



TEACHING
SCHOOL
ALLIANCE



KYRA CASE STUDY

ST GILES NURSERY SCHOOL

 [kyrateachingschool.com](https://www.kyrateachingschool.com)

 01522 527339

 @KYRAteaching

St Giles Nursery School, Lincoln

This year, Fiona Whimster is celebrating her thirty-ninth year as Headteacher at St Giles Nursery School. Indeed, there must be something very special about the early years setting on Lincoln's Addison Drive, as Fiona is only the third Headteacher at St Giles since it opened during World War II (to care for the children of women working at the local munitions factory). The tradition of striving to provide children with the best start in life – often in the context of challenging circumstances – has been at the heart of St Giles' ethos ever since.

With around two-thirds of children at the nursery living in areas of disadvantage, a key focus for Fiona and her team is on raising aspirations – both of the children and their



parents. This is strongly reflected in the provision that Fiona and her team have developed over a number of years. For children, the curriculum at St Giles places great emphasis on providing external activities such as regular trips to places of interest – including Lincoln cathedral, weekly swimming lessons, and involvement in community projects. “From an early age” says Fiona, “we want children to see beyond their horizons and see what is possible.” The learning environment itself embodies that sense of aspiration, a fact not missed by Ofsted who commented that

“each classroom is an ‘Aladdin’s Cave’ of stimulating, well-planned activities.” Parents meanwhile are encouraged to engage in the numerous adult learning opportunities that are facilitated by St Giles, for example, through courses in areas such as maths, English and ICT, provided by Lincoln College.

“Raising aspirations and creating opportunities for parental as well as children’s learning is a really important starting point, our commitment to providing parents with opportunities to develop life skills has made a real difference – both to themselves as individuals but also, significantly, to their children’s early development.”

“Raising aspirations and creating opportunities for parental as well as children’s learning is a really important starting point” says Fiona, “our commitment to providing parents with opportunities to develop life skills has made a real difference – both to themselves as individuals but also, significantly, to their children’s early development. We cannot over estimate the parental influence during this period of children’s lives.” Fiona tells the story of one parent who was unemployed and had health issues. After attending a

number of courses in IT, she went on to become an IT technician and very soon saw her life transformed. “Her enthusiasm for her own learning and the increase in her confidence made such a difference to the dynamic in that family.” This is just one of many examples of how the nursery and its team have enthused and engaged parents who have too often been let down by the education system themselves. “It’s great to see parents’ confidence return. Through our ‘Family Learning’ sessions, I see certain parents and their children learning together in a way that wasn’t possible before. The parents feel empowered by the process of their own learning and through that, feel empowered to make a difference to their children’s learning too.”

Part of St Giles strategy for making a difference has been its recent decision to open its doors to two year olds. The first cohort has seen twelve ‘under threes’ join the nursery and has presented a period of learning for staff. “We have worked hard to adapt to their needs and to create a curriculum that is best suited to their age and stage of development. It has had its challenges – such as managing the separation of children from their parents in the first weeks of September, which we had to do by involving parents in the first few weeks and then gradually reducing their contact time.” Introducing routine has also been important, for example, using a pictorial timetable to help children understand the pattern of each day and moving between activities such as ‘milk time’ and ‘play time’. “We have found, both from the training provided by Birth to Five and from reviewing what works well in practice, that lots of tactile experiences, the use of stories, and outdoor play, all help to engage the children at this age and ensure their progress.”



One other key benefit of expanding the intake to two-year olds, is that the nursery has a much clearer understanding of where those children are in terms of their development by the age of three. This enables staff to make an informed choice with parents about when it is the right time for individual children to progress to other classes and to more advanced activities.

Partnership plays a central role in life at St Giles. The partnership with Lincoln College has been key to providing opportunities for parents, demonstrating how one can underestimate the importance of links between the early years and higher education sectors. Another key partnership is that with other schools and nurseries across Kyra. “Investing in staff development and learning from other schools and colleagues is critical to success” says Fiona. “We have a strong philosophy of learning at a staff level. Being part of a network where we can not only learn from others but also share and contribute our own expertise

is essential to that." The nursery's staff have taken a lead in supporting others settings to implement the early years' curriculum.

"We have found that by using the outdoor learning environment and props – in our case the outdoor sandpit and lots of exciting resources – boys are demonstrating greater eagerness to read and write."

St Giles is playing a leading role in KYRA's Early Years Hub model, an initiative funded by the Department for Education in order to encourage the development of best practice across early years settings. During the last year, the nursery has been working in a triad with two other settings to investigate and evaluate ways in which boys can be better engaged in reading and writing. "We have found that by using the outdoor learning environment and props – in our case the outdoor sandpit and lots of exciting resources – boys are demonstrating greater eagerness to read and write." Another project just underway is looking at the successful integration of children with EAL with the rest of the school community. "This is so important if we are to give all our children the best start in life possible" says Fiona "and we are already developing some key strategies – from analysing how the children successfully develop relationships with their peers to training staff in basic language skills to help ease the children's transition."

Colleagues can contact Fiona at: enquiries@st-giles-nur.lincs.sch.uk

More case studies of KYRA schools can be found at:
<http://kyrateachingschool.com/research-and-development/>





TEACHING
SCHOOL
ALLIANCE

Kyra Teaching School Alliance, Mount Street, Lincoln, LN1 3JG

 kyrateachingschool.com  01522 527339  @KYRAteaching