


# Prep



**Freshwater  
Creek**  
Steiner School

A young child with blonde hair, wearing a light blue and grey striped hoodie and shorts, is sitting on a sandy surface. The child is focused on playing with a wooden stick that has two blue fabric pieces tied to it. In the foreground, there is a silver metal colander and a round, shallow, woven basket containing some dried leaves. The background shows a sandpit area with several logs and some green plants. The overall scene is outdoors and appears to be a play area.

The need for imagination,  
a sense of truth and  
a feeling of responsibility —  
These are the three forces  
which are the very nerve  
of education.

~Rudolf Steiner~

# Contents

Welcome to Prep.....	1
Your Child’s Teacher and Assistant.....	1
The Child.....	1
Child Development.....	1
The Child as a Being of Will.....	1
The Child as a Sense Being.....	2
The Child as a Being of Imitation.....	2
The Child as a Being of Imagination.....	2
The Prep Environment.....	3
Physical Environment.....	3
Adults in the Prep Environment.....	3
Living Together.....	3
Daily Rhythm and Daily Programme.....	4
An Example of the Daily Programme.....	4
Learning Experiences.....	4
Play.....	5
Morning Circle.....	5



Music .....	6
Language .....	6
Story Time.....	6
Science & Nature Study .....	6
Mathematics .....	7
Language Development .....	7
Handwork .....	8
The Visual Arts.....	9
Painting.....	9
Drawing.....	9
Handedness.....	9
The Curriculum.....	10
Food .....	10
Birthdays.....	10
Television.....	11
Clothing .....	11
Toys.....	12
Rhythm.....	12
How Can We Build a Healthy Rhythm at Home for Our Children? .....	12
Rhythm in the Life of the Child .....	12



## Welcome to Prep

### Your Child's Teacher and Assistant

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Further information about the school can be found in the *FWCSS Family Guide*, which is available from the Administration Office, or on the school's website:  
[www.fwcss.vic.edu.au](http://www.fwcss.vic.edu.au)

### In Prep

The Prep programme is based on the knowledge of the development of man given by Rudolf Steiner. We recognise that each child who enters prep has a unique destiny to fulfil and take it as our task to create the best circumstances possible to help each child unfold healthily and appropriately, thus enabling them to take the developmental steps that are of fundamental importance to their future roles as free, creative individuals.

Prep meets the child in the first seven-year phase of life, in which the young child builds up a healthy physical body. It is during these years that the children make the most extensive progress that will be made in a whole lifetime of development in the area of physical growth, and organ development, as well as in language, cognitive, social, gross and fine motor skill development.

### The Child

#### Child Development

Based on Rudolf Steiner's indication of the development phases of the human being in childhood, the Prep curriculum focuses on several essential processes in which the child is engaged, addressing the child's developmental needs as a being of will, of the senses, of imitation and of imagination.

#### The Child as a Being of Will

The young child lives in the world of processes, in the world of continuous activity. Unconscious forces within the child drives them to connect with the environment into which they have chosen to be born, and from those experiences, a healthy bodily form will emerge. These are the forces which impel the child towards humanness - to walking upright, to developing speech, and a thought-life. In direct contrast to the adult, young children, when meeting a new experience, respond first in their will, digest it through re-enactment (play), and then are able to form concepts. Each child has these will-forces in abundance, and they need nurturing in a healthy environment so they may become strong and healthily self-directed forces in maturity.

### The Child as a Sense Being

The little child's senses are wide open, allowing the developing human being to take in all that surrounds them, without discrimination. Everything has an influence, for the child cannot help but be at one with it. This is the time of life when children are at their most vulnerable, for whatever is experienced goes deeply into the physical body. Understanding this has great implications for the type of environment, both physical and human, with which the child should be surrounded.

### The Child as a Being of Imitation

*“The whole life of the child up to his/her seventh year is a continuous imitation of what takes place in his environment. And the moment a child perceives something, whether a movement or a sound, there arises in him/her the impulse or an inward gesture to re-live, what has been perceived, with the whole intensity of his/her inner nature.”*-- (R. Steiner: The Spiritual Ground of Education. Oxford, 1922)

Small children enter with deep empathy into every experience they meet. For example, having watched their mother cut the vegetables for dinner, children will, when they have the opportunity to do the same task, not only mimic her gestures but also her inner attitude to the task. The educational implications are clear here - that the child will learn much more through imitation and example than by being 'told'. As the desire in children to imitate is so strong, that which they are able to receive through healthy imitation will be taken up in a living way.

### The Child as a Being of Imagination

*“You can make a doll for a child by folding up an old napkin, making two corners into legs, the other two corners into arms, a knot for the head and painting eyes, nose and mouth with blots of ink. Or else you can buy the child what they call a ‘pretty’ doll with real hair and painted cheeks. If the child has before him the folded napkin, he/she has to fill in from their own imagination all that is needed to make it real and human. This work of the imagination moulds and builds the forms of the brain. The brain unfolds as the muscles of the hand unfold when they do the work for which they are gifted. Give the child the so called ‘pretty’ doll, and the brain has nothing more to do.”*-- (R. Steiner: The Education of the Child, 1909)

In the third year of life the child's play emerges into the world of fantasy, where the child is able to imbue, say a piece of wood, with qualities and in his/her play call it a car or (even a minute later) a rolling pin! The child's imagination works in a very fluid way



with whatever presents itself in the environment. This gradually changes until, by the age of five, the child moves into the taking on of roles, plays out human relationships and the professions. Now the play begins to have a sense of planning, as the child is able to plan ahead, and finally the imagination is more internalised and children then are able to play without needing external props on which to project their fantasy.

## The Prep Environment

For the child, as sense being especially, the environment is of primary importance. An environment that will nurture and not overwhelm the senses is striven for in the Prep room. The social environment and the adults who relate to the children and to whom they relate also influence them profoundly on many different levels.

### Physical Environment

The Prep room provides warm, nurturing, inviting surroundings. Great care is taken in choosing colours and materials- for example, the colour of the walls (a warm, gentle pink) has been chosen for its warm and life-enhancing qualities. Natural materials are used wherever possible. The furniture and equipment used is often made by hand, with attention to beauty and practicality. Play things are often objects collected from the natural world - beautiful shells, nuts, pine cones, logs and some more conventionally shaped blocks as well. There are also cloths in plain, beautiful colours, and hand-carved wooden animals and houses. The outside play area is very important. It should be a children's garden where the children may play alongside the beautiful plants and trees and experience the elements - earth, water, air, fire.

### Adults in the Prep Environment

Those who choose to work with little children in a Rudolf Steiner Prep understand that the children learn best by imitation and example. *“The joy of the child in and with his/her environment must be reckoned among the forces that build and mould the physical organs. He/she needs people around him with happy looks and manners and, above all, with an honest unaffected love. A love which fills the physical environment of the child with warmth may literally be said to ‘hatch out’ the forms of the physical organs. The child who lives in such an atmosphere of love and warmth and who has around him really good examples for his imitation is living in his right element. One should therefore strictly guard against anything being done in the child’s presence that he must not imitate.”*-- (R. Steiner: The Education of the Child, 1990)

The adults need to be engaged in real work around young children, doing the tasks of everyday life. Through the inner life attitude towards this work and their clear gestures, the will of the children will be engaged healthily. This in turn may then be expressed in good play and in the way the children later take up tasks themselves.

Through the adult's attitude towards them, and the world around them, come the attitudes of wonder, respect and reverence in the children. For example, in the way a hurt child is looked after, or in the way that animals are cared for in the Prep - from the chicken's and ducks that need daily care, to the little spider that is gently brought outside to find his way there.

### Living Together

Being the bridge between home and formal school, the Prep room uses the model of family life enhanced by more formal group activities such as movement and artistic endeavours (including: painting, drawing, craft



and sewing, etc.) There is a homelike atmosphere in that food is prepared and cooked, the garden is tended, and the animals fed and so on. Within this warm surround, the children play freely according to their developmental stage, helping with these tasks when they wish or where appropriate.

### **Daily Rhythm and Daily Programme**

The day is structured in a rhythmical way, allowing for extended periods of play (expansion) interspersed with more formal activities (contraction). Each day we have a Morning Circle, where we join together to sing songs, dance and say verses. Sometimes this will take the form of a story, perhaps a fairy story. Meal times are shared together. We eat quite formally with beautifully set tables. Before we eat we say or sing a blessing together, we eat the food we have prepared together, and enjoy the conversation and being together throughout the meal. A story is told each day with the children sitting on the floor to listen. Lunch then follows. In the afternoon sessions we have a rest period where we lie down on sheepskins and blankets, some children may even sleep. Outdoor play, a walk, painting, drawing, bees wax modelling, singing and games, occupies the rest of the afternoon until home time.

### **An Example of the Daily Programme**

8.50am	Arrival time outdoor play time
9.00am	Morning Circle and Morning Verse
9.30 am	Inside Play
10.10am	Pack up
10.30 am	Morning Tea
11.00 am	Outside Play
11.50am	Storytime
12.00 pm	Lunch
12.30 pm	Rest time, and may also include playing the Lyre
1.00 pm	Outdoor play time
2.00pm	Painting, drawing, craft beeswax modelling or going for a walk to the Magic Woods.
2.30 pm	Afternoon informal circle, afternoon tea and goodbye verse
3.10 pm	Home time

### **Learning Experiences**

In an interesting natural environment filled with 'open-ended' play materials, children have unlimited opportunities for learning. In free play children are forever problem-solving, whether in the social realm, e.g. "Who will play with me?" - The physical realm,



e.g. “How do I get this big stick to stand upright?” - or the psychological realm, e.g. “What does it feel like to be ‘boss’?”

In the garden the children experience the seasonal cycles, the weather. They experience the elements - earth, water, air, and fire. They learn the care of animals and experience with wonder, the cycles of birth, life and death. They watch the growth of plants, the excitement when the seeds we plant grow. The pumpkin growing enormous on the vine - and what wonderful soup they will make.

More formally, the children gain skills in cutting and grating food, weighing and measuring. They experience how bread rises. In handwork they develop skills and dexterity, eye-hand coordination. Through group experiences, especially sitting down and eating formally with others, social skills are encouraged in a normal, healthy way.

### **Play**

By the time children enter Prep they have developed fantasy and use this tool to imitate and create, to understand and to learn, and to integrate their life experiences. Children need to play, to express themselves outwardly, just as adults need to play with thoughts and ideas to solve problems and to be creative.

The Prep is set up to allow for true self-directed play. The children may use most of the materials in the room including the tables and chairs. Baskets containing ‘open-ended’ materials offer many possibilities, rather than a single fixed idea. Many of these materials are gifted from the natural world, many are handmade with care rarely will anything be synthetic.

Time is set aside for indoors and outdoors to give the children time to create and develop their play. The content of morning circles and stories offer the children opportunities for stimulating play, as do puppet plays.

Through play children:

- ❖ Explore and manipulate their environment
- ❖ Imitate what they experience so these experiences can be integrated
- ❖ Practise and develop physical skills
- ❖ Give themselves opportunities to deal with emotions, such as fear
- ❖ Try on roles
- ❖ And, very importantly, gain an increasing range of social skills.

Given the opportunity for plenty of free play children are able to integrate their life experiences more fully and exercise their imaginative faculties which, when internalised, transform into creative thinking forces. This helps them to relate well to others and have the measure of their own abilities.

### **Morning Circle**

Young children are forever in movement and it seems only natural if one is presenting songs and poems to them that movement does accompany voice. Morning circle is an important part of the morning, when all the children come together to create a story. These will often have a seasonal theme, e.g. Spring circle. A fairy story may also be used as the basis of a circle, and songs and rhymes created or found for it.

Care is taken in choosing the language and music. The circle needs to fit the mood of the story or season, and attention is given to a variety of movements (vigorous movement/quieter movement) and to the use of space (up, down, in and out). All the movement should be graceful and ensouled, and truly complement the content. The circle is lead by the teacher and the children are not instructed, but delight in imitating the movements. Although the circle always begins as a circle, once the children begin to move they are unable to hold the form and this is not required of them. We may run, skip, jump, hop, walk, or fly like birds. We may curl up into very small seeds, and unfold into beautiful tall plants.

It is very rare that morning circle is accompanied by an instrument. Music is usually sung. Towards the end of the year more traditional circle games may be included in the afternoon. These have come to us over hundreds of years and embody truths concerning man's being and destiny at a deeper level. They also teach cultural and social behaviours.

### Music

Music is an integral part of the programme. Children live in a musical element and respond easily and joyfully to the singing voice. They develop discrimination and the ability to follow a tune. Most music is given in the pentatonic scale - an early mode - with simple open qualities appropriate for this age group. More specifically the music should revolve around the fifths from A down to D and up to E, with the emphasis on the A. It is important that the adults sing with the children rather than use recorded songs and music, so they can imitate the human's voice and not a mechanical device. Songs may be sung to accompany some activities and perhaps little chants for changes in activities. Children may also do this among themselves. Songs are also used extensively in the morning circle and sometimes during a story. The pentatonic lyre may be played before rest time.

### Language

Prep children also participate in a 20-minute Japanese Language lesson once a week where they learn Japanese songs and games.

### Story Time

Each day the children are told a story. The story may be taken from nature or be a traditional fairy-tale (especially from the Brothers Grimm). The stories are not chosen as entertainment for the children, but for the genuine deep values, and the psychological and spiritual truths they contain. Such stories bring to the children, in images, aspects for themselves, their lives and the road ahead of them. These are stories that can be told many times. Usually the same story is told each day for a week. No book is used but sometimes puppets or other small props are used to enact the story. The children develop listening skills and are able to respond freely in their own images of the stories.

### Science & Nature Study

Within the Prep environment young children have the opportunity to explore and learn through their contact with the natural world, experiencing, for example, the seasons through the changes which occur in the garden and through their own manipulation of materials.

Experiences of the elements:

- ❖ Earth (sand, stone, clay)
- ❖ Water (rain, hail, dew, frost, tap, and hose)
- ❖ Air (wind, stillness, clouds moving, and kite flying)
- ❖ Fire (sunlight, candle flame, oven, special occasion tire, e.g.: festival time)

Experiences with animal life:

- ❖ Pets at Prep (observing and caring for their needs)
- ❖ Insects in the garden
- ❖ Many birds in our environment

Experiences with plant life:

- ❖ Climbing trees
- ❖ Picking flowers
- ❖ Gardening, caring for the gardens
- ❖ Planting seeds.
- ❖ Harvesting our fruit and vegetables, and subsequently eating them

Experiences in chemistry:

- ❖ Cooking

Experiences of physics:

- ❖ Water, earth, sand play
- ❖ Building and constructing
- ❖ Developing technologies

### **Mathematics**

If a child is given the opportunity to really explore and manipulate his environment through play, and take part in the everyday activities, concepts such as serialization and measurement arise naturally.

- ❖ During building in creative play children make patterns or sequences of objects
- ❖ During building, concept of measurement arises
- ❖ Packing away requires sorting and classification
- ❖ Setting tables creates a need for one to one communication
- ❖ Cooking requires counting, measuring and weighing
- ❖ Sharing may require division
- ❖ Gardening- e.g.: one pumpkin seed in each hole
- ❖ Putting out seats for story time - Each child requires a seat
- ❖ Some number rhymes and games
- ❖ In drawing, children express their connection with basic geometric shapes

### **Language Development**

Within the first 7 years of life the young child becomes a speaker. By the time the child reaches Prep age (5 years) he/she should be able to say 'I' and use fairly well constructed grammatical sentences, and have a reasonable vocabulary. These will be refined through informal and more formal language experiences

- ❖ Adults in the environment should use clear, grammatical English and a wide vocabulary. However, instead of explaining the meaning of words they should be used in a cone/text where the meaning implicit.
- ❖ Meal times taken together promote conversations with others
- ❖ Morning circle contains many verses and rhymes which are accompanied with movement to aid rhythm and connection with sound
- ❖ Story time is a focused time in the day when listening skills are encouraged as the story is told without a book, though sometimes with the aid of very simple puppets. These are usually fairy stories or nature stories and may contain quite sophisticated language. “There once was a donkey who carried his masters sacks of wheat to the mill indefatigably for many a long year.” But once again, such words are used in clear contexts.

### Handwork

Through handwork children develop dexterity; eye-hand coordination, and as in the old saying “nimble fingers, nimble mind.” Handwork connects us with the old crafts and we make things that have some applications in real life. Some projects require days to complete and in applying themselves to these tasks the children strengthen their will forces. There is an emphasis on the quality of the material we use - wool, cotton, hemp, wood, paper - and we try to colour our materials with natural dyes as much as possible.

### Activities

- ❖ Craft Bags.
- ❖ Making twists or plaits



- ❖ Making pompoms
- ❖ Finger knitting
- ❖ Sewing
- ❖ Simple woodwork
- ❖ Felt making

## The Visual Arts

### Painting

The children paint once a week with fluid water-colours on wet paper with rounded corners. This makes the colours flow much better and encourages painting rather than 'drawing' with paint. Only the three primary colours - red, yellow, and blue - are offered and the children are able to create the secondary colours. Maybe this ends up as 'Mud' at first! The children are free to paint whatever they like. Painting is offered primarily as a rich experience in colour, but as the children mature, they are able to control the flow of the paint and begin to create recognizable forms in their work.

### Drawing

The children are given beeswax block crayons in the three basic colours. With these blocks children can create in solid colours as well as in lines. The children are left free to create their own pictures which develop through predictable stages related to the development of the child. All the drawings (and paintings) are kept at school until the end of the year, partly because there is commitment to the process rather than the

emphasis on the finished product and also because the child's drawings are a wonderful mirror of their development and an invaluable reference point.



### Beeswax Modelling

Beeswax is used for modelling. Once again the children are free to create their own forms. Beeswax has the advantage of being a warm medium which helps the circulation (no-one has cold hands after working with beeswax).

### Handedness

When the horizontal mid-line is established, then handedness will become settled as either right or left. Until this time children can use either hand and often swap from one to the other.

The period from five to seven years is marked by increased body awareness and growth. Children become aware of all their body parts and their names. Sometimes there is noticeably reduced capacity for creative play.

## **The Curriculum**

The Curriculum is based on a picture of human development that values the childhood of a human being as being of vital importance to the continuing life. The beliefs encompass the idea that the environment on earth has been created by, and is supported by, a spiritual world. The child is a spiritual being coming from and returning to a spiritual world.

The Prep program is based on creative play. The child learns and digests all of the experiences that come from life through play. Learning for the young child is a motor activity. Play in the foundation years is a necessary step on the pathway of a creative, thinking, independent and healthy human being. Play time is a recognized basic human right, yet very often in the modern world, there is no time for a playful childhood. Children are raced along, usually in cars but also in bouncers and walkers, on a hurried path to achievement in a materialistic world who haven't time to be physically healthy themselves.

The play program is supported by adults who earnestly and actively work around the children at play. Planned activities revolve around real work that would be carried out in any healthy home - cooking, washing, cleaning, polishing and other domestic tasks that involve active, spiral movement.

In any activity there is accommodation for individual rates of progress within a strong rhythmical framework that supports the healthy development of all. Our program is based on the belief that early academics will rob the child of life forces. The child does not learn through rational thinking - without paying a price - which may be the cause for many difficulties later on. The child under seven is growing a healthy body and needs time to be a child and do childish things.

## **Food**

Food is a very important part of the children's lives, indeed, of all our lives. By preparing food in the Prep room the children are able to share in this preparation and the process brings a comfortable home-like atmosphere into their environment. Food preparation can be a wonderful social event as well as providing the opportunity to practise fine motor skills and basic math. There is a considerable softening of the environment where food is being prepared with loving care and this can help the children to relax and feel secure. We will provide morning and afternoon tea for the children during their time in Prep. You will need to provide a healthy lunch, try not to include pre-packaged goods, and pack the food in reusable containers/wraps only. The ingredients used in our cooking are biodynamic and organic if possible. Our diet is mostly fruit, vegetables and a mix of grains. We do not use dairy products. Clean drinking water is available for the children at all times.

## **Birthdays**

The children's birthdays are a special occasion and we will acknowledge them with a small celebration at school. Parents are invited to come in for the afternoon tea and share it with their child. We do ask that you provide a cake on the day. The cake need

not be very large as only a token piece is required for each child. Please no icing, lollies, chocolate or nuts. Flowers or fruit can be used for decoration.

## **Television**

There are many arguments that support the idea that young children should not be exposed to television and it is certainly our view as well. Young children are not able to work things out in a rational way as adults do. They cannot reason with their thinking as we do.

Their way of assimilating things, of understanding things and coming to terms with them is to work them out through their play. As a result of this, every time a child watches something on TV, goes to see a movie, watches a video, plays on a computer or play station they encounter things that do not make sense to them, are not real to them so they must play them out, work them out through their activities. They will work at them until they come to some resolution. As a result their own creativity is put on hold until they clear themselves. This means that they will play out, time and again, the offending images.

Now the dilemma is this, do we allow the children to play out these experiences so that they may rid themselves of them or do we suppress them and leave them to fester in whatever way they will? If we allow the play out, then what about the other children who are not exposed to these experiences, and are then drawn into them and must resolve them for themselves? In reality, to work with the true Steiner Curriculum, those images and this type of play cannot be allowed in the class and I must ask that every parent try to support this.

## **Clothing**

The children need to wear layers of comfortable clothing that do not restrict their movement, and that they do not have to worry about getting dirty or wet. Natural fibres and plain colours are best. Please no black. Black is an intellectual colour that absorbs light and energy and gives nothing. Children should be as the rainbow, full of light and radiant beauty. Plain coloured clothing allows one to meet with the child properly and not be distracted by words or pictures. The child tends to be lost behind such things; they need to meet you first.

For the summer terms, 1 and 4, the children will wear a sunhat. The school will provide these for your children and they will remain at school. The children cannot go outside in terms 1 and 4 unless they have a sunhat. During the winter months they will need a pair of gumboots and a raincoat at school every day. These should be named, as many will have the same kind. If your child is an ardent water player, a spare set of clothes may be necessary. Any clothes that the children are likely to take off during the day should be named. Please try to be aware of walk days and be sure your child has the appropriate clothing. Secure shoes are needed for all the running, skipping and climbing that they do. Later in Term 1 we will be requiring slippers for the children to wear inside and, if possible, to be left at school.

## Toys

We ask that the children do not bring toys from home as they are often lost, broken or cause unwanted distractions.

## Rhythm

### How Can We Build a Healthy Rhythm at Home for Our Children?

- ❖ Regular meal times, including, grace/verse
- ❖ Eat seasonal foods
- ❖ Plan different menus for particular days, e.g.: Rice on Monday, special foods for festivals
- ❖ Develop sequences for household tasks
- ❖ Take regular walks in the same places to observe seasonal changes
- ❖ Find reverence to the days of the week, e.g.: is Sunday different to other days in the week
- ❖ Parents need regular 'time out' alone together
- ❖ Try and find moments in the day for your own thoughts
- ❖ The consistence of bringing rhythm into the daily life of the child pays off now and carries children into an independent future.

### Rhythm in the Life of the Child

- ❖ Rhythm is important for life
- ❖ The outside life with all its rhythms has a mirror picture in our inside life, expressed in our etheric/life body
- ❖ Rhythm helps us to find the balance between breathing inward and breathing out in the environment
- ❖ Rhythm connects us/children with the world of nature, in particular the seasons and with night and day
- ❖ Rhythm fosters healthy sleep routine (young children under six need 12 hours a night sleep and regular daily rest time)
- ❖ Rhythm helps divert difficult behaviour
- ❖ Children develop self-confidence and security when they know what they expect from the day
- ❖ Children can find freedom within a rhythmic lifestyle
- ❖ Rhythm nurtures imitation



## NOTES

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## NOTES

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