

Spotlight on a Suffolk school

Stratford St Mary Primary School

Strickmere, Stratford St Mary, CO7 6YG



Stratford St Mary is a very small village primary school with 84 children on roll. 61% of children attending the school live out of the catchment area. 7% of the children are on the SEND register; 9% attract pupil premium / service family funding and 11% are from Black or Minority Ethnic groups.

We teach the children in four classes. Reception / Year 1; Years 2 & 3; Years 4 & 5 and Year 6.

Attainment at the end of key stage 2 has been above national for the past 3 years and outcomes in 2024 for GLD and phonics were above national average.

What is the school's vision?

Through our school vision, we are committed to providing our children with a place where they can set challenging goals for themselves and develop their mindset to enable them to achieve excellence. We are committed to creating a stimulating learning environment with our well planned, personalised curriculum, bespoke to the children's needs. We are also committed to ensuring all children leave our school as responsible, positive and respectful individuals who are not only prepared for the next stage of their education but also for their future lives in today's diverse society.

We have 6 rules in school, and these are known as the Stratford Bs. Be kind; Be respectful; Be curious; Be positive; Be happy and Be 'you'! These are displayed throughout the school and link in with the schools' reward system. These are embedded in everything we do.

Curriculum and pedagogical approach

Our school vision links to our curriculum intent themes of: Individual Aspirations, Global Awareness, The Arts and The Environment. Our enquiry-based curriculum has evolved, taking into account the National Curriculum but also ensuring it supports the development of cultural capital. Due to the nature of the class structure, we needed to carefully map the curriculum coverage to fit in with the mix of ages within each class. The 2-year long term plan did take a while to develop and there have been slight adaptations and improvements made as we revisited topics for the second time around. For each history, geography and science unit, there is an overarching 'essential question' and each week an enquiry question which links to this.

For every foundation subject and science, knowledge organisers have been bespoke written which the children use in lessons. The children and adults value these as a learning resource and this also supports and promotes the children to be independent learners. Our curriculum makes links across both individual and other subjects which ensures children revisit, make connections and embed - all this helps them to contextualise their learning. We achieve this through teaching both disciplinary and substantive knowledge throughout each subject. An example of this would be in our history lessons, the children are in the role of historians throughout the lessons and are taught to have an understanding of the skills a historian needs. (for example, in Year 6, they are taught to question the sources of evidence with regards to their reliability).

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All the children have access to Forest Schools throughout the year. Children in our Yr R/1 class spend an afternoon each week taking part in Forest School activities. The children in other classes spend 1 afternoon for 2 half terms. These sessions are carefully planned to link in with other curriculum areas.

Forest School activities enable the children to learn new skills, take supported risks, participate in kinaesthetic learning and foster an appreciation for the outdoors.

We actively and regularly seek challenge and support from an External Consultant who monitors and supports the School's Improvement journey. We also actively engage with the Local Authority and School Improvement Partners.

Teaching year 6 in single age class

Since 2021, we have arranged our classes with Year 6 being taught on their own - the other years groups are taught in mixed age classes. After the pandemic, we knew there were likely to be significant gaps in the children's learning across the school, but also knew that the Year 6s only had 1 year left in primary. In teaching Year 6 on their own, our intention was to provide children with accelerated learning and opportunities to fill the gaps and prepare them for High School ensuring they all had the opportunity to reach their true potential.

The skilled and experienced Year 6 teacher was able to easily identify the gaps in children's knowledge, personalise learning and spend targeted time with individuals. She was also able to concentrate on delivering the Year 6 curriculum, adapting it to the needs of the individuals and to focus on supporting their emotional development in preparing them for their next stage of education and transition to High School.

At the end of July 2024, 3 years after the initial decision to teach the Year 6s on their own, we noted many positive factors.

- Emotional development – staff have noted that the Year 6 children develop emotionally very quickly once they begin in the discrete Year 6 class. This, combined with the absence of younger children, led to more mature conversations and in-depth discussions both generally, as well as around curriculum topics.
- The change to being in a smaller class size and a single year group has created a strong identity for the Year 6 children. Each class has 'gelled' very quickly and relationships / friendships that were not there before have been created. As a result of this, the learning environment is highly supportive and respectful.
- The children's work ethic and behaviour for learning quickly steps up a gear, with a noticeable increase in individual levels of maturity and taking of responsibility.
- Impact upon outcomes – before the changes were implemented, outcomes for individual subject areas were in line with or just above national; in 2019 combined RWM was just below national. Since the changes were implemented, outcomes in all three subjects have risen to be significantly above the national, as has the combined.

Despite having to re-map the curriculum (which was time consuming), the change to the class structures has been overwhelmingly positive. The positive impact has been seen in terms of the official KS2 outcomes, but also for the way in which staff have seen the children develop and mature. There have been no negative impacts across the school.