

Case Study: St Cuthbert's and St George's Catholic Primary Schools, Newcastle and South Street Primary School, Gateshead

Champion Heritage Schools share their learning with aspiring Heritage Schools

Background

St Cuthbert's and St George's are both part of the Bishop Bewick Catholic Academy Trust. They work closely together to develop their heritage learning, and both schools became Champion Heritage Schools in spring 2025. To achieve this accolade, they have embedded heritage across the curriculum in History and other subjects, and for all year groups from Reception to Year 6. They choose places to study which are very local to each school, often within walking distance. This enables the pupils to develop a sense of place, a connection to where they live, and an understanding of how local people and places fit into local, national and world history. Both schools have a team of Heritage Heroes; pupils apply for the role and are chosen for their interest in local history. They take part in heritage activities inside and outside school, and help with the monitoring and evaluation of History teaching.

The History Leads of St Cuthbert's and St George's delivered training to teachers as part of the Gateshead History Leads Network meeting in the autumn term 2024. The training covered the benefits of taking a Heritage Schools approach to using local heritage in teaching, and how schools can achieve the Heritage Schools Award. This model, of Champion Heritage Schools teachers delivering CPD about the Heritage Schools programme to other teachers, means that they can demonstrate the real examples that they are using in the classroom and the impact that it is having on their pupils. It also enables more teachers to be reached, than if only the Heritage Schools' Local Heritage Education Managers are delivering CPD sessions. This is an effective way to cascade information to more teachers in more schools, who can then share their Heritage Schools knowledge and skills if they move to a new school in the future.

As a result of that CPD session, two schools (in a different Local Authority area and from different Academy Trusts to St Cuthbert's and St George's) have gone on to achieve the Heritage Schools Award, and other schools are in the process of applying. The History Lead at South Street Primary, Gateshead, which has now achieved the Heritage Schools Award, was interviewed for this case study.

Impacts on St Cuthbert's Primary of becoming a Champion Heritage School

St Cuthbert's has 240 pupils in the school, 29% of whom are eligible for Pupil Premium and 34% have English as an additional language. An increasing number of pupils have recently moved to the area, and more enter the school in years above Nursery and Reception.

Now that so much local heritage is included across the curriculum, pupils have had new cultural experiences and met new people, which they would not have done otherwise. For example, Year 2 pupils learn about Kenton Colliery and study the work of local artist Sarah Hill, who paints scenes of former collieries.

"They talk to her on the video chat and it's fantastic. In Pupil Voice at the end of the year, so many of them said that they liked speaking to Sarah" – St Cuthbert's History Lead

Local heritage has a positive impact on other aspects of school life beyond lessons:

"St Cuthbert's is a School of Sanctuary¹ and heritage can really help the children understand the area, especially if they have been forcibly displaced. It can help them build roots in the current place and it can help them integrate with their friends in the local area" – St Cuthbert's History Lead

Understanding more about their local area can increase the children's pride in where they live, for example finding out that stone from Kenton Quarry was used to build Graingertown, the part of Newcastle built 1824-1841 in the Tyneside Classical style:

"There's a lot of pride in Newcastle already, and we just put fuel on the fire" – History Lead



Heritage Heroes talking with care home residents

¹ <https://schools.cityofsanctuary.org/>

St Cuthbert's has had a recent OFSTED inspection, and received a special mention for their Heritage Heroes. The school has six Heritage Heroes who take part in many activities inside and outside school. Applying to become a Heritage Hero is an exercise in democracy and supports the teaching of British Values. The pupils see being a Heritage Hero as a highly sought-after role. To commemorate the 80th anniversary of VE Day, they visited a local care home to talk to the elderly residents and find out about their memories of World War 2. The Heritage Heroes brought this information back to school, so that the rest of the class studying World War 2 were able to share this knowledge.

Champion Heritage Schools receive a grant of £2,000 from Heritage Schools which they can use as they wish, for example to pay for cover so that teachers can attend CPD sessions, or for a project. The Head Teacher at St Cuthbert's chose to use the grant to provide a lasting asset for the school, and commissioned a local artist to create sculptures of five Northern saints, for the school's prayer garden. This will provide another way for pupils to learn about the history of the North East.

Impacts on St George's Primary of being a Champion Heritage School

St George's has 90 pupils, in mixed-year group classes. 47% of them are eligible for Pupil Premium and 22% have English as an additional language. Many children have moved to the area recently, although some families have lived nearby for several generations and older members of the community sometimes come into the school to tell pupils about the area in the past.

St George's pupils study very local places, many of which are in walking distance of the school. This helps to increase their pride in their locality, and the History Lead commented that increased pride is linked to improved mental wellbeing, increased aspiration and enjoyment. Pupils talk in school about places they have visited with their families and vice versa:

"They obviously go home and talk about it because of the questions coming back into school" – St George's History Lead

Through the heritage aspects of the curriculum, pupils are able to do things which they might not be able to with their families, which widens their horizons and gives everyone equal opportunities. For example, the pupils meet and work with adults from other organisations, such as the St James Heritage & Environment Group, and an artist from the Baltic Centre for Contemporary Art.

"Children on free school meals, a lot of whom don't have books at home, and they don't get to walk out and see things, and they wouldn't get to do art work or talk about the area. Everything's equal for everyone. You could say the same thing

about the EAL children, children who have come in from outside the area. It gives them all equal opportunities across the board” – St George’s History Lead

Walking from school along to the former glass works, for example, and making sketches there, gives a more active and sensory learning experience.

“It opens up the History curriculum to children who aren’t necessarily academic – it’s a more practical approach” - St George’s History Lead

Now that even more local heritage is included in the school’s curriculum, it is having a positive impact on all the staff, especially those who are not History specialists, as it makes the topic easier for them to relate to, as well as for the pupils.



Year 5 & 6 pupils researching at Newcastle Central Library

St George’s has had a recent OFSTED inspection, with a deep dive into History, and received a special mention for the pupils’ enthusiasm for local history. St George’s also has a team of Heritage Heroes, who sometimes work with the St Cuthbert’s Heritage Heroes. Each year, the Heritage Heroes teams have a trip to the Local Studies department at Newcastle City Library, in addition to several other activities.

St George’s are using their Champion Heritage School grant towards a mural which a local artist will create in the school hall, depicting the heritage of Bell’s Close and Lemington (where the school is situated). This will be another way for current and future pupils to learn about their local area and will be a lasting legacy to mark the school’s 150th anniversary.

South Street Primary School: achieving the Heritage Schools Award

South Street Primary School, Gateshead, has 190 pupils. 60% are eligible for Pupil Premium, 50% have English as an additional language, with more than 30 languages

spoken in school. Many pupils arrive or depart during the school year as their families are seeking asylum and are often moved to new places by the Home Office.

The History Lead attended the Heritage Schools CPD session delivered by the History Leads of St Cuthbert's and St George's, organised by the Gateshead History Leads Network, in autumn 2024. The South Street History Lead was inspired to apply for the Heritage Schools Award and felt that it would not be onerous or time-taking to apply. The LHEM gave advice on what evidence to submit.

South Street Primary had revised its History curriculum three years ago, with the help of the History Advisor for Gateshead schools, to include local and regional heritage in all History topics, and for all the year groups. Local residents come into school to talk to pupils about the area in the past. The school often uses Gateshead Library's Local Studies collection for historic maps and other resources. As a result of the curriculum re-design, the History Lead already had enough evidence for the school to achieve the Heritage Schools Award in spring 2025.

Impacts of using local heritage in History and other subjects

The History Lead commented that achieving the Heritage Schools Award has made South Street's History curriculum more structured; each year group has its topics and content planned so that teachers who are not History specialists are confident and have the knowledge to teach them. Visits for each topic are specified so that the pupils have first-hand experience of historic sites.



Year 5 pupils at Beamish, learning about the Suffrage movement

Learning about the local heritage of Gateshead and the wider North East helps all the pupils, whether they have arrived recently or whether their families are long-established in the area, to feel more connected to the locality. They have opportunities to meet people and go places which they might not do otherwise, for example going to an exhibition of Gateshead artist Charlie Rogers' paintings of local buildings and street scenes.

"The big thing I'm really passionate about is making sure that visits and visitors are incorporated wherever possible – not just History but Art and Geography as well. Having such a high number of pupils eligible for Pupil Premium, we know a lot of these children won't have gone to Beamish [the Living Museum of the North], they may not have had the opportunity to go to the coast" – South Street History Lead

The school has a team of Young Interpreters. The pupils are trained to support new pupils who are asylum seekers, and they understand what it is like to be a refugee. This is linked to the study of World War 2 and learning about people who became refugees as a result of the war. Inspired by the Heritage Heroes at St Cuthbert's and St George's, the History Lead at South Street is planning to appoint a team of History Heroes in the coming school year. The school already has English and Maths Ambassadors.

Summary

For St Cuthbert's and St George's, becoming a Champion Heritage School has embedded local heritage further into more aspects of both schools, for example through appointing Heritage Heroes, extending local content into the school library, giving pupils more cultural capital opportunities, and using the Champion Heritage Schools grants to create artworks which will help future generations of pupils understand more about their local heritage.

The History Leads have successfully delivered CPD to other teachers about the Heritage Schools programme – the online Heritage Schools resources, bespoke sets of maps and aerial photographs provided to schools by Historic England, and support from the LHEM - and the benefits of using local heritage for teaching History and other subjects. This has resulted in more schools achieving the Heritage Schools Award which is a recognition of how they are using local heritage effectively. The History Leads will deliver further CPD sessions to other schools in the future. This means that more teachers can be reached than if only the LHEM is providing CPD sessions about Heritage Schools.

Achieving the Heritage Schools Award has strengthened the place of local heritage in South Street's curriculum. It has ensured that History is taught in a more structured way, with the content for each topic and year group set out so that the teachers have

the necessary knowledge provided for them. This ensures continuity of content, and means that teachers do not have to spend time planning lessons themselves.

The History Leads at all three schools commented on how much their pupils enjoy learning about local heritage, that it is accessible to children of all abilities, it gives them new experiences and it helps new and existing pupils to learn together about their locality, thus strengthening community connections.