

Black History Month 2024

Celebrating Black Britons in Public Service

October is Black History Month – a national opportunity to celebrate, recognise and remember the extraordinary achievements and contributions of people of African and Caribbean heritage to Britain’s history, culture and economy. It is also a time to shine a light on the lesser-known stories that risk being forgotten unless we intentionally bring them into the curriculum.

This year, our school explored the theme of Black Britons working in public service roles - individuals whose courage, resilience and determination helped shape the nation we live in today.

Across the school, each year group studied a different profession, allowing children to understand how Black Britons have contributed to keeping our country safe, strong and supported.

Early Years – Frank Bailey: Britain’s First Black Firefighter

In Hedgehog Class, the children were introduced to Frank Bailey, the first Black firefighter in the UK. They learned about his journey from Guyana to Britain, his determination to join the Fire Brigade despite racial barriers, and his lifelong commitment to public service. Pupils explored what firefighters do, why bravery matters, and how Frank Bailey’s achievements opened doors for others.

The children created artwork of fire engines, enjoyed role-play fire-station scenarios, and discussed how helping others makes a difference.

Years 1 & 2 – Sislin Fay Allen: Britain’s First Black Woman Police Constable

KSI children learned about Sislin Fay Allen, who made history in 1968 when she became the first Black woman to serve in the Metropolitan Police. The pupils listened to Sislin’s story with empathy, reflecting on her bravery and the pride she felt breaking new ground.

Children produced thoughtful writing about her life and created beautiful artwork depicting Sislin in uniform. Discussions also highlighted how fairness, courage and determination are essential qualities in public service.

Years 3 & 4 – Black Britons in the Armed Forces

Years 3 and 4 explored the contributions of Black service personnel in the British Armed Forces, learning how people of African and Caribbean heritage have served in the military for generations.

Examples included:

- Walter Tull, a professional footballer and one of Britain’s first Black Army officers during WWI.
- Sam King, a Jamaican RAF serviceman during WWII who later became a London mayor.
- Lilian Bader, one of the first Black women to serve in the RAF during WWII.

The children compared these individuals’ experiences, exploring themes of bravery, discrimination and service. They produced timelines, diary entries, silhouette artwork and reflective writing imagining life during wartime.

Years 5 & 6 – “Who Should Be on the £10 Note?”: Research, Debate & Representation

UKS2 pupils engaged in a rich enquiry project asking: “Who should be featured on the £10 note?”

This encouraged pupils to research influential Black Britons whose contributions to the UK have often been overlooked.

Examples of figures they explored included:

- Claudia Jones – journalist and founder of the Notting Hill Carnival
- Ignatius Sancho – writer, composer and the first Black Briton known to have voted in a British election
- Mary Seacole – Crimean War nurse and medical pioneer
- Dame Floella Benjamin – actor, author, campaigner and former Children’s Laureate

Pupils presented persuasive speeches, created information posters, and debated their chosen candidate, developing strong oracy, critical thinking and research skills.

Owl Class History Deep Dive – John Jellicoe Blair and Britain’s Forgotten Black Airmen

In a dedicated History study, Owl Class examined the remarkable but often overlooked stories of Black airmen in the RAF, focusing on John Jellicoe Blair from Jamaica.

To understand his legacy, pupils first revisited the Battle of Britain, ensuring clear historical context. They then explored Blair’s journey:

- What inspired him to travel across the Atlantic to fight for Britain?
- What challenges and prejudices did he face upon joining the RAF?
- How did his service contribute to Allied victory and to the future of Black servicemen in Britain?

This enquiry encouraged pupils to consider perspective, motivation and historical significance, deepening their understanding of Britain as a multicultural nation shaped by contributions from across the Commonwealth.

The Impact of Our Black History Month Study

Across all year groups, children:

- developed a richer understanding of British history through diverse lenses
- learned about inspirational role models who challenged discrimination
- strengthened empathy, critical thinking and historical enquiry skills
- recognised the importance of representation and inclusion
- celebrated the achievements of Black Britons whose stories deserve to be heard

Black History Month 2024 reminded us that history is widened, deepened and made more truthful when we explore all its voices. Our pupils engaged thoughtfully, warmly and with great curiosity - ensuring these important stories continue to live on in our community.