

History Policy

St Matthew's Catholic Primary School



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Review Date

Vision and Aims

At St Matthew's, history helps children understand the people, events and ideas that have shaped the world in which they live. Rooted in our Catholic mission, we want every child to be curious about the past, to ask thoughtful questions and to recognise the dignity and experiences of people in different times and places. We maintain high expectations for all pupils, including those with SEND, pupils learning English and those facing disadvantage. Through history, pupils learn to listen respectfully to different perspectives, examine evidence carefully and develop informed, reasoned interpretations.

Progression in History

By the end of Year 6, pupils should have a secure chronological framework, a growing body of knowledge about British, local and wider world history, and the ability to use historical evidence to ask and answer questions. Our curriculum follows the Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS) statutory framework in Reception and the National Curriculum for England in Years 1 to 6. Teaching develops both substantive knowledge - knowledge of people, events, places and periods - and disciplinary knowledge: how historians use sources, construct accounts, consider cause and consequence, identify change and continuity, make comparisons and examine different interpretations of the past.

The journey begins in Reception through Understanding the World. Children talk about their own lives and families, notice change over time and encounter the past through stories, photographs, objects, celebrations, visits and familiar places. Adults introduce language such as past, present, before, after, old, new, then and now. Children sequence simple events and compare experiences, developing the early vocabulary and sense of chronology that later history learning will build upon.

In Key Stage 1, pupils develop an awareness of the past and use common words and phrases relating to the passing of time. They learn about changes within living memory, significant events beyond living memory, the lives of significant individuals and important events, people and places in their locality. Pupils place events and people in chronological order, identify similarities and differences, ask and answer questions and use sources such as photographs, artefacts, written accounts and buildings. This planned progression provides a clear bridge from EYFS Understanding the World to the Key Stage 1 National Curriculum and prepares pupils for the broader chronological and disciplinary demands of Key Stage 2.

Curriculum Design and Planning

History is planned through a coherent, sequenced curriculum that secures the National Curriculum for England while reflecting the context of St Matthew's and its community. Units are organised so that pupils revisit and deepen important ideas, vocabulary and historical concepts over time. Teachers select and adapt enquiries, sources, texts, images, artefacts, maps and visits so that pupils build secure knowledge rather than encounter disconnected facts. Planning identifies what pupils need to remember, the historical questions they will investigate and the evidence they will use. Teachers remain alert to misconceptions, anachronisms and over-simplified accounts, and ensure that resources are age-appropriate and historically meaningful.

Teachers remain responsible for the history taught and for ensuring full curriculum coverage. Class teachers liaise regularly with the history subject leader about curriculum coverage, chronology, vocabulary, assessment, misconceptions and the adaptations pupils need. These discussions inform whole-school planning, agreed priorities and next steps for teaching. The subject leader provides practical support and guidance with sequencing, historical enquiry, source selection, local history, resources and lesson design, including coaching or team teaching where useful.

Subject progression identifies the key knowledge, concepts, vocabulary and disciplinary approaches that build from Reception to Year 6.

EYFS and Key Stage 1

In Reception and Key Stage 1, children develop an early sense of chronology through their own lives, families, stories, objects and significant events. They learn to use time-related vocabulary, sequence events, recognise change and compare aspects of life in different periods. They begin to ask historical questions and use simple sources to find out about the past.

Key Stage 2

In Key Stage 2, pupils develop a chronologically secure knowledge and understanding of British, local and world history. They make connections across periods and use increasingly precise historical vocabulary. They explore concepts such as continuity and change, cause and consequence, similarity and difference, significance and historical interpretation. Pupils learn that sources were created for particular purposes and audiences, and that historians use evidence to construct and test accounts. Timelines, maps, knowledge organisers and working walls help pupils connect new learning to prior knowledge and locate each unit within a wider chronological framework.

Strong foundations in History

In Reception, children develop historical understanding through purposeful play, conversation, stories, photographs, objects, family experiences and exploration of their local environment. They notice how people, places and routines change over time and begin to sequence familiar events. These foundations continue throughout school through carefully sequenced teaching, frequent retrieval and repeated use of timelines. Pupils revisit important periods, people, places and concepts so that new knowledge connects to what they already know rather than remaining as isolated facts.

Adults model clear historical language and give children time to explain what they notice, remember and infer. Talk partners, oral rehearsal, story, images and sentence stems support early oracy. Reading demands are adapted so that decoding does not prevent pupils from accessing historical ideas: teachers may read sources aloud, pre-teach vocabulary or present shorter extracts while retaining the historical question. Pupils are taught to distinguish between what a source shows directly and what they can reasonably infer from it.

Chronology, retrieval and historical vocabulary

History lessons include regular opportunities to revisit prior learning and strengthen chronological understanding. Teachers use timelines, retrieval questions, maps, images and key vocabulary to help pupils connect people and events across units. Important dates are taught where they help pupils locate and relate periods, but chronology is developed through more than memorising dates: pupils consider duration, sequence, overlap and the interval between events. Vocabulary is explicitly taught, revisited and used in spoken and written historical explanations.

Historical enquiry and source work

Historical enquiry is taught as an integral part of the curriculum. Pupils encounter a purposeful range of primary and secondary sources, which may include artefacts, photographs, maps, buildings, written accounts, oral testimony and archaeological evidence. Teachers model how to observe closely, ask questions, consider provenance and purpose, compare evidence and recognise the limits of what a source can tell us. As pupils progress, they learn that accounts of the past are constructed from evidence and that interpretations can differ. Source work is carefully selected to deepen secure knowledge of the period rather than becoming an activity detached from historical content.

Teaching and learning the St Matthew's Way

Lessons follow the St Matthew's Way: teachers establish what pupils already know, introduce precise vocabulary and the learning goal, model new knowledge or a historical process, check understanding, provide guided and independent practice, and use feedback to decide the next step. The gradual 'I do, we do, you do' approach helps pupils move towards independence. Teachers use timelines, maps, images, artefacts, stories, texts and carefully chosen sources to make the past accessible. New information is connected explicitly to prior learning so pupils can locate events in time and place and build coherent historical narratives.

Teacher explanations are concise and purposeful, leaving substantial time for pupils to think, read, discuss, investigate and communicate historically. Silent signals support calm transitions and attention. Mixed-ability seating and talk partners give pupils opportunities to explain and compare ideas; teachers also use flexible groups when a particular gap requires focused teaching. Oral rehearsal, stem sentences, partner discussion and carefully chosen questions help pupils use evidence and vocabulary accurately. Questions such as 'What changed?', 'What stayed the same?', 'Why might this have happened?', 'What can this source tell us?' and 'How do these accounts differ?' require pupils to explain and support their ideas. Historical talk and enquiry can draw on the school's P4C approach where appropriate.

Inclusion and adaptation

The same ambitious historical ideas are made accessible through responsive teaching. Teachers may pre-teach vocabulary, use Widgit symbols or visual instructions, provide timelines and maps, chunk longer texts, read sources aloud, highlight key information, provide sentence stems, enlarge images or sources, offer additional guided practice, or allow an alternative way to record a response. Pupils learning English benefit from visuals, oral rehearsal, explicit vocabulary teaching and opportunities to connect new concepts with prior knowledge. Teachers check that adaptations remove a barrier without reducing the historical goal, and review them with the SENDCO and families where appropriate.

Assessment and responsive teaching

Teachers assess prior knowledge through retrieval activities, discussion, targeted questions, timelines and short tasks. During lessons they use mini whiteboards, low-stakes quizzes, observation and purposeful questioning to see what pupils know, remember and understand. A no-hands-up approach, including lollipop sticks and supportive cold calling, helps teachers hear from a broad range of pupils while allowing thinking time and appropriate support.

Teachers anticipate likely misconceptions during planning, identify gaps early and adapt explanation, examples, source material, grouping and practice accordingly. Assessment focuses on whether pupils are building secure knowledge and can use it to think historically, rather than on the quantity of written work produced. End-of-lesson and end-of-unit information informs consolidation, further teaching and targeted support. Short, focused intervention revisits identified prerequisite knowledge or vocabulary and is linked back to class teaching. Assessment is used to improve learning, and staff avoid collecting evidence that does not help them make a teaching decision.

Personal development and Building the Kingdom

History is connected to meaningful experiences through stories, artefacts, local studies, visits, visitors and enquiry. Pupils learn about the lives and experiences of people from different periods and communities and consider how choices and events have affected individuals and societies. They learn to discuss evidence respectfully, recognise that people in the past lived in contexts different from their own and avoid judging the past through simple stereotypes. In keeping with Catholic social teaching, history can provide genuine opportunities to consider dignity, justice, service, community and the consequences of human choices, while maintaining accurate historical study.

Leadership monitoring and review

Class teachers plan, teach, adapt and assess history, maintain useful historical displays or working walls where appropriate, and communicate concerns about progress. Class teachers have regular communication with subject leads to gain advice and guidance. We recognise the importance of strong subject leadership at St Matthew's. Allocated subject leadership time enables the history leader to undertake learning walks, review planning, monitor books and standards, speak with pupils, review curriculum resources and provide team teaching and coaching sessions with staff. Subject leaders regularly lead CPD during staff meetings and share effective practice from their subjects across the school. In history, this includes strengthening chronology, modelling source work, developing historical vocabulary and discussing common misconceptions. These activities focus on how well pupils understand and retain historical knowledge, make connections over time and use evidence to answer historical questions. The curriculum lead and senior leaders ensure the curriculum is implemented consistently and provide time and support for improvement. Governors hold leaders to account for the quality and accessibility of history provision. Findings from monitoring and assessment inform action plans, staff development and changes to curriculum planning. The History Lead regularly creates governors' reports so that school governors are aware of strengths, areas for development and next steps in history.

Working with families

Year group curriculum information is shared with parents and carers, including the periods, people and themes pupils will study and practical ways to support historical curiosity at home. Families may be encouraged to discuss family and local history, visit museums or heritage sites, look at photographs and objects, read historical books and talk about how life has changed. Teachers discuss individual progress and support with families as needed. The school's published information should reflect the curriculum pupils actually experience.

Homework

Where history homework is set, it reinforces or enriches learning already taking place in school. Activities may include retrieval of key knowledge and vocabulary, reading, family or local-history discussion, research using teacher-selected sources, or preparation for an enquiry. Homework should be purposeful, accessible and proportionate. It should not depend on families purchasing resources or on pupils completing unsupported internet research, and it should not replace the carefully sequenced teaching of the history curriculum in school.

Related guidance

Early Years Foundation Stage statutory framework; National Curriculum in England history programmes of study; school curriculum, assessment and SEND policies; agreed school guidance for teaching, learning, safeguarding and educational visits.