



Hunter Mill Country Day School Parent Handbook

Our Mission Statement

Hunter Mill Country Day School is a special place where your child can interact, learn, and grow in a unique, loving environment; where children are constantly learning and fostering long-term friendships and creativity—a home away from home. As a parent-directed organization, we remain sensitive to the needs and interests of HMCDS families.

We welcome you to our school.

Judith Beattie
Director

Cindy Huddleston
Assistant Director

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A History of Hunter Mill Country Day School

In 1967, “The Kitchen Farm” at 2021 Hunter Mill Road was bought by Captain and Mrs. Klare—both educators—and Hunter Mill Country Day School (HMCDS) was born.

Starting as a small preschool, HMCDS also provided extended daycare. Owing to its then-remote location, a station wagon was used to pick up and return the children from as far away as Fairfax City, Greenbriar and Great Falls. This journey was made three times a day for a total of 100 miles each day! Later, two small yellow buses were purchased to transport the children to and from the school. As fate would have it, the driver of one of those buses had spent his boyhood years with his family in the little white house that is located next to the school building. As development in Northern Fairfax County intensified and the school’s enrollment grew, HMCDS was no longer as isolated and the buses were sold.

The Klares originally had visions of building a private school in the area where the barns are located, offering classes from kindergarten to high school. However, after many successful years, the Klares decided to retire and hired a series of Directors, none of which had both the business and people skills necessary to run a school. The school began losing money and many families withdrew their children from HMCDS. Things looked pretty grim until Mrs. Judith Beattie came along and with her devotion, love of children, concern, and hard work, made HMCDS the fun place it is today!

In 1978, Mrs. Beattie purchased the business and rented the property. Enrollment was only about 35 children and the school was in poor financial condition. Gradually, enrollment picked up and improvements to the school were made, mainly through the help of HMCDS families. A Parents’ Group was established and two parents held seats on the school’s Board. In the fall and spring, the school held clean-up days.

In 1980, the property owners informed Mrs. Beattie that they wished to sell and that she had the right of first refusal. After discussing this with Ira Saul, one of the parents who handled the legal work for the school, it was decided to purchase the property and establish a co-op school. Negotiations continued for two years.

The school’s first Board members were elected by the parents. Ira Saul, with the help of another parent, Jack Conner, guided the process to establish a co-op. In order to become a co-op, HMCDS would have to go through a licensing and zoning process, which would eliminate all the benefits granted under the “grandfather clause.” Jack Conner recommended an alternative to a co-op—that HMCDS become a “parent-directed center” instead. The board voted to take his advice and drew up the by-laws.

Over the years a number of improvements have been made to the facilities. What is now the library was once part of the playground. In 1972, that area was enclosed to make space for a first-grade classroom, which was later used as the Director’s office. All of the barns were cleared of trash (they were full), the fields were regularly mowed, and the carpeting was replaced many times. Sal Alonge kindly refurbished the bathrooms. An elderly repairman working at HMCDS recalled that Mrs. Kitchen permitted him to live with his new bride in what is now the Dolphin room. At that time, the room was separate from the main house and had its own entrance.

Finally, with the school bursting at the seams, it was decided to add a room for after-school programs. This process took about 2_ years and included modifying the driveway, buying a fire hydrant, and a number of other improvements. The cost was \$170,000—about one-third of that was for the actual room, the rest went towards meeting Fairfax County regulations and completing exterior alterations. Improvements have continued through the years, with the most recent being the complete renovation of the Red Barn.

About the Program

Curriculum

At HMCDS, each child is viewed as a unique person with an individual pattern and timing of growth and development. Different levels of ability, development, and learning styles are expected, accepted, and used to design age-appropriate activities.

We provide children with a variety of planned active learning experiences that meet children's needs and stimulate learning in all developmental areas.

Our curriculum centers around weekly topics or themes. Activities which are incorporated into these themes include group time, creative art, music and movement, indoor and outdoor play, field trips, science and nature study, snacks, and play with equipment and creative materials.

Involvement in these activities will engage children in a total learning process developing skills in language development and literacy, socio-emotional development, physical development, cognitive development, and aesthetic development.

Philosophy & Goals

Preschool is a very important time for your child. The activities that we use are designed to provide the children with a love of learning, a sense of self-worth, and respect for others. At HMCDS, we are committed to providing an environment where children can develop as individuals and acquire a comfortable, realistic concept of self. With a positive awareness of self, a child is then freer to develop intellectually and can work toward a happier relationship with others.

We believe children learn best when they are happy and relaxed and when the activities are meaningful to them. Our classrooms are filled with safe, age-appropriate games, books, art supplies, and other learning tools. Our outside play areas provide special opportunities for exploring nature, planting, and learning about and handling small animals.

Staff

Our teachers and staff are carefully chosen, not only for their expertise in child development and education, but also for their commitment to caring for children. The teachers' task is to help children to acquire happy, useful patterns of behavior and a sense of wonder and trust, which will help them to become productive, creative adults.

Play

Our program is founded on the belief that play is the most developmentally appropriate and productive avenue for young children's learning.

Have you ever heard someone remark about an early childhood program—even ours, perhaps—that “all the children do there is play?” At good early childhood programs there *is* a lot of play—and there should be!

Years of research on children’s learning and development document the many benefits of play for children’s intellectual, social, emotional, physical, and language development. Children at play are actively involved in creating themes, exploring and establishing environments, solving problems, and developing shared understandings.

Children play in many ways. They play independently, sometimes near each other but with each child engrossed in his/her own activity. They engage in what is called “parallel play,” perhaps using each other’s toys or even talking, but not coordinating their play. They also play cooperatively, organizing roles and scenarios for group play. As they get older, children are capable of more cooperative, coordinated play. But all kinds of play are valuable.

As kids play with each other, they learn to see other children’s points of view and begin to become more empathetic and caring. They come to understand customs and rules in their own culture and to appreciate those of others. They learn to use language in new ways to describe their play and to interact with others. And in play, children develop their muscles and coordination.

Adults support children’s play by providing space, opportunity, and materials. We set up areas where kids can play without fear of damaging furniture or injuring themselves. We make sure that they have the time to choose and to become engaged in their own play activities. And when we provide them with simple, interesting materials—no newfangled, expensive gadgets required—kids take it from there.

Play is fun. But it also is serious business that pays big dividends to its eager young investors.

Enrollment Options

Children between the ages of two and six are eligible for full-day care and preschool programs. All children who attend the morning session participate in the preschool program, which runs from 9:00 a.m. to 1:00 p.m. each day. Day care services—both early morning and afternoon—are wrapped around this program. The school operates year-round, with separate registrations for school-year and summer sessions. While the school-year session is more structured and focused on traditional school-day activities, the summer session offers opportunities for a variety of summer-time activities, such as swimming, nature lessons, and gymnastics.

Before and after school care is available for children ages five to twelve who attend public school. With this program, children are bussed by Fairfax County from HMCDS to Oakton Elementary School and Sunrise Elementary School each morning and returned after their school day. Children who participate in this program may also attend *full-time* during the summer session, school breaks and teacher workdays—except for the eight HMCDS holidays.

Class Groupings

Children are grouped into the following classes by age:

Tadpoles: Younger 2s
Penguins: Late 2s – Early 3s

Dolphins: Mid 3s – Mid 4s
Tigers: 4 _ and older, 1-5 days a week
Blue Whales: 4 _ and older, 5 days a week
Kindergartners: Kindergarten
Unicorns: School-age

These ages are approximate and may vary from year to year based on the number of children of each age that are enrolled.

Discipline

We believe that a stimulating and loving environment that intrigues and involves children, that affords them the right to make choices, and protects the rights of individuals helps promote inner control and self-discipline. Classroom rules are designed to protect children and their property and to promote pro-social behavior.

Our primary means for effective behavior management is positive reinforcement. If problems do arise, however, the teachers will:

1. remind the child in terms of acceptable behaviors,
2. redirect the child's activity to an area that may be more calming or involving, and/or
3. remove the child briefly until he/she decides he/she is able to regain self-control.

The School Day & Special Events

Arriving & Departing

When bringing and picking up your child, please park your vehicle, turn off your engine, and enter through the front door. Always use the front door to drop off and pick up your child. Never use any other entrance or exit.

For those attending the morning session only (9:00-1:00), children should arrive between 8:30 a.m. and 9:00 a.m. Children should be picked up promptly at 1:00 p.m.

For those attending all day, children may arrive as early as 6:30 a.m. Children must be picked up before 6:30 p.m.

Please stop at the front desk and cross off your child's name on the list as you depart.

Please note that late charges may be assessed for failing to observe the stated pickup times.

Snacks & Meals

Daily snacks are provided by the school at 10:00 a.m. and 3:00 p.m. If you would like to send a snack for a special occasion—such as a birthday—please make arrangements in advance with your child's teacher.

Children should eat breakfast before they come to school. If this isn't possible, breakfast is available, upon request, for \$1.00. Lunch is prepared at HMCDS and is served at noon. Lunch menus are available in the monthly newsletter and posted within the school on various bulletin boards at the beginning of each month. If your child is on a special diet for medical or religious reasons, a signed statement is needed from your doctor or clergy.

HMCDS is a nut free environment, which means none of the meals or snacks will contain nuts nor are any outside food allowed on campus if it contains nuts.

****If your child has any allergies, please inform the teacher personally in addition to writing the allergy in the school forms.**

Celebrations

We have a number of celebrations throughout the school and summer:

- Halloween-children make their own costumes & we have a parade
- Thanksgiving-parents are invited to a Thanksgiving lunch with their child
- Winter Holidays-Santa visits each child around Christmas
- The Fourth of July (summer session)
- School year kick off & end of summer celebration – all are welcome on the last Friday before Labor Day to enjoy a moonbounce and ice cream.

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- Other special events during the school year may include: Valentine's Day, Lunar New Year, St. Patrick's Day and Easter.

We are *always receptive* to learning about and celebrating other cultures' special holidays with assistance from parents. Please speak to your child's teacher if you have ideas.

Birthdays

Please notify your child's teacher if you wish to provide a snack for a special day. You may want to try some healthy alternatives to cupcakes too, such as fruit, muffins, etc. Reminder: We have a "no nuts" policy throughout the school grounds.

We also have the Birthday book club. Your child can bring in a book to donate to the class as your child's birthday gift. The teacher will read the book on your child's day of celebration and we will personalize it with a birthday book club label.

Field Trips

Each class tries to take periodic field trips to places that are tied in with our units of study (post office, bakery, etc.). Parents are welcome and encouraged to attend. A signed Field Trip Transportation Consent form must be on file in order for a child to go on a field trip. Suggestions for places to visit are always welcomed.

Parents Night and Parents Day Out

This is an opportunity for parents to have some free time outside of school hours. It is done once a month and run by the staff. Sign up sheets are put out in the lobby 2 weeks ahead of time. There is a minimal charge for participation.

Holiday House

This fundraising event usually happens the first weekend in December. More information can be found in the fundraising section on page 10. Parent participation is encouraged and welcome!

Spring Picnic

More information can be found in the fundraising section on page 10. Parent participation is encouraged and welcome!

Nature Day

This day is an opportunity for families to become acquainted with each other and all of what HMCDS has to offer on our five acre campus; including the creek, animals, playgrounds and the garden. This event usually happens in early fall.

"Rockin' The Hill" Concerts

A fun filled day for families to watch a children's band perform on the stage at the hill and to enjoy all of HMCDS' grounds. <http://www.rockinthehill.com>.

Parent Involvement

Parent Participation

HMCDS encourages—and welcomes—parent participation in school activities so they not only become a part of their children’s preschool/day care experience, but also get to know the teachers, the other children, and the parents who make up the HMCDS family. If you would like to assist in field trips or present a special program on a hobby or special interest, job, travel, etc., please indicate your willingness to your child’s teacher.

Parent Advisory Board of Directors (PAB)

HMCDS maintains an Advisory Board of Directors comprised of parents. Any and all parents are welcome to attend and provide input. PAB’s purpose is to provide advice to HMCDS’s Director on the operation of school affairs in the best interests of the enrolled children and their parents. Parents become Directors on PAB by expressing their desire to serve to the school Director. PAB meets monthly.

Topics the Board addresses include, among other things: fiscal policies and planning; tuition and fees; employee evaluations, salaries, and benefits; long-range planning; maintenance and improvement of buildings and grounds; and general school policies.

PAB currently has five standing committees: Education, Buildings & Grounds, Finance and Personnel, Social & Fundraising, and Web/IT. These committees, and other *ad hoc* committees formed to address specific concerns, meet immediately before general PAB meetings and present recommendations on issues within their purview to the full PAB for action. While PAB makes only non-binding recommendations, the school Director traditionally relies heavily upon PAB’s guidance.

School Visits

Parents are welcome to visit their child’s classroom at any time; however, to ensure that teachers can devote their full attention to the needs of the children, we request that parent/teacher conferences be conducted at prearranged times—not during these visits. Although we maintain an “open door” policy, visits must be scheduled through the office in order to minimize class disruptions.

Conferences

Two parent/teacher conferences are scheduled each year—in the fall and the spring—to discuss goals for your child and overall developmental progress. Should you desire a conference at any other time, please speak to your child’s teacher.

Some parents have asked what questions they should ask the teachers at conferences. The following are some things you might want to know—suggestions only:

1. Does my child seem happy at school?
2. Does he/she interact appropriately with the other children?

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3. What are his/her favorite activities?
 4. Does he/she follow directions?
 5. Is he/she able to (or learning to) wait and take turns?
 6. What types of activities are appropriate for me to do at home that would build on school activities?

Parent Programs

Workshops and other informational meetings for parents are scheduled throughout the year based on interest and parental input. These programs are planned by the Advisory Board's Education Committee. Examples of some past workshops are: Positive Discipline, CPR/First Aid and Kindergarten Readiness.

Clean-up Days

HMCDS holds three Saturday clean-up days annually, one in the fall, one in the spring, and one at the end of summer. All parents are encouraged to participate. Childcare is usually available for a portion of the day. A list of tasks is typically posted prior to the cleanup day, so volunteers can choose the tasks at which they are most comfortable—painting classrooms, spreading mulch, raking leaves or making playground/building improvements. The spring cleanup also includes planting flowers. Special projects have included building new pens for the rabbits, trimming trees and installing classroom cubbies. Anything parents can do to avoid hiring outside assistance helps hold down the cost of tuition. Parents with particular interest in sharing special expertise, tools or talent are welcome to share their ideas with the staff.

Fundraising

HMCDS holds various fundraising activities throughout the year. Below is a description of the major events. These fundraising activities benefit the entire school and are one of the ways we keep tuition costs low. Parent participation is welcomed and encouraged!

Holiday House

The Holiday House is typically held in early December. Generally, the proceeds from this event are used for the holiday bonuses for HMCDS staff.

For nominal amounts, children can make holiday crafts, purchase and wrap small gifts for family and friends, and have their picture taken with Santa. The whole family can enjoy lunch and delicious bake sale goodies.

Quality children's books are also available for sale. The school earns books for its library and classrooms based on the level of books sold at Holiday House.

A gift basket, which usually follows a theme such as movie/video night, wine and cheese, kids' games, chocolates, etc., is assembled by each room mother. Donations are collected by the room mothers. These baskets, along with handmade quilts and other donated items, are sold by way of a silent auction.

Attendance is always high and everyone has a good time. Participation in Holiday House is a great way to demonstrate support for the staff.

Spring Picnic

This annual event is one of the highlights of the year for kids and parents alike. The all-school picnic is held on a Saturday in early June and features food, a moon bounce, children's games and activities, pony rides and the parents' favorite—a singing recital by each class on the outdoor stage. There is also a bake sale and silent auction of gift baskets and other items. Quality children's books are also available for sale at the picnic. Similar to Holiday House, the school earns books for its library and classrooms based on the levels of books sold at the picnic. Tickets are sold starting at \$1 for various picnic activities including pony rides, games and other activities. Lunch is also available for purchase.

Other Fundraising Avenues

From time to time, HMCDS conducts various low-key fundraisers comprised of items for sale. In the past it has been pizzas, plants, and toys. Order forms and necessary brochures are made available at the front counter for those interested in supporting the school through purchase of these products. The school uses funds generated from these sales to buy new furniture and supplies as needed. We have also been able to purchase some special equipment, like the pottery kiln, with the funds we have raised. If you know would like to help or can think of a fundraiser we haven't thought of, please discuss your ideas with the Fundraising Committee.

Rockin' The Hill Concerts

This is a relatively new, fundraising event that occurs on “the hill” at HMCDS. Non-HMCDS families are also welcome to participate.

Administrative Issues & Policies

School Sessions and Billing

School-Year Session

The HMCDS school year begins the day after Labor Day and ends on the last day of school for Fairfax County Public Schools. Tuition for the school year is divided into 10 equal monthly payments. This method evens out the payments even though the number of days/weeks of school varies from month to month. Bills are placed in the alphabetical cubbies across from the Front Desk on the 1st of each month. Payment is due by the 10th of each month.

If you wish to pick up your child, on a regular basis, before 2:00 pm on Mondays and 4:00 pm on Tuesdays through Fridays, we will deduct \$20 a month for each day of the week you elect to do so. (This applies for full-day students, during the school year only.)

Summer Session

The HMCDS Summer Session begins the day after the close of Fairfax County Public Schools and ends the Friday before Labor Day. All children who will attend during the summer, including those currently enrolled for the school year, need to be registered for the summer session. Registration for the summer session, which takes place in March/April, is subject to space availability based on priority tiers: preschoolers and kindergartners enrolled during the school year are registered first, followed by school-age children enrolled during the school year. Siblings and others not enrolled during the school year are registered last. Please note that the number of spots available for the school-age children and for those not enrolled during the school year may be limited.

The summer session is organized by individual weeks. This system gives families the benefit of not having to pay for weeks their children will not be at HMCDS, while allowing the school to fill any vacancies. By registering, however, you commit to pay for the weeks for which you have registered.

The summer is divided into two 5-week billing periods. Tuition payments are due within 10 days of the beginning of each billing period.

Additional details concerning Summer Session registration procedures are distributed prior to the registration period.

Registration Forms

Required HMCDS Forms

Prior to your child's first day of attendance at HMCDS, the following forms must be completed and returned to the Director:

- Annual Enrollment Contract – to be filled out yearly

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- Student Registration Form – filled 1x only
 - Commonwealth of Virginia School Entrance Health Form – filled 1x only
 - Teacher Information Form – filled 1x only

Additionally, the Directors must verify proof of birth by examining the original birth certificate (copies are NOT acceptable) for each child to be enrolled. Please show your child's birth certificate to the Director before your child's first day of attendance.

Optional HMCDS Forms

The following forms must be completed and returned to the Director before your child can participate in the related activity:

- Field Trip Policy for Parents & Transportation Acknowledgement
- HMCDS Equine Activity Release Form (Horseback Riding)
- Sledding release form
- Parental Consent Form For Medication

School Holidays

HMCDS is closed on the following days: Labor Day, Thanksgiving Day, Christmas Eve, Christmas Day, New Year's Day, Presidents' Day, Memorial Day and Independence Day.

Pick Up Policy

Children will only be released to their parent, guardian, or other responsible person as designated on the Annual Enrollment Contract. Pickup by any other person requires special arrangements made in advance with the Director.

Inclement Weather Policy

HMCDS remains open whenever possible and does not necessarily follow Fairfax County Public Schools closings for snow or other inclement weather. Please call the school if you are unsure whether it will be open.

Natural Disaster Policy

In the event of a natural disaster, children will be retained at the school until parents are able to pick them up. We will be sure they are taken to the safest part of the building depending on circumstances (i.e., the basement in the case of a tornado).

Health & Illness Policy

At HMCDS, we believe that the health of the children in our care is the combined responsibility of parents and the school. We ask that parents not send children to school when they are ill. HMCDS always notifies parents when their children become ill at school or have been exposed to a contagious disease. Likewise, we expect parents to notify the

school if their child has been diagnosed with a communicable disease—such as chicken pox—so that we can notify other parents.

When to Keep a Sick Child Home

We follow the guidelines for the inclusion/exclusion of sick children recommended by NAEYC, as published in the booklet “Preparing for Illness, A Joint Responsibility for Parents and Caregivers.”

Generally, the following criteria should be used to exclude children with short-term illnesses from the group care setting:

1. The child does not feel well enough to participate comfortably in the usual activities of the program.
2. The Staff cannot care for the sick child without interfering with the care of the other children.
3. The child has any of the following that indicate a contagious disease or an immediate need for medical evaluation:
 - fever and behavior changes or other signs or symptoms of illness as defined under “Recognizing the ill child” in the “Preparing for Illness” booklet, until the child’s inclusion is checked with a health professional who determines that the child may be in child care;
 - signs or symptoms of a possible serious condition as defined under “Conditions that require immediate medical evaluation” in the “Preparing for Illness” booklet until the child is checked by a health professional who determines that the child may be in child care;
 - symptoms or conditions listed in the tables of the “Preparing for Illness” booklet that require exclusion as potentially contagious illnesses, until the child meets the criteria for re-admission.

The child should be kept home until a full 24 hours is met without a fever.

If you are uncertain about the nature or management of an illness, call or consult a pediatric health professional. The pediatric health professional will help you determine how sick the child is and what care the child needs.

The “Preparing for Illness” booklet includes tables for specific symptoms or conditions. The tables tell the cause, when to exclude from child care, when to ask for medical advice and when to re-admit a child to child care.

Please ask to see a “Preparing for Illness” booklet if you would like further information.

When a Child Becomes Sick at HMCDS

If a child becomes ill at school, the School Director will contact the child’s parents by telephone. Parents are expected to pick up a sick child immediately.

Allergies

Although there is a place for you to list these on your child's medical form, please notify your child's teachers directly of any allergies.

Medications

School Directors will administer needed medications to your child. It is necessary for parents to fill out a medication form (available in the office) before the school directors may do so. For warmer weather, should a teacher be asked to apply sunscreen and/or insect repellent anytime during the day on a child, a parent's written consent is required in addition to providing the child's supplies.

Policy for Reporting Suspected Child Abuse

We are licensed by the State of Virginia and are required by law to report to the Virginia Department of Social Services all cases of suspected child abuse or neglect.

Clothing

To ensure that the children can enjoy both indoor and outdoor play, it is important that clothing be casual, durable, and washable. Children go outside daily, weather permitting; therefore outerwear should be appropriate for the time of year. **All clothing should be clearly marked with the child's name, including gloves and hats.** In addition, please provide a complete change of clothes in a marked bag in your child's cubby or backpack. We also ask that parents launder and return any borrowed clothing, promptly.

Items from Home

The school cannot be responsible for personal items brought from home. If your child is planning to bring in a toy, such as a favorite stuffed animal he/she sleeps with, make sure it is tagged with the child's name.

Information Sources

In addition to this Parent Handbook, there are many places you can get information about what's going on at HMCDS.

On the Screened-In-Porch

- The easel is used to highlight special activities such as fundraisers, sign ups, etc.
- The white board is updated frequently with announcements and reminders of various current events.

In the Lobby

- Alphabetized cubbies, where you will find your bill at the beginning of each month, are located above the white shelf near the main door. Sign-up sheets for different activities and current fundraising information are placed on the white shelf.

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- Staff photos are posted on the bulletin board and staff biographies are on the shelf.
 - A corkboard on the door to the Dolphins' hall posts expressions of praise for staff whom have done something "above and beyond." Please feel free to add your comments.

Newsletter

The HMCDS newsletter features articles from the Director as well as from the teachers of each class on upcoming events, topics of study and reminders. The newsletter is published at the beginning of each month and is placed in the plastic holder located beneath the white board on the porch. To minimize copying costs, please take only one copy per family. If you would like to receive the newsletter via email, please provide your current email address to the office.

Parent Advisory Board (PAB) Meeting Minutes

Detailed minutes are taken at each monthly PAB meeting. PAB meeting minutes are posted on the porch with extra copies located in the plastic holder beneath the white board.

Online

- **HMCDS Website**
Visit www.hmcads.com for additional information about our school.
- [HTTP://www.bigtent.com](http://www.bigtent.com) is our online community board to sign up for email list-serves, buy/sell/trade items, access a live newsletter and calendars, etc. All parents will receive an email invitation from Big Tent sometime at the beginning of the school year using the email listed on the Annual Enrollment Contract. Please note: Big Tent has a very strict privacy policy and does not sell, rent or give user information to ANY third parties.

Items We Share

The following items are available for use without charge to HMCDS families:

- Use of the facility for birthday parties, civic functions, meetings, etc.
- Tables and chairs
- Cots
- Books and toys

Please make arrangements with the Directors for any of these items.