

Stanton Bridge Primary School



Broadening minds



Headteacher Sofina Islam OBE

Coventry-based Stanton Bridge is a school in the centre of an area ranked as being one of the most deprived in the country, with a deprivation index of 0.4, placing it in the top quintile. Serving a school community of 44 different languages with high transience and 38 per cent pupil premium, the school has transformed from being one of the worst schools in the city to being recognised for its achievements at parliamentary level. In 2013, David Laws MP commended the school for its pupil progress and attainment at Key Stage 1 and Key Stage 2, and in 2017, Nick Gibbs MP celebrated the school for ranking within the top three per cent for pupils' progress. Headteacher Sofina Islam OBE tells the *Review* more.

In 2008 I took the post as headteacher, bringing with me a long-standing experience of working in schools in challenging contexts. Judged consistently as "satisfactory" by Ofsted, the school was failing to achieve good outcomes. The pupils' behaviour was poor, community support lacking, standards and results low and the building itself was in the middle of a huge refurbishment.

Pupils had low self-esteem and self-belief, and staff had lost sight of the vision it surely once held in high stead. Through determination, belief, drive and moral fervour, I worked hard with my team to realign staff, pupils and the community so that they had a shared vision, shared values and shared purpose, taking with me those who were willing to embark on the journey to improvement.

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REPORT CARD STANTON BRIDGE PRIMARY SCHOOL

- » Headteacher: Sofina Islam OBE
- » Founded in 2016
- » Located in Coventry
- » Type of school: Primary
- » No. of students: 438
- » Sofina received an OBE in recognition of her services to the community
- » stantonbridge.coventry.sch.uk

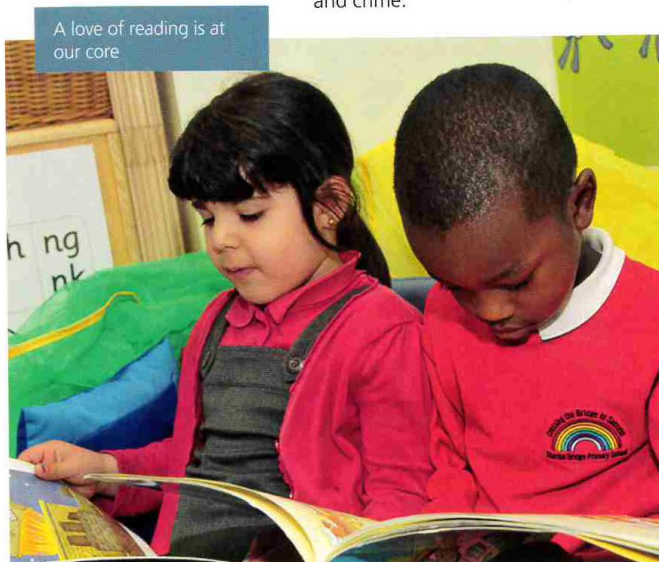
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and management being rated “outstanding”. Since then, Stanton Bridge has been an Ofsted case study for early years foundation stage, has become the first primary school to achieve the Investors in People Gold Award and has achieved the Leading Parent Partnership award.

Where we stood

A significant percentage of pupils enter EYFS well below expectation, often over 12 months behind age-related expectations, with little English spoken at home for some and poor language development for others. Pupils at Stanton Bridge have much catching up to do before they are able to begin their formal education.

The area surrounding the school is a local council hotspot for social housing, often used to house families with the lowest incomes, those seeking safety due to immigration and those fleeing from challenging circumstances. These additional factors already place pupils at a disadvantage but are often illustrative of deeper underlying social problems in the children’s home lives such as domestic violence, drug and alcohol abuse, family disruption and crime.



A love of reading is at our core

The nature of the housing situation in the immediate area has meant that transience over the years has been a significant challenge for the school and its pupils. Many of the families that move into the area are historically from overseas, and both pupils and their families begin their school life with little to no English as well as limited, if any, experience of school. Indeed, roughly 80 per cent of pupils are categorised as having English as an additional language.

Over the years, key groups within the school have evolved with the national trends, ranging from Somalian to Roma gypsy, and more recently, Syrian refugees. In order to support the pupils and families, I and the school have employed a range of strategies to ease pupils’ transition into school life, to support teaching and learning and to encourage families to stay in the area so as to provide a better future for their families. In addition to employing a full-time dedicated EAL teacher who works with pupils to develop survival language, we offer regular food banks in conjunction with local businesses and provide a range of additional workshops including cookery on a budget, English and maths for adults and basic care and hygiene.

A dynamic curriculum

As a person, I always strive to be innovative and forward-thinking. With this ethos in mind, I have managed to stay ahead of the game, often developing initiatives within school before they become government policy – such as staff wellbeing, workload and curriculum.

Changes in the national curriculum bought about an opportunity to realign the curriculum at Stanton Bridge to be driven more by values, morals and life experiences. Stanton Bridge’s curriculum was overhauled in 2018: foundation subjects became

cross-curricular, with topics being led by the interests of the pupils, providing progressive teaching of skills across subjects.

Real-life experiences, educational visits, practical activities and engaging lessons were planned with more time allotted to reflect, evaluate and improve. This reflective process enables pupils to think more deeply, evaluate and build a greater sense of pride for what they achieve. Pupils are challenged with DT projects such as woodwork, cookery and textiles and are introduced to techniques such as batik and screen printing in art – skills often found only in secondary schools.

A strong community focus

Being situated in a deprived area has both advantages and disadvantages. Surrounding the school and its pupils is a community rich in culture, traditions and beliefs. Accordingly, we celebrate the festivals of all of the religions, beliefs and traditions that our pupils belong to: Christmas, Eid, Diwali, World Romania Day and Holi to name just a few.

Pupils, parents and staff dress up, share traditions and give gifts. This community support has built a mutual trust and respect between school and home, and parents are included in the decision-making process through termly parent meetings to discuss school priorities, developments and successes.

We also have strong relationships with local businesses such as LEAR Corporation, who support us in providing regular food banks for our families; at Easter and Christmas, the workers voluntarily provide gifts for pupils. They also provide tickets for sports matches and, wherever they can, provide funding and opportunities for the pupils and their families to take part in experiences they otherwise would not have the chance to.



Learning takes many forms

A core ethos

My vision for the pupils is adopted by all – staff and parents alike. Pupils are expected to attend school, on time and every day. They are also expected to show a good learning attitude and a respectful attitude toward their peers – if this is not the case, the issue is addressed immediately.

This relentless pursuit of high expectation and standards is what has made, and continues to make, Stanton Bridge one of the best schools in Coventry and why, in 2014, my dedication to education and the community I serve was recognised with the award of an OBE.

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