



# View from the classroom



**'Strive to Succeed' is the moto of Rush Green Primary School, a large four form entry school in in Romford, Essex within the London Borough of Barking and Dagenham. This month Education Today speaks to deputy head teacher, Lisa Humphreys, who explains how the school impressed Ofsted with its notable improvements, particularly in reading and writing.**

### Tell us a little bit about your school?

The amalgamation of poorly performing infant and junior schools in 2013, resulted in immediate changes in expectations, standards and leadership. After 10 months of intensive improvement, we received our first 'Good' Ofsted grade. Since then, we have made rapid progress to become one of the highest achieving schools in Barking and Dagenham and beyond. Every day

we continue to make dramatic improvements and the school grows from strength to strength. This constant drive for improvement has resulted in Rush Green being recognised and congratulated on our pupil's high level of progress by the Mayor for London, The Rt Hon. Nick Gibb (Minister of State for School Standards) and Tim Coulson (Regional Schools Commissioner for The Department for Education).

We were recently nominated for the Pearson's Award for 'Making a Difference,' School of The Year and awarded the Primary Quality Mark for Excellence in the teaching of Basic Skills.

### Why did you choose the moto 'Strive to Achieve'?

Sir Richard Branson is a big advocate of 'striving to succeed' and its clear to see when you look at his accomplishments. He says, about his business, 'had we not kept striving, we certainly wouldn't be where we are today. There can be no greatness without striving.' Madeleine Albright, U.S. ambassador to the United Nations and the first woman to hold the cabinet post of U.S. secretary of state also refers to the importance of 'striving' when she said, 'I was taught to strive not because there were any guarantees of success but because the act of striving is in itself is the only way to keep faith with life.'

In our view it is important to give the children a level of pride in their work. A school can offer the highest quality education but without an appreciation of their own autonomy and inner drive to achieve, students will not reach their potential. Striving to achieve is something we instil in all our staff and pupils.

### How did you turn your reading and writing standards around?

If I had to summarise our incredibly successful transformation in one line it would be to say that we've used a totally kinaesthetic and engaging

approach to involving the children in reading and writing, rather than just using flash cards or technology.

We started to mandate that each class has a literacy lesson every day with a high emphasis on the teaching of reading, encompassing phonics, spelling and grammar. Within each week our pupils will also have opportunities to develop their extended writing skills. Speaking and listening skills are developed throughout the day in





it's all about full engagement with the characters involved. We have noticed that this is very effective for children who have trouble retaining things; they remember the letters and sounds much better through the action of 'doing'. Each class is well equipped with interactive whiteboards, networked computer equipment and an extensive range of subject resources and each year group has a set of 30 wireless laptops, but because the children seem to learn faster through the physical and hands-on activity, actually participating with whole body movements, we use very few digital activities for phonics and reading.

We introduce tricky non-decodable words alongside the decodable ones and worry less about spelling; this will come in time.

This learning is then reinforced by sending a selection of high frequency words home which is supported through our parent workshops.

**Can you explain a little more about your parent workshops?**

We all recognise the benefit of parental involvement in their child's development, but this comes with the concern that sometimes parents, or guardians may 'teach' them in a different way to the way we do, which can end up being confusing for the child and make matters worse. Once children have been in school for a few weeks we invite the parents in for a reading workshop. By using Jolly Phonics, we have learned that there is a very specific process in teaching reading in order to achieve effective outcomes. We follow this in school but of course the children's learning is going to be reinforced more effectively if the parental support is aligned to our teaching. During the workshops we model lessons for parents, and they observe our teachers' articulation of the sounds and the way we blend and segment sounds. We explain that hearing their child read at home is important but going a step further and spending time discussing the book with them and asking questions is a very valuable way in which they can contribute to their child's progress. We get great feedback on these workshops, and interestingly enough, particularly from dads.

**How do you support those children who really struggle with phonics?**

Like any school there is clear differentiation between the various levels of development. If we feel a child is not progressing in Year 1, we introduce targeted support. After the phonics



activities such as group discussions, talking about work to peers or adults, drama and stories.

Starting in the nursery, children are taught to read using letters and sounds, supported by Jolly Phonics which offers the kinaesthetic approach that has made a notable impact on their learning; the teachers plan interesting 'active' tasks and you see all the children becoming very absorbed in their learning.

By the time they get into the reception class most children are already engaged in phonics and love books. For us, using the Jolly Phonics tactile and visual resources and the recommended learning pathway has worked!

**Can you give me an example of the daily reading and spelling activities that your teachers use in the classroom?**

Our teachers will plan a lesson around a sound that they're focusing on at that time. This may include songs, flash cards, puppets and stories, with letter sounds and rhymes on the interactive whiteboard. The puppets work particularly well as

screening check, if they're still struggling, we invite the parents in again to ensure they are fully aware of the challenges their child is facing and with their permission we may sometimes invite them for intervention sessions before school starts. Some parents are harder to reach than others, but they will always do better if parents are involved.

At the end of our first year of implementing this teaching strategy, the school's results in Year 1 national phonic check showed results much higher than the previous year and well above the national average.

And the progress continues.

In 2018, Ofsted reported that our standards of teaching and learning especially in reading and writing are established and secure and that 99 per cent of our parents would recommend Rush Green to other parents. We will continue to build on recent successes and our upward trajectory towards providing an outstanding education for all children.

Every day we strive to succeed!

