



ASHLEY HALL
FOUNDED 1909

Each Ashley Hall student brings their own talents, needs, and dreams. That's why we personalize our admission process to each applicant and their family. Visit ashleyhall.org/admission to get started.

ASHLEY HALL
FOUNDED 1909

EARLY SCHOOL

PRE-PRIMARY THROUGH PRE-KINDERGARTEN



OUR MISSION

The mission of Ashley Hall is to educate students to be independent, ethically responsible, and prepared to meet the challenges of their world with *confidence*.

“

At Ashley Hall, children engage with thoughtfully designed spaces that inspire curiosity, critical thinking, and creativity. Learning is guided by meaningful context, allowing students' ideas to flourish. Together, we explore, wonder, and build a strong foundation for lifelong learning.

– DIANE FLETCHER
DIRECTOR OF THE EARLY SCHOOL



THE EARLY SCHOOL



The Early School at Ashley Hall provides a joyful, intentional, and dynamic environment where curiosity and creativity thrive. Rooted in a student-centered and inquiry-based teaching philosophy, our program nurtures young learners as they build foundational skills, independence, and a lifelong love of learning. Through exploration, collaboration, and discovery, children develop the confidence and capabilities that prepare them for success in school and beyond.

Here's a glimpse into the Early School.

WHO WE ARE

Our learning environment celebrates the voice and perspective of each child, fostering a culture of respect, empathy, and wonder. Grounded in care, and a deep understanding of early childhood development, our educators work with intention to cultivate a sense of belonging and purpose in every learner.



CREATIVE



JOYFUL



INTENTIONAL



INDEPENDENT



CONFIDENT



INQUISITIVE

A DAY IN THE LIFE:

MORNING

ARRIVAL & WARM WELCOME

Children are greeted by teachers and friends as they transition from home to school. They hang up belongings, wash hands, and participate in morning rituals like reading the arrival message or a fun “question of the day.”

DISCOVERY & EXPLORATIONS

Children dive into engaging, teacher-curated learning centers—exploring art, science, sensory play, math, blocks, and water. This hands-on time supports creativity, social interaction, and emerging skills.

COMMUNITY MEETING

Gathering as a group, children set intentions for the day. They enjoy greeting games, movement, storytelling, and early academic play like counting and rhyming.

MORNING SNACK

A shared snack of fruits and vegetables encourages social skills, manners, and conversations—with opportunities for real-life math through surveys and group decisions.

INQUIRY & RESEARCH GROUPS

Children select centers or teacher-guided small groups to dive deeper into emergent projects based on their interests. New materials and ideas are introduced intentionally to encourage creativity, critical thinking, and collaboration, both indoors and out.

CONNECTION CLASSES

Children rotate through enriching experiences such as:

- Art Atelier
- Music & Movement
- Library
- Swim
- PE (Pre-K only)

MIDDAY

OUTDOOR CLASSROOM & NATURE PLAY

Outdoor exploration fosters curiosity and gross motor development through gardening, seasonal observations, group games, and nature walks. The natural world becomes an extended classroom.

LUNCH, REST & STORYTIME

Group meals foster conversation and community. Afterward, children relax with classical music or stories, followed by rest time to recharge for afternoon adventures.

AFTERNOON

REFLECTIONS & MINDFULNESS

Children regroup to reflect on their day, share insights, and practice mindfulness or guided movement—helping them internalize their learning and set intentions for tomorrow.

DISMISSAL

Children say goodbye, collect their belongings, and share their anticipation for the next school day. This closing moment includes a song or ritual that reinforces belonging and joy.

AREAS OF LEARNING

At the heart of the Early School at Ashley Hall is a Reggio Emilia-inspired philosophy that honors each child as a curious, capable, and creative learner. Our program recognizes children's natural desire to explore, communicate, and make meaning of the world around them. Teachers serve as thoughtful facilitators, guiding learning through inquiry, play, and purposeful interaction. As children investigate topics of interest, essential cognitive, language, social-emotional, and motor skills are seamlessly woven into daily experiences. Classrooms are joyful, active spaces where exploration and independence are encouraged, from mastering self-help skills to taking initiative in their own learning. This holistic, child-centered approach lays the foundation for confident, inquisitive learners.

EARLY LITERACY

Early literacy skills are nurtured through rich, meaningful exposure to language in all its forms, starting with the youngest students. Reading, writing, listening, and speaking are woven into each day as children engage with stories, poetry, and nonfiction texts individually and in group settings—indoors and out. Classrooms are filled with accessible books, and weekly visits to the Ashley Hall campus library provide further opportunities for exploration and discovery. Children are introduced to letters, phonetics, and early reading and writing in developmentally appropriate ways, often through small-group or one-on-one experiences. By fostering curiosity and encouraging organic, inquiry-driven learning, students begin to make natural connections between letters, sounds, and words—building a strong foundation for confident, lifelong literacy.

STEAM

At Ashley Hall's Early School, science and math are everywhere, sparked by curiosity and fueled by exploration. Guided by our Reggio Emilia-inspired approach, students engage with science through playful provocations, hands-on investigations, and intentional time spent in nature. Inside the classroom, children mix, observe changes, question, and discover using materials that invite scientific thinking—think bubbles, dirt, sand, and



light. Outside, the learning continues as they tend flowers, spot tadpoles in the Reflection Pond, and notice the rhythms of the natural world. From daily discoveries to full-day adventures at our Johns Island Nature Retreat, our students learn to think like scientists. We celebrate their questions, nurture their observations, and cultivate a lifelong love of learning through the lens of the sciences.

ATELIER STUDIO

The Atelier in the Early School is a special studio space where children are exposed to a wide variety of creative materials, including clay, paint, wire, pastels, sculpture, chalk, crayons, pencils, paper, fabric, yarn, and recycled items. The studio is guided by the Atelierista, an educator with a background in the arts, who encourages students to express their unique ideas and experiment. As a space that honors process over product, the Atelier invites children to think critically, explore abstract concepts, and make meaning through hands-on, multi-sensory experiences that reflect their inquiries and imagination.



only at **AH**

SWIM

At Ashley Hall, all Early School students participate in weekly swimming instruction as part of our year-round swim program. These lessons offer more than just physical activity—they promote water safety, encourage healthy risk-taking, and instill a lifelong love of the water. Guided by certified swim instructors and lifeguards, students build foundational swimming skills and confidence at their own pace, celebrating milestones both big and small. The experience also nurtures independence and responsibility, as even our youngest students practice changing and caring for their belongings before and after each lesson. Swimming at Ashley Hall becomes a joyful, empowering routine that supports physical development, self-assurance, and a sense of achievement in every child.

MUSIC AND MOVEMENT

Each week, students engage in varied music and movement experiences—singing, playing instruments, and exploring creative movement that supports strength, coordination, and expression. Dance parties are a favorite, and this class often becomes a space for dramatic play and imaginative storytelling. Through rhythm, melody, and motion, children develop auditory discrimination, body awareness, and emotional regulation. These sessions also foster a sense of community as students learn to listen, respond, and move together in harmony.

THE OUTDOOR CLASSROOM

The Outdoor Classroom is a vital and cherished part of the Early School. It's a space for children to explore, initiate their own learning, to be flexible and curious, and to move their bodies freely. Creating a lasting relationship with the natural world and making connections between what happens inside the classroom and in the world outside is a key part of the Reggio Emilia-inspired style of the Early School, and a basic foundation for lifelong learning.

In the Outdoor Classroom, you will find a set of colorful, tactile signage, created with the children's own words and artwork. These signs guide children through defined areas such as "Willow Cave," "Outdoor Atelier," and "Road 1909," offering both a visual framework and a gentle invitation to engage with language and meaning in a playful, age-appropriate way. This design element supports their sense of place and community, while also marking a significant part of our Nature Explore Classroom certification. Ashley Hall is one of only two certified spaces in South Carolina.

Climbing Area

CLIMBING

Let's feel powerful! Let's take a risk!

Climbing engages the entire body, activating strength, core, and endurance.

The sky's the limit!



LEARN MORE ABOUT THE ASHLEY HALL OUTDOOR CLASSROOM HERE



THE DEVELOPMENT OF STUDENT IDENTITY

Though each child meets milestones in their own time, a hallmark exercise for students beginning in Pre-Primary is the self-portrait project. A glance at the drawings included here reveals how their self-image evolves over the years, including what they notice about themselves and how they communicate it from year to year. This artwork is a deeply personal reflection of their developing introspection and growth, and it is vital to the development of children who value and respect their differences and celebrate individuality, as well as young learners who can make connections between themselves and their environment.



PRE-PRIMARY

(2-3 YEARS):
DISCOVERING THE SELF
THROUGH MARK-MAKING

For the youngest learners, self-portraits are an introduction to representation and self-expression. As they experiment with mark-making—dots, squiggles, and circles—they begin to understand that their actions can leave lasting, meaningful traces. Using permanent markers helps them commit intentionally to their work, encouraging exploration over precision. Although their fine motor skills are still emerging, they take pride in their creations, often exclaiming, "That's me!" even when the image is abstract. These early portraits mark the beginning of recognizing themselves as individuals and visually communicating their identity, laying the groundwork for future growth in self-awareness and artistic expression.



PRIMARY

(3-4 YEARS):
A GROWING AWARENESS
OF SELF

In Primary, children gain greater control over their tools, allowing them to create more intentional and structured self-portraits. Their drawings begin to include recognizable features like faces, limbs, and details such as hair or smiles, reflecting a growing awareness of their physical and emotional identity. These portraits are often accompanied by personal, imaginative explanations that highlight what matters most to them—feelings, relationships, and experiences. As their self-awareness deepens, children begin to connect what they see in the mirror with how they feel and relate to others, developing confidence in their individuality and pride in their expressive abilities.



PRE-KINDERGARTEN

(4-5 YEARS):
A DEEPER UNDERSTANDING
OF IDENTITY

By Pre-Kindergarten, children's self-portraits become richly detailed expressions of identity, supported by advanced fine motor skills and a growing sense of self. They incorporate specific features like freckles or favorite items, reflecting both physical traits and personal interests. Children can now articulate the meaning behind their artistic choices, revealing how they see themselves in relation to their passions and the people around them. These portraits prompt thoughtful discussions about individuality and diversity, fostering empathy, self-confidence, and an appreciation for what makes each person unique within the community.

EARLY SCHOOL ENRICHMENT

Enrichment experiences in the Early School are thoughtfully woven into the curriculum to broaden perspectives, spark curiosity, and deepen learning. These opportunities invite children to engage with the world around them in meaningful and developmentally appropriate ways.



THE NATURE RETREAT

Each class makes at least one special trip to the Ashley Hall satellite campus on Johns Island to explore the wooded area and be in nature together. They practice observation, make inquiries and find joy in a new environment. Often, older students are paired with a younger buddy, and it's a great opportunity to provide Primary and Pre-K students with leadership opportunities and foster special relationships between the years.

CAMPUS GUESTS

We warmly welcome parents and community partners to visit our campus and engage with our students. A memorable example of this partnership is Clean City Clara, who visits us through our collaboration with the Keep Charleston Beautiful initiative. Clara brings environmental awareness to life for our students, helping them understand their important role as stewards of the earth. During her visits, Clara introduces engaging lessons on litter, pollution, and the impact of human behavior on the environment. Her presence inspires meaningful actions among the children. It's not uncommon to hear a student proudly declare, "I'm getting all my litter where it belongs—in the trash!" These visits not only reinforce environmental responsibility but also deepen our students' understanding of their role in the broader community.

FIELD TRIPS

Student interests and inquiry-based learning often lead us beyond the classroom and out into the broader community. We believe meaningful learning can happen anywhere, and our teachers thoughtfully extend classroom experiences to real-world environments that deepen students' understanding and spark their curiosity. Whether visiting local parks, arts organizations, or community landmarks, students engage in reflection, exploration, and civic-minded action. Many of these journeys emerge directly from students' investigations—like a study of marine life that led to a fishing trip on Shem Creek, or a fascination with transportation that inspired a visit to the Charleston Airport. Such experiences make learning tangible, relevant, and unforgettable.

EXTENDED DAY

The Ashley Hall Extended Day program is available as an option for all families. Staffed by Education students at the College of Charleston, it is a fun, activity-filled environment for children to fill the after school hours until 6:00 p.m. Snacks are provided daily, and children are able to enjoy the Outdoor Classroom if the weather permits, or can spend time with activities indoors if needed. The School also offers a wide range of additional after school offerings including music lessons, swim lessons, athletic enrichment and additional support.

COMMUNITY



“
What impresses us most is how intentional each part of the day is—from morning greetings to reflection circles. Ashley Hall feels like an extension of our home, full of care, curiosity, and community.”

“
The Reggio Emilia-inspired curriculum has opened our child's eyes to the world in new ways. She's asking questions, exploring ideas, and seeing things with a curiosity that's wonderful to witness.”

“
The Early School is special because they really know each child. Our daughter has been nurtured from day one, and this close-knit school community has become like family to us.”