

# Spotlight on ...



## St Francis Catholic Primary School, Goosnargh

Standards are high at St Francis where enthusiasm for writing has exploded. Read on to learn how Headteacher **Sarah Deakin** and Assistant Headteacher **James Gilmour** view the writing success of this small primary school.

“Writing should have a purpose and a meaning; something to be proud of and rewarding.”

‘I love writing, Miss. I don’t want to go out to playtime, I want to carry on!’

Music to any teacher’s ears. Staff at St Francis, under the creative guidance and leadership of head teacher, Miss Sarah Deakin, have implemented an alternative way in which to engage all the children in writing.

Is writing all about: being told to sit still, write a story in your English book, half a page, full page – all done to sit there in your book for the teacher to laboriously read through at the end of the day to correct with a red pen? Where is the fun in that? What is the purpose? Where are the happy memories and moments created?

Ultimately – where are the future authors coming from?

From an early age, making writing fun, creative, engaging and something that children look forward to, is the writing ethos of St Francis. Writing is something that should be celebrated, hanging on the walls – stories created by children to be read to children.

Writing should have a purpose and a meaning; something to be proud of and rewarding. Each class has a toolkit for writing and it’s not yellow and black HB pencils and English books. Masking tape, personalised target bookmarks, gold pencils, bright coloured pens, hole punchers, treasury tags and many writing templates, temptingly sitting in the middle of the table, ready for eager hands to add more pages!



From Early Years to the end of Key Stage Two, children at St Francis take part in weekly cross-curricular Big Writes, where there is no English book in sight. Writing is done through pop-up books and inventive writing frames, where the number of possible pages is endless. Children can create their own books, add their own pages and see their masterpieces hanging from the ceiling by the end of the lesson. Through a range of topics and inventive teaching, even the most reluctant writers have been inspired to see themselves as creative authors.

In the Early Years, children are taught the basics of early writing through multi-modal techniques using all of the senses. Through a fully cross-curricular approach, children – including boys – are immersed in magical worlds of learning.

Here's how ...

Start with quality texts! Through *Author Study* and the careful selection of texts, a book can open doors to all areas of learning, ensuring that children are naturally excited and motivated to learn.

The children recently read a range of books by Sue Hendra over a 2-week period. *Barry the Fish with Fingers*, *No Bot the Robot with no Bottom*, *Norman the Slug with the Silly Shell*



and other books by the same author created a classroom that was alive with imagination.

After holding a Possible Lines of Development (PLOD) planning meeting with the children, an approach advocated by Oliver Quinlan in his book *The Thinking Teacher*, they told the class teacher what they wanted to make, do and learn and this was recorded in the class planning book and brought to life. The outdoor classroom was turned into fishmongers and the children dissected fish of all types. They were learning to count in multiples of tens throughout the week and they used weights, dienes and a balancing scale to weigh the fish but count in tens. The children made a slideshow of the fish at the end of the lesson.

Story boxes and story trays gave children access to plenty of non-fiction books about sea creatures and children even played differentiated hide and seek outdoors in the woodland area after making a huge-scale sunken pirate ship from natural materials. The writing task was simple – children had a basket in the middle of the table full of the same shaped



template, treasure tags, hole punches and masking tape, all hidden inside a treasure chest. The children were so excited to choose their story template from any of the books they had read that week by the same author.

Facilitated by their teacher, they just kept adding the pages whilst key skills were taught throughout. Puppets were made in the art studio and the end product was a little book bag, sewn by the children, to take home and to share at school with their Year 5 buddies.

The same process can be used in any year group or topic. The stimulus is key to the motivation, opening the doors of creativity and allowing those who do not necessarily see themselves as writers (usually the crowd of boys who don't see it as being cool) to become budding young authors. Using a cross-curricular approach, such as Design Technology and getting boys 'hands-on', inspires them to be creative.

Having initially being inspired by the film, *A Life of Pi*, children were challenged to create a raft for their wavy writing template to hang from. On the raft, children then made their three key pieces of equipment to survive out at sea. The stimulation and energy in class to complete the *Survival at Sea* story (brightly coloured pens in hand), to

improve their work, to add their own pages as their enthusiasm increased, to build their model and have it hanging from the ceiling – meant that break times were viewed as just getting in the way of the creative flow!

Each child has personalised writing targets that are child-friendly and progressive. These stay on the desks whilst the Big Write is in full flow. Mini-plenaries are used to outstanding effect, allowing children to access key words on their creative working walls. Others will assess their current paragraphs, in relation to those personal targets, with their Big Write ‘gold pencils’.

The children know exactly where they are up to in their learning and where they need to go to improve. Throughout the lesson, children are active in their learning, moving around the room, being creative, accessing different learning areas, with purpose and creativity. The possibilities and opportunities are endless!



**Sarah Deakin** has been Headteacher at St Francis’ for four years. She is passionate about offering children an awe-inspiring curriculum and always aims to be as ‘outside the box’ as possible. Sarah believes that teachers must teach in a way that delights children; her creative and cross-curricular approach is reflected in the children’s love of writing.



**James Gilmour** has taught across both Key Stages and enjoys teaching English in a vibrant environment, fuelling children’s enthusiasm by relating writing tasks to their learning across the curriculum in a fun and creative way. James is currently Assistant Headteacher at St Francis’.

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Check our website for all details of how to enter. [www.ywsp.co.uk](http://www.ywsp.co.uk)