



Understanding the World (EYFS) – Intent, Implementation and Impact

CONTEXT (Why Understanding the World matters)

Understanding the World (UTW) helps children make sense of their lives, their place and the world around them. It develops a sense of self, time, place and community, and lays the foundations for later learning in science, geography, history and wider STEM.

UTW is taught through first-hand experiences, rich talk, and enabling environments. In EYFS, we prioritise meaningful, age-appropriate experiences rather than tokenistic coverage. We build on children’s personal experiences and family knowledge, then gradually broaden horizons to include the local area and the wider world.

Nationally (EYFSP 2024/25), the percentage of children at the expected level is 81.9% for Past and Present, 81.8% for People, Culture and Communities, and 85.1% for The Natural World. These reference points help us evaluate cohort outcomes and refine provision.

1) INTENT (What we want children to know and be able to do)

At Rugeley John Taylor School, our intent is that all children become curious, respectful and confident learners who understand their own lives and communities, appreciate diversity, and can observe, question and explain the world around them. We want children to build foundational knowledge that supports later humanities and science learning, whilst developing positive learning behaviours and strong language.

UTW end-points (Nursery → Reception)

- Sense of self and community: children talk about their family, home, and familiar places; recognise similarities and differences; and show respect for others.
- Sense of time: children understand routines and sequences (day/week/month/year), use time language, and notice changes over time (seasons, life cycles, growth).
- Sense of place: children explore the school grounds, local area and natural spaces; begin to use simple maps and positional language; and talk about features of places.
- Natural world foundations: children observe, explore and investigate materials and living things; use scientific language in context; and care for the environment (stewardship).
- Technology and modern life: children use technology appropriately to support learning (e.g., taking photos, simple research with adults, using interactive resources), and understand that technology helps people in everyday life.
- Oracy and vocabulary: children ask questions (“I wonder...”), explain what they notice, and learn new domain vocabulary through stories, non-fiction, rhymes and talk.



Rugeley John Taylor values and mission (woven through UTW)

- Respectful: children learn about different families, cultures, faiths and communities and treat others with kindness and curiosity.
- Resilient: children are encouraged to try, test ideas, make mistakes safely and learn through investigation.
- Ready: children build foundational knowledge, routines and language that support a smooth transition into KS1 humanities and science.
- Powered by knowledge and driven by ambition: as a STEM specialist school, we value careful observation, questioning, reasoning, and real-world connections from the start.

Characteristics of Effective Learning (how children learn in UTW)

- Playing and exploring: children investigate real objects, artefacts and natural materials; they explore environments indoors and outdoors.
- Active learning: children sustain attention in investigations, repeat routines and revisit learning; they take pride in being “experts” and sharing what they know.
- Creating and thinking critically: children plan, predict, test, compare, and explain; they make connections to what they already know and reflect on outcomes.

EYFS principles (our approach)

- Unique child: we start from each child’s experiences, identity, strengths and needs.
- Positive relationships: warm, responsive interactions help children feel safe to ask questions and share experiences.
- Enabling environments: continuous provision indoors and outdoors offers rich, accessible UTW resources and repeated opportunities to apply learning.

Local area and heritage (Rugeley, Staffordshire) – used purposefully

We use local heritage when it naturally supports children’s developing sense of place and time. In EYFS this is introduced through concrete, child-friendly experiences and vocabulary, ready for deeper study in KS1/KS2.

- Cannock Chase and local green spaces: seasonal walks, habitats, wildlife and stewardship, linked to Forest School and outdoor learning.
- Trent and Mersey Canal and the River Trent: water, transport, bridges, boats, floating/sinking, and map routes in child-friendly ways.
- Rugeley’s industrial story (age-appropriate): “people worked with coal/iron/glass”; links to materials (hard/soft, transparent/opaque), energy and electricity (torches, batteries) and how places change over time.
- Landmarks and community buildings: St Augustine’s Church as an example of a local landmark; visiting/photographing landmarks and learning respectful behaviour in community spaces.



2) IMPLEMENTATION (How we teach Understanding the World)

Our UTW curriculum is carefully mapped across Nursery and Reception so that knowledge and vocabulary build in small, connected steps. We integrate UTW into daily routines and continuous provision, while also providing planned, adult-led experiences (stories, visitors, investigations, mini-projects and trips). Adults are explicit about the UTW knowledge and skills each activity develops.

A. Curriculum organisation (three strands)

To keep UTW coherent, we plan through three strands:

- 1) Personal experiences (sense of self, time, community) – starting with children’s lives and events.
- 2) Diverse world (people, culture, communities, places) – broadening horizons with respect and inclusion.
- 3) Widening vocabulary and domain knowledge (science, geography, history foundations) – building a knowledge-rich language bank through texts and first-hand experiences.

1) Personal experiences: sense of self, time and community

- Strong routines build security and a sense of time: daily timetable, visual now/next, self-registration, and predictable transitions.
- Time tools: calendars, clocks and giant sand timers help children experience duration and sequencing (before/after; first/next/then).
- Life events are handled sensitively: birthdays, new siblings, moving house, celebrations and (where appropriate) sad events such as loss are supported through stories, gentle talk, and PSED links.
- Children build a “timeline of our school year” (photos, displays): seasons, class events, visitors and trips support memory and narrative.
- Home–school partnership: families share photos, objects, traditions and home languages; adults use these to connect learning to children’s identity.

2) Diverse world: people, culture, communities and places

- Books, stories, non-fiction, songs and poems provide windows and mirrors: children see themselves reflected and learn about others respectfully.
- Diversity is embedded, not bolted on: we revisit themes of family structures, languages, disability, ethnicity, faith and gender in everyday contexts.



- Community links: visitors (e.g., emergency services, gardeners, community members), relatives' talks and local trips (parks, libraries, museums when appropriate) build real-world knowledge.
- Sense of place starts local: children explore the school grounds, green spaces and local landmarks, then compare to contrasting places through photos, maps and stories.
- Oracy is central: adults model curiosity ("I wonder...") and encourage children to ask questions and explain observations.

3) Widening vocabulary and domain knowledge (Science/Geography/History foundations)

Natural World (science foundations)

- Hands-on investigations: melting/freezing, floating/sinking, light/dark, shadows, magnet play (where used), growth and life cycles.
- Forest School and outdoor learning: habitats, minibeasts, seasonal change, caring for plants, allotment/growing spaces, and simple ecological stewardship.
- First-hand experiences and careful vocabulary: adults explicitly teach and revisit new words (e.g., habitat, grow, change, melt, freeze, float, sink, shadow).
- Sustainability and care for the world: recycling/upcycling, looking after resources, caring for living things and the environment.

Past and Present (history foundations)

- Children develop a sense of time through routines, "before/after" language, sequencing stories and events, and building class timelines.
- Artefacts and photographs are used to compare "then and now" (toys, tools, transport) and to talk about change within living memory.
- Local heritage is introduced through concrete experiences: walking routes, looking at old/new photos of the area, and simple stories about work and transport long ago (canal/rail; coal/industry).
- Adults model respectful historical enquiry: "How do we know?" "What evidence can we see?" in child-friendly ways.

People, Culture and Communities (geography/humanities foundations)

- Children use simple maps, picture maps and positional language to describe routes and places (classroom → playground → local walk).
- They learn key human and physical features in context (road, shop, park, river/canal, forest/woodland) through real walks and play-based role play.
- Technology supports learning: children take photos, use simple digital maps with adults, and use videos/images to compare places around the world.



- Cooking, craft and practical traditions: children experience cultural practices through food, music, celebrations and stories, with respect and inclusion.

B. Pedagogy: how adults teach and scaffold UTW

- Model → practise → apply: adults model vocabulary and ways of thinking, children practise in guided activities, then apply in provision.
- Shared sustained thinking: adults listen, extend talk, and use prompts that deepen thinking (“What do you think will happen if...?” “Why do you think that?”).
- Careful planning and reflection: staff are clear about the UTW knowledge and skill each activity targets; they review impact and adjust next steps.
- Inclusive practice and equity: all children access rich experiences; we adapt language, visuals, objects and support so every child can participate.
- Subject knowledge: adults maintain secure knowledge and vocabulary so they can respond accurately to children’s questions and extend learning meaningfully.

C. Enabling environment: continuous provision and enhancements

Continuous provision (always available)

- Indoors: role play linked to community (shop, post office, café), non-fiction and picture books, artefacts baskets, seasonal displays, simple maps, technology area (camera/tablet with adult use), investigation areas (magnifiers, torches, natural objects).
- Outdoors: Forest School/woodland area, mud kitchen, water play, gardening/allotment space, natural loose parts, weather station prompts, shadow/light resources, bug hotels/habitat areas.

Enhanced provision (planned add-ons)

- Visitor/trip enhancements: artefacts, photos, uniforms, tools, and follow-up role play to embed learning.
- Seasonal and local-area enhancements: local walk map, canal/river exploration prompts, “then and now” photo pairs, nature collections linked to current season.
- Inquiry prompts: “I wonder...” question cards; simple recording tools (drawings, marks, voice notes) to capture thinking.

D. Assessment, monitoring and parent partnerships

- Assessment is observation-led: adults capture evidence through children’s talk, play, drawings/marks, photos and short check-ins, then use this to plan next steps.
- Progress is monitored across the three UTW ELGs: Past and Present, People, Culture and Communities, and The Natural World.



- Family knowledge is valued: we invite parents/carers to share traditions, stories, languages and community knowledge; we provide simple home links (season walks, talk prompts, library visits).
- Transitions are supported with consistent routines, visuals and communication with families, particularly for children who need extra help with change.

3) IMPACT (What difference this makes)

A. Children develop strong foundations for humanities and science

- Children talk confidently about their own lives, family and community, and show respect for differences.
- Children understand time through routines and sequencing; they notice seasonal change and talk about “then and now” with growing accuracy.
- Children know and can describe familiar places, using simple maps and positional language; they show a sense of belonging and place.
- Children observe, investigate and explain the natural world using increasingly precise vocabulary; they care for living things and the environment.
- Children use technology appropriately to support learning and communicate what they have found out.

B. Impact is measurable and drives improvement

We evaluate impact through EYFSP outcomes and internal monitoring of knowledge, vocabulary and learning behaviours. National reference points (EYFSP 2024/25) for UTW are: Past and Present 81.9%, People, Culture and Communities 81.8%, The Natural World 85.1%.

C. Children are ready for Key Stage 1

- Children enter Year 1 able to ask questions, use a growing vocabulary and engage in discussion, supporting the KS1 humanities emphasis on enquiry and language.
- Children have foundational knowledge of local place and community, supporting geography fieldwork and history “past and present” learning in KS1.
- Children show curiosity, resilience and positive attitudes to learning, supporting wider curriculum access and strong foundations.

Summary paragraph

Understanding the World at Rugeley John Taylor School is carefully sequenced from children’s personal experiences towards a broader understanding of community, place and the wider world. Through strong routines and enabling environments, children develop a secure sense of time, place and self. Adults model rich vocabulary and purposeful talk (“I wonder...”, “What do



you notice?") and provide frequent first-hand experiences indoors and outdoors, including Forest School, local walks and meaningful visitors. Local heritage (Rugeley, Cannock Chase, canal, industry and landmarks) is introduced only when it supports children's developing understanding of change, community and place. Assessment is observation-led and used to plan next steps, ensuring all children build the foundational knowledge and language needed to thrive in KS1 humanities and science.