

Case study: Gipsey Bridge Primary School, near Boston, Lincolnshire

A rural Primary school working towards becoming a Heritage School, and increasing its involvement with the community through heritage

Background to Gipsey Bridge Primary School, part of Infinity Academies Trust

The village of Gipsey Bridge was developed in the 1820s after the surrounding fenland was drained, so it is a relatively new settlement in a man-made landscape. The village is 8 miles from Boston, the nearest town; there is no public transport and the shop and post office in Gipsey Bridge closed last year. Housing costs, rural poverty and social isolation have an impact on several of the families whose children attend Gipsey Bridge Primary School. Lack of transport means that some children are quite isolated and they miss out on opportunities and experiences, such as visiting the seaside.

The school has 98 pupils, from Reception to Year 6, in mixed-year classes. Most pupils live locally, but several come from Boston and further afield. 23% of pupils are eligible for Pupil Premium and 4% have English as an additional language. 19% of pupils have SEND, and 12% have an EHCP. Several parents decided that Gipsey Bridge would be the best school for their SEND children because it is small, even if they have to travel some distance.

This case study shows how local heritage is having a positive impact on children experiencing rural deprivation and isolation, and how it is increasing the local community's involvement with the school.

Getting involved with Heritage Schools

The Headteacher used to work at another school when it became a Heritage School in 2016, and so had contact with the Heritage Schools Local Heritage Education Manager (LHEM) at that time. In 2025, Gipsey Bridge Primary School took part in the Department for Education's Time Capsule project which aimed to capture the lived experiences of today's pupils, and to mark the 100th anniversary of the DfE. The school already had a time capsule which had been created in 2000 for the Millennium, and they decided to invite former pupils to open the capsule this year, and hold a display of the contents and other aspects of the school's and the village's history. The Headteacher contacted the LHEM, who provided a CPD session about the Heritage Schools programme and the history of the local area to the teachers, and gave a presentation to the pupils, parents and the wider community as part of the celebration for opening the old time capsule and creating the new one.

Gipsey Bridge Primary has already taken part in a number of local heritage activities but local heritage does not feature in the curriculum yet. The school uses the

Cornerstones curriculum which has an optional local history topic, but the teachers were not using it because of the time they would need to carry out the research to develop a local history topic for Gipsey Bridge. The other history topics are generic and do not have a local focus. However, in 2025/26 the History Lead will work with the LHEM to develop a locally-focused history curriculum for Years 5 and 6, and then do the same for the lower year groups so that there is a thread of local history which runs through from year to year. The LHEM's involvement provides knowledge and expertise to achieve this. In due course the teachers plan to review the other curriculum subjects to include aspects of local heritage where possible. This demonstrates the impact that Heritage Schools is having on Gipsey Bridge Primary, as the teachers see how the pupils can benefit from learning about their local heritage. The school plans to apply for the Heritage Schools Award in 2025/26.

The LHEM's CPD session for the teachers has increased their knowledge of the history of the Gipsey Bridge area, and has increased their skills in teaching local history through using historic maps and photographs, census records and military records.

"It's been wonderful to see how much the children's understanding of the local area has already grown through their hands on experiences and work with our LHEM. I see this as just the beginning – there's even more exciting learning to come as we build on this foundation back in the classrooms for all ages" - Headteacher

The Cornerstones curriculum company is very interested to see the outcome of giving a local focus to more topics within the history curriculum, and then how this could be shared with other schools around the country which use Cornerstones so that they could localise their history curricula too.

Heritage activities in the school

Time capsule



One of the pupils reading the newspaper which was in the 2000 time capsule

The time capsule which was created in 2000 was opened by former pupils in 2025. A fair was held in school to display the objects in the time capsule, and the LHEM gave a presentation about the heritage of GipseY Bridge and the surrounding area. Several of the families attending the school have moved to the village relatively recently, and even some of the longer-standing residents were not aware of GipseY Bridge's origins.

"The community's response has been nothing short of extraordinary. From eye-opening facts some had never heard before to the captivating way the LHEM brought the village's story to life – people were truly moved. Residents, along with former pupils whose memories stretch back over eighty years, were amazed to discover just how little they knew about the village – its land, its rivers, even the origin of its name. The LHEM's presentation sparked curiosity, pride and a deep sense of connection that left many inspired and eager to not only learn more but display this information for all to see in the village noticeboards!" - Headteacher

All the pupils in the school, and the children in GipseY Bridge Pre-School, are creating the new time capsule which will be opened in 2050. As the Pre-School is involved as well, the time capsule project has expanded from being a Primary school project to a community project.

GipseY Bridge War Memorial

The War Memorial Trust has a record that the school has a War Memorial plaque, but at some point in the past it has gone missing. The school is planning a project to research local service personnel who would have been named on the plaque, and to create a new one. The LHEM's research showed that the servicemen from GipseY Bridge are commemorated on the war memorial at the church in nearby Wildmore, which the school did not know about. Now, pupils will take a wreath to the war memorial on Remembrance Day. The LHEM, the Headteacher and staff are continuing to research into the original plaque's whereabouts, and a former family of the school have pledged a donation to support the purchase of a replacement for the school if needed.

Boston Brilliance Festival

In February 2025, the school took part in Boston Brilliance; the pupils won a competition to create light designs which were projected onto the buildings, to celebrate the history of some of the historic buildings in the town for the two-day public festival. Their designs reflected the history and architectural characters of the buildings which they had learned about. This took place prior to the LHEM's involvement at GipseY Bridge, and will provide evidence of the school's existing local heritage work when they apply for the Heritage Schools award.



Two of the building illuminations, designed by Gipsey Bridge pupils

Impacts of the heritage activities on the pupils

The Headteacher commented that the local heritage work which the pupils have done so far has particularly encouraged those children who find reading and writing challenging, as the work has involved more practical and visual elements using different ways to record their findings.

"Several children in the class who found it challenging to record their thoughts through traditional writing methods were able to demonstrate their historical understanding using alternative forms of expression. These pupils, often more creative in nature, particularly excelled when engaged in practical, discussion-based tasks. Their knowledge and curiosity came to life during conversations and hands on exploration of artefacts, where they confidently articulated observations, asked insightful questions, and made meaningful connections. By offering a range of recording methods such as podcasts, artwork, diagrams and charts, these children were able to showcase their learning in ways that suited their strengths. This inclusive approach not only supported their ability to reflect on historical concepts but also boosted their engagement and confidence. Notably some pupils only began to show a real interest in history when it became personally meaningful, particularly during activities that involved exploring their own family histories. This personal connection helped them to see history not just as a subject, but as a part of their identity, deepening both their understanding and enthusiasm for learning" - Headteacher

The Headteacher considers that the local heritage work has had a positive impact on the pupils' wellbeing:

"Winning the Boston Brilliance Award was an incredible moment for our entire school community. The sense of pride and excitement was wonderful to see especially among the children. It was a powerful experience for them to see the positive impact that hard work and teamwork can have, not only in achieving

success but in being recognised by others beyond the school. One of the most meaningful aspects of the project was how it helped pupils connect with the past. They gained a deeper understanding of what life was like for children their age in earlier generations and came to appreciate many of the opportunities and conveniences they might otherwise take for granted today. Beyond the award itself, the whole experience had a significant impact on the children's wellbeing. It boosted their confidence, reinforced the value of collaboration, and celebrated their dedication in a very public and affirming way. Being recognised in this way by the wider community was incredibly powerful, and something they will carry with them for a long time. The children have now met with Boston Borough Council for the 2030 celebrations of the Pilgrim Fathers, so they will continue to be involved in the local history of our area" - Headteacher

Families are also now more involved in what their children are learning about the locality; they are talking to their children more about what they are learning, and more families are coming in to school for heritage events such as the time capsule opening and the 80th anniversary of D-Day. The Headteacher commented that the covid pandemic restrictions had prevented parents from coming into school, and it is the recent heritage events which are encouraging them to be more involved in the life of the school again.

Impacts of the heritage activities on the wider community

The heritage activities have strengthened links with village residents and the wider community. Many parents and other local residents attended the D-Day commemoration event, along with ex-servicemen and the British Legion, and during the recent OFSTED inspection the inspectors praised the community engagement which the event had created. One outcome is that a resident, who is now 93 and attended Gipse Bridge School during World War 2, has been into school to tell the pupils about her wartime experiences.

The time capsule community day held this year has made more connections with people in the village. The Headteacher commented that the heritage events have encouraged people in the community to talk to each other more about the history of the locality, thus helping to increase community cohesion. As a result of the time capsule event, the Parish Council are planning to install an interpretation panel in the village about the heritage of Gipse Bridge, based on some of the research which the LHEM carried out. The pupils will contribute to the content of the panel. This will be informative for local people and visitors and will help to raise the profile and image of the village.

Summary

"As a school, we are now deeply committed to valuing and celebrating the unique heritage and natural environment that surrounds us. We place great importance on understanding its significance – why it remains with us today – and how we can play an active role in restoring and preserving these special places for future generations. I would also like to extend a huge thank you to our LHEM for her invaluable support, expertise and enthusiasm, which has truly inspired staff, pupils and their families throughout this journey" - Headteacher

The local heritage activities which Gipsev Bridge Primary has undertaken so far have had a tangible impact on engagement between the school and the local community, and the OFSTED inspectors praised this work. Parents and children talk about the heritage of the village and surrounding area, and stronger connections are being made with the Pre-School, the Parish Council and other residents.

Taking part in these heritage activities has strengthened the pupils' understanding of where they live and enabled them to use a variety of methods to learn about their locality, which has been beneficial to pupils of all abilities.

Although the school had been doing some heritage activities previously, working with Heritage Schools has increased the focus on local heritage. The CPD sessions and presentations which the LHEM delivered have been very well received by the teachers, the pupils and the community. The History Lead will work with the LHEM to localise the school's History curriculum, and add local heritage to other subjects where possible, to further increase the pupils' understanding of where they live. The teachers would not have been able to do this without the LHEM's support and knowledge of local history resources, because they did not have the capacity (in time or skills) to be able to do the necessary research themselves. The school plans to apply to Historic England for the Heritage Schools Award, and continue to integrate local heritage into the pupils' learning.