



Report on IQM Inclusive School Award



School Name: Discovery Special Academy

School Address: Kedward Avenue
Brambles Farm
Middlesbrough
TS3 9DB

Head/Principal: Jennifer Duncan

IQM Lead: Ann Titchener

Assessment Date (s): 23rd March 2021

Assessor: Kasia Fejcher-Akhtar

Sources of Evidence:

- School's website.
- IQM Self Evaluation Report document.
- Excellent additional documents submitted.
- Conversations with Headteacher and Deputy Headteacher.

Meetings Held with:

- Headteacher and Deputy Headteacher.
- Teachers and support staff.
- Pupils.
- Parent.



Overall Evaluation

The Leaders of Discovery Special Academy are committed to continually drive the academy forward to improve the outcomes for the pupils and establish the school within the local community. They discussed their journey so far and demonstrated the determination and a clear vision and direction they need to take to fulfil their aims and meet expectations set out for themselves and the Trust.

The assessment was the school's first review conducted via Zoom due to the Covid 19 pandemic restrictions and attended by the Headteacher, deputy Headteacher, various members of staff including the business manager, a junior class of children assisted by their teacher and teaching assistants, and a parent.

There are 60 pupils on roll at the Discovery Special Academy now but once the new building is complete, the academy will have a maximum capacity of 84 children aged from 4 years through to 11 years (Reception to Year 6), thus serving the primary age pupils. All children admitted have moderate or severe learning difficulties, alongside communication difficulties as well as/or physical, sensory and medical needs that are specified on each child's EHCP. Discovery Special Academy serves a culturally and ethnically diverse population with a significant number of single parent families and asylum-seeking families. 32% of pupils have English as an additional language, and the numbers of children starting school with severe communication needs and non-verbal is proportionately high.

The school attracts pupils from a range of backgrounds. Currently, there are 8 children who have an allocated social worker, 2 children with support from disability services, 2 children benefit from early years' support and 12 need help from a pastoral team. Also, there are post CLA pupils.

Before the pandemic, a significant number of disadvantaged families received extra support from school, where staff would make regular home visits and advise on educational and basic life skills matters. As this was not possible to conduct in the same manner due to the Covid-19 restrictions, the school had to look out for different routes to continue with the support. For instance, the support was provided by level 3 teaching assistants who phoned the parents more frequently to advise, or an ethnic minority team was deployed to make sure that the pupils, they know very well, were equipped to access learning; all adults worked together to make sure the children were safe.

Despite the lockdown and predominantly home schooling for some children, there were no additional safeguarding issues. However, the school provided extra support for some families who had economic issues. For example, one parent with learning difficulties was advised to bring the child to school every day where she was helped with establishing a daily routine and the child was fed, washed and clothed.

During the consecutive lockdowns, the school provided support to staff who experienced anxiety due to Covid-19; two people took time off and an option to work from home was available to all who needed it, alongside access to counselling services.



Report on IQM Inclusive School Award



Staff who were not on school premises were kept abreast by regular Zoom meetings and stayed connected. The pupils who attended the school were organised in small bubbles with playtime and lunchtime staggered to minimise human contact. Further precautions were taken such as additional and more frequent deep cleaning to keep the school safe and virus free.

In the conversation with me, staff reflected that they “missed not being able to be with each other” but confirmed that during this difficult time, the whole child agenda remained weaved into the daily practice and the school operation.

Staff at Discovery Special Academy feel valued and supported; there is a clear sense of the school investing in its people as one of them said: “A year ago I started with no qualification but now I have a Level 3 Teaching Assistant qualification and a Diploma in Art Therapy”. They spoke warmly about being part of the community, “we support each other” and the opportunities they have for professional development: “a door is open for professional development”. Staff quoted a number of training options available that range from informal colleagues’ conversations about tasks they perform to the in-house updates (Makaton), the online specialist courses (Safe Recruitment, Central Single Record) and ongoing formal training to expand their knowledge and enhance existing skills, especially with regard of provision for pupils with complex needs.

The published documents stating the school’s effectiveness and the conversations with leadership and other stakeholders support the articulation of the inclusive ethos that is evidenced in the collegiate approach to policy making, curriculum planning and was demonstrated by upholding shared values such as respect for all. In particular, during this difficult academic year the emphasis on staff and pupils’ well-being has proved to be an integral part of the school daily practice; help received from a specialist counsellor and from the Trust’s wellbeing services were appreciated by all members of staff.

The school commitment to their pupils is well expressed and captured in the quote from Rita F Pierson: “every child deserves a champion, an adult that will never give up on them” and is echoed in their daily attitude and practice.

The Inclusion Quality Mark’s Inclusive School Award project has commenced with the school reflecting and describing its inclusion practice to create a fully inclusive academy for pupils with learning difficulties and other additional needs. The school is moving towards consolidating and further developing their practice in conjunction with moving to a purpose- built new accommodation. This will undoubtedly have a positive impact on the children and their progress and support development of the new leadership team, teaching and support staff.

I am of the opinion that the school fully meets the standard required by the Inclusion Quality Mark’s Inclusive School Award. There are only minor areas requiring development and the school is aware of these. I recommend that the school be awarded the Inclusive School Award and be reassessed in 3 years’ time.



Report on IQM Inclusive School Award



I also recommend that the school should consider applying for Centre of Excellence status subject to the inclusion within its plans of the appropriate areas for development and the completion of the Centre of Excellence documentation. If the school chooses to pursue this status and it were to be awarded the school would be subject to annual review from this point forwards.

Assessor: Kasia Fejcher-Akhtar

Findings confirmed by Inclusion Quality Mark (UK) Ltd:

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'J. McCann'.

.....
Joe McCann MBA NPQH
Director of Inclusion Quality Mark (UK) Ltd



Element 1 - The Inclusion Values of the School

Staff at Discovery Special Academy feel valued and supported; there is a clear sense of the school investing in its people as one of them said: “A year ago I started with no qualification but now I have Level 3 Teaching Assistant qualification and a Diploma in Art Therapy”. They spoke warmly about being part of the community, “we support each other” and the opportunities they have for professional development: “a door is open for professional development”. Staff quoted a number of training options available that range from informal colleagues’ conversations about tasks they perform to in-house updates (Makaton), online specialist courses (Safe Recruitment, Central Single Record) and ongoing formal training to expand their knowledge and enhance existing skills, especially with regards to provision for pupils with complex needs.

During the consecutive lockdowns, the school provided support to staff who experienced anxiety due to Covid-19; two people took time off and an option to work from home was available to all who needed it, alongside access to counselling services. Staff who were not on school premises were kept abreast by regular Zoom meetings and stayed connected. The pupils who attended the school were organised in small bubbles with playtime and lunchtime staggered to minimise human contact. Further precautions were taken such as additional and more frequent deep cleaning to keep the school safe and virus free. In a conversation with me, staff reflected that they “missed not being able to be with each other” but confirmed that at this difficult time, the whole child agenda remained weaved into the daily practice and the school operation.

School staff speak enthusiastically about their workplace and describe it very much as a community that desires their pupils to achieve the best through a broad curriculum and other educational and developmental activities, in order to foster the holistic development of each child. One of them said that: “It does not feel like a job”, and another added that: “there isn’t a blanket approach in our school. We constantly adapt, we are flexible and the children know we are here for them.” A member of staff shared her positive experience of working at the Discovery Special Academy by comparing this school with her previous workplace: “This is the best school I have worked. I am deaf myself and have been supported to do my job. If we have personal problems, we can talk to the head.” During the meeting with staff, they have not hesitated to praise openly the headteacher who they described as inspirational. “She models to us a positive outlook. If we had a hard day, we are encouraged to think positively”. Along the positive comments about the relationships between staff, and staff and leadership they expressed views confirming cultivation of culture where people are not restricted but given a space to develop: “we are allowed to make mistakes”. An example of using constructive criticism to support staff development is evident in the English leader working on a 1:1 basis with teachers who benefit from additional phonics training. Such a practice contributes to the school’s ambition of being a learning community for all stakeholders: pupils, employees, parents and governors.

Staff are effective role models; they understand and fully engage with the inclusion agenda promoting high standards. They take professional responsibility for individual needs of learners within their classes to ensure that pupils are happy, confident, tolerant and resilient by offering a creative, appropriately challenging curriculum



Report on IQM Inclusive School Award



through which the children can take risk, develop skills and broaden their knowledge of the world around them.

The Headteacher and Deputy have high expectations of staff which ensures the best possible outcomes for every pupil. The impact of the inclusive ethos developed by leaders means that staff feel valued and involved in planning for the future. They articulate inclusion that is evident in the pupils' outcomes and in a safe and happy environment that is nurturing and enables the pupils "to be the best that they can be."

Next Steps:

- To develop the Academy's Inclusion Policy.
- To develop the Pupil Council both as a vehicle for teaching and understanding of democracy and to increase an opportunity for peer-to-peer interaction across KS2.



Element 2 - Leadership and Management and Accountability

Leadership of the Discovery Special Academy has an inclusive, ambitious and aspirational vision for the school. They work collaboratively with staff and their improvement partner to optimise planning and assessment processes and develop effective structures and systems for self-evaluation and monitoring purposes.

After some time spent on research by leadership, the school successfully introduced the Evidence for Learning iPad-based application to monitor the learning outcomes and, at the same time, this tool has proved to be effective in driving the needs for training. The Evidence for Learning iPad application has the capacity to be used in conjunction with the school's curriculum framework, and its facility to attach videos and photographs of the children's work helps to reduce teachers' workload without compromising the quality of evidence gathered. This approach is an example of the school being open to experiments with different electronic devices and computer programs, but if they find them not suitable, for example because they do not meet the special needs requirements, the leadership will change it until the helpful solution is materialised.

The Discovery Special Academy's 3-year strategic school development plan, currently in its year 2, is regularly reviewed on a termly basis; each time the review focuses on a different aspect of the Trust. The inclusion agenda is weaved through the plan with some aspects given extra attention during the reviews when appropriate.

In the present climate, lots of thought and preparation have been given to restarting of the recovery curriculum. Owing to the pupils' huge disparity between their chronological and cognitive age, the school adopted a personalised Early Years Foundation Strategy curriculum pathway. With additional individual differentiation added to this learning programme, which is versatile and easily adaptable, this choice of the framework for the school's curriculum proves to be the best suited way of meeting all pupils' learning needs and allowing progression.

Leadership and Management keep constant focus on providing high quality of education to all pupils thus its sharp attention to the development of teaching and learning in collaboration with other professionals like therapists. This uncompromising attitude is prevalent among staff and governors with regular monitoring in place and underpinned by up-to-date policies and working procedures.

Leadership and Management ensure continued innovation in the school's curriculum design, they are reflective and creative in terms of resources, activities, pedagogical approaches and forward thinking.

The academy is at its early stages of development and consequently its Senior Leadership Team is currently developing too, which entails an opportunity to grow together.



Report on IQM Inclusive School Award



Next Steps:

- Strengthen distributed leadership approach in line with your current SLT and middle leaders' development.
- Implement areas for development as identified in your Self-Evaluation Report.



Element 3 - Curriculum – Structure, Pupil Engagement and Adaption

At the Discovery Special Academy, the curriculum aims to give the pupils the broadest possible education that consists of basic skills in each subject and exposure to experiences that will allow the pupils to develop their character to “succeed in life”. The curriculum is personalised and based on EYTS strategy and Development Matters programme with activities matching the individual developmental stages. The academic curriculum is complimented by the therapeutic curriculum that has equal weight in terms of delivery and coverage. The latter forms an integral part of everyday teaching and unstructured times and includes - sensory diets, sensory circuits, Intensive Interaction, Makaton, Inclusive Technology, SCERTS and many more therapeutic approaches that have been proved effective with special needs pupils.

The school has a clear curriculum intent outlined in the Free School application and curriculum policy that describes the delivery through three distinct areas - academic learning, therapeutic input and offer and social and emotional curriculum that includes communication, interaction and life skills. Such a curriculum requires multidisciplinary teamwork, which the school fosters to ensure a holistic teaching and learning approach is in place and that it encourages independence, greater access to knowledge and learning, and the development of children’s physical, mental and social wellbeing.

At the Discovery Special Academy, the curriculum is designed to offer an opportunity to staff to challenge themselves whilst enabling the learners to secure the best possible outcome, in line with their ability. Staff are encouraged, in meetings and training sessions, to discuss the curriculum approaches so that they can share the best practice or be supported if needed. By being reflective in their practice, teachers communicate with each other to improve their pedagogical and subject specific skills and this helps them to accept constructive criticism. Over the last academic year, the school priority has been to refine strategies to teach phonics, which has provided the platform for staff to engage in training as well as in frank, professional discussions.

The pupils’ work displays and the conversation with the parent confirm access to a varied and appropriately challenging curriculum. During the assessment, with some discreet assistance from the adults, the children were able to describe their work: “I like to do numbers” and “doing action words”. They talked about practical work like washing dishes and that they have plenty of opportunities to engage with physical activities like playing games, catching the ball, basketball, climbing frames, riding bikes, going on swings and playing with each other.

The school offers opportunities for learning beyond the classroom where the pupils can experience the curriculum in a concrete way that considerably enhances their chances to retain the learning. All classes are encouraged to partake in external extra-curricular activities that are integral to the Discovery curriculum.

Leadership and many staff at Discovery are knowledgeable about SEN and how to make the broadest possible curriculum accessible and enjoyable to their pupils. Thus, they made an informed decision to teach pupils in KS1 and KS2 through an informal, a semi-informal and a semi-formal plus at TVED curriculum. These approaches allow to provide for pupils with specific needs in the areas like communication and interaction



Report on IQM Inclusive School Award



or incorporate some subject specific learning. “It is evident from what teachers do that they have a firm and common understanding of the curriculum intent and what it means for their practice.”

The school’s more recent focus is on improving pupils’ attainment in reading through strengthening an understanding and application of phonics for decoding words. There is also some work completed towards an oracy project to improve communication skills. Both initiatives will have a considerable and positive impact on pupils accessing learning across the curriculum and improving their life chances in future.

The school is successful in ensuring that they identify early and address any barriers to learning from the moment of the pupil’s admission. They plan support and interventions, which they then implement, monitor and review thus ensuring progress and equal access to the curriculum. This approach and attitude motivate pupils to engage with learning and helps to develop in pupils a love of learning through a well-designed and led curriculum.

Next Steps:

- To continue to develop the pupils’ communication skills through an effective oracy project.
- To enhance an opportunity for more varied outdoor learning in a newly built school accessible in September 2022.
- To implement the recovery curriculum after the third lockdown.



Element 4 - Teaching and Learning – Learning Environment, Planning Resources, Pedagogy

The academy is a special free school that is part of Tees Valley Education Multi Academy Trust located in the borough of Middlesbrough. Opened in September 2018 as a response to growing demand for provision for children with learning difficulties, the school presently occupies a temporary accommodation whilst hoping to move to the purpose-built premises in September 2022. In spite of its current location in the built-up urban area and limited space both indoor and outdoor, the management and staff have been creative in utilising every space available to transform this accommodation into a friendly, safe environment and meeting the children's needs educational environment. Its outside ground is divided into different areas accessible to pupils when learning their semi-formal curriculum like Forest School; there is a reading shed, sensory areas and a quiet space to access at playtime or when directed by staff during the learning time. The school is entirely accessible with many gates to enter and exit, which enable safe travelling to and from the building and keeping a safe distance, that has been essential to maintain during the pandemic. The school is a single storey building and there are no children in a wheelchair.

As the current pandemic climate has necessitated adjustments of teaching and learning with remote learning being a predominant way for some children, the school responded to this challenge by adapting the existing resources and practice. Due to the complexity of the pupils' needs, the staff continued with blending learning but extended and sometimes simplified the content so that the families were able to access the material. The Discovery Special Academy staff delivered by hand the learning packs and sensory based activities to the pupils' homes as well as provided support to parents on how to use them. A few families were lent the iPads to enable their children access to learning and retain familiarity with the equipment they were used to in school. The school knows the children and their families very well and those with poor housing conditions were encouraged to use the school premises, when appropriate, to alleviate the socio-economic disadvantages. Whilst having some children on site (different numbers over the three national lockdowns) staff worked closely with the families on sensory integration and created a home programme for some pupils. The services from various therapists did not stop during the lockdown although they had to be modified. Although the curriculum had to be adapted to accommodate restrictions and lack of intense face-to-face teaching during the lockdowns, the school made sure that each child was equipped with the suitably differentiated learning material; the academy's informal and formal and formal plus curriculum approach lent itself to the team around the child, as per the school's practice, which continues to support individual children and local social services remain contactable so that the school is able to access advice or make a referral should this be necessary.

At the Discovery Special Academy about 63.3% pupils qualify for Pupil Premium. 43% of children have diagnosis of Autistic Spectrum Disorder and judging by the current trend, the number of pupils with ASD is likely to increase. Currently, there is 1 child on a Child Protection register, 7 Children in Need, 3 visually impaired, 3 with hearing impairment, 3 with Down Syndrome and 7 with mobility restrictions. In addition to that, many pupils have other health issues like epilepsy. Occasionally, there are children admitted who present with a rare syndrome that requires staff to research and adapt



Report on IQM Inclusive School Award



practice to provide for their specific needs. Due to this kind of inclusive approach, staff gain in qualifications and the school expands its SEN expertise. Consequently, the learning difficulties and the syndrome the pupils present with means that the adult-child ratio has to be high depending on individual needs; it ranges from 1:1 to 1:4 but never less than 1:4.

Such a wide range of needs in a relatively small school (60 pupils) requires space to accommodate specialist equipment and additional staff like therapists to facilitate each child's needs as specified on their EHCPs. The school, especially in the last academic year when operating under the Covid-19 restrictions, has been extra creative to convert every "discovered" space so that the pupils' needs were not compromised and the children were safe. This was a whole staff effort under the operational manager's direction, who expressed her gratitude at the time of assessment to staff commitment and dedication to do the best for each child.

Next Steps:

- To consider introducing ELKLAN as another teaching tool that supports children's language development.
- To increase resources for non-verbal pupils e.g., Proloquo2go a symbol-based app to promote growth of communication skills to support the pupils' further inclusion in school life.



Element 5 – Assessment

Discovery Special Academy clearly recognises the need for a multiple assessment method to capture the non-learner progress of their learners. As each child presents with a spiky learning profile, there is a need for other, apart from formative and summative, assessments tools. The school's Assessment, Recording and Reporting Policy and the Assessment for Learning Policy explain the rationale and effectiveness of their practice. The milestone documents, progress data and other relating reports provide evidence for the school's rigorous and appropriate assessing methods.

In EYFS, the school measures progress using Development Matters; this allows them to obtain statutory data and submit at the end of each academic year. This tool is particularly useful due to its span from 0-60 months, therefore, being inclusive of all Reception pupils.

The school has been successful in developing the use of Evidence for Learning, an iPad-based app, which allows to collate evidence to support progress judgements. This tool has also been very helpful in reducing teachers' workload by the fact that evidence can be easily attached electronically and communicated across the school and, if appropriate, with other stakeholders.

The school has at its disposal a number of assessment methods and tools that match and reflect pupils' non-learner learning journey. For their informal assessment they use the Mapping and Assessing Personal Progress tool, which allows to assess the lateral development of four aspects of skill that encompass knowledge, understanding and attitude over time. As the SEN pupils do not learn in line with age expectations, this is a particularly positive way of proving that the learning is taking place.

For their semi-formal assessment, the school uses Performance Indicators for Value Added Target Setting (PIVATS) to create an accurate record of individual progress over the time. This is supported by teachers' assessment which is obtained by analysis of the pupils' needs and informed by daily conversation and observations. The other advantage of using PIVATS is that the system is recognised and used by special schools nationally, therefore the outcome is understood and enables moderation and monitoring across TVET and when communicating with external agencies. In addition to that, progress captured can be compared nationally using tools such as CASPA (Comparative Analysis for Special Pupil Attainment).

The range of assessment tools and methods as well as recording is the school's strength as it is transparent, appropriate to the pupils' learning profiles and pace of progress. Despite all pupils' inability to follow the mainstream schools' pathways of learning and their assessments, the school is in a position to account for every child's learning and progress. This is inclusive and demonstrates that even the tiniest steps of learning are valued.

The assessment system and the documents that summarise pupils' progress in addition to teaching strategies, the curriculum and the whole school learning culture supports the school's claim of having high expectations of every child academically, physically and therapeutically.



Report on IQM Inclusive School Award



During the assessment, when pupils were asked how they know if their work was good, the children explained that they show it to an adult and are told “good writing, good sharing” then given a sticker. The adults take a photograph of their work to show to parents. Clearly the school fosters the celebratory culture and develops in SEN pupils’ recognition of the value of the work they produce.

In order to facilitate each child’s learning, the school uses personalised pathways which are never static. The child’s individual progress is reported to parents termly in conjunction with their personalised pathway and then again at the end of the academic year in an annual report. During the course of the assessment day and in the meeting with the parent, the conversations were underpinned by the sense of pride of having an effective system of measuring and conveying pupil progress that captures their academic, social, emotional and life skills’ learning.

Next Steps:

- To continue to refine and optimise all assessment systems on each curriculum pathway as identified in the Self-Evaluation Report.



Element 6 - Behaviour, Attitudes to Learning and Personal Development

On the assessment day, the consistent thread through all our conversations was the wellbeing of pupils, their education and the school's ambition to fulfil the local demand for specialist places. Leadership demonstrates a strong desire to build a school with inclusion, equality of opportunity and diversity at the heart of everything they stand for and wish for their community.

My virtual visit to one of the KS2 classes and a conversation with the pupils allowed me to see the pupils in their environment and observe how they interact with each other and the adults. It is evident that the pupils are familiar and comfortable with the class routine and aware of the school's expectations of their behaviour. The children spoke enthusiastically about their school: "really, really special" and were happy to be back together after the lockdown interruptions. The pupils wore school uniforms with pride and behaved naturally displaying good relationships with each other and the adults who supported them. They respected everybody by listening and taking turns to speak and responded positively when corrected either by peers or adults.

The school has clearly a well-established behaviour management practice that uses highly structured routines and incorporates therapeutic methods to manage pupils' behaviour. When individual pupils struggle with behaving according to the school's rules and staff expectations, there are plans in place to support them with self-regulation, often by using visual aids like Zones of Regulation. These interventions are there to deal immediately with the events as they occur but also to provide pastoral care and educate the pupils and develop their self-control.

Despite lockdown, the attendance at Discovery Special Academy remains 95.4% and absences are rigorously checked by staff in line with the school's procedure and policy. There has been a steady increase in attendance over the last three years culminating in the above figure, though it was lower during the three lockdowns.

The school is proactive in making sure that children attend lessons regularly and considers each case on an individual basis. Strong positive relationships and trust between the school and parents, confirmed by the parent during the assessment who said "Teachers are easily approachable. If there is a problem, all you need to do is to ring; they really care" serves well when it comes to encouraging and persuading the parents to send their children to school. More so, the school has a dedicated staff for EAL pupils and uses interpreting services to reach all parents. This inclusive attitude is demonstrated on the website where there is an easy link to translating services so that all documents can be accessed in many languages.

In the event of children having legitimate reasons for not attending school during the lockdown, staff made home visits to drop off work and provide support often to the whole family. Everybody who experienced difficulties due to such circumstances was visited every week, which helped to maintain the direct link between families and school and ensured that the children's education continued.

Since the opening of the academy, there have been no fixed term or permanent exclusions. The school invests in pupils' personal development through the appropriate



Report on IQM Inclusive School Award



curriculum, positive and effective pastoral care and promoting positive attitudes and healthy lifestyles. They emphasise character development that is enabled by the academy culture where leadership recognises adults' responsibility for SEN pupils' wellbeing. The latest school's focus in this respect has been on increasing physical activity, mindfulness and mental health through daily miles, yoga and sensory sessions. During the conversation with pupils, they were able to express an understanding of how to treat newly admitted pupils: "try to be friends and play together". It has been apparent that the children are taught self-regulation as they said that when they feel unhappy, they need to take a big breath and tell the teacher. Some added that when they see a friend unhappy, they need "to be gentle with them" thus the school encourages appropriate emotional responses to behavioural issues at the level that matches the participants' age and cognitive ability.

When talking, the children and staff used Makaton, the practice that has been positively commented on by the parent who said that: "my daughter does not need Makaton but I like when she uses it because it helps other children to communicate."

There is an abundance of evidence to state that the academy, with their nurturing approach, does everything to secure the best possible life chances for its pupils and ensures the children are happy, confident, tolerant and resilient and enables them to thrive.

Next Steps:

- To ensure that Pupil Voice is in the School Development Plan.
- To ensure that personal development remains a distinct part of the curriculum recovery programme.



Element 7 - Parents, Carers, Guardians

The importance of establishing and fostering strong relationships with parents and families is as central to the approach the school takes, as it is to have strong working partnerships. The school offers workshops for parents, and during lockdown provided technical support and advice through calls to parents. Families that are particularly vulnerable are closely monitored, and additional support is put in place when necessary; examples of these were staff reaching out to EAL families as well as going above and beyond to make sure that a child from a single parent family was provided with food and helped with hygiene at the time of distress. This intervention was followed by securing a more permanent help.

The academy's open-door policy for parents has not stopped during the pandemic although it had to be modified to follow the government regulations yet retaining, at the same time, an easy access to staff and resources that the parents' value and the school fosters. The confidence and relationship building between school and parents comes from the fact that leaders are always available to parents.

The parent representative during the assessment day was full of praise for the school, staff and their practice. She described the leadership and administration staff in particular as "easily approachable. If there is a problem, all you need to do is to ring; they really care. It does not feel like a school, you are not judged." The parent approves of the fact that her child is taught something that will help her to reach out to her peers who lack the same level of communication skills. "My daughter does not need Makaton but I like it when she uses it because it helps other children to communicate".

Apart from welcoming parents on a daily basis, the school has many channels of communication; for example, it uses Showbie to support parents with remote learning with teachers providing feedback and advice. The leaders make efforts to plan, organise and celebrate events to include parents. Due to pandemic restrictions, the opportunities for face-to-face meetings were scaled down, but there is plenty of evidence of this dynamic on the school's website and it was frequently referenced in conversations with staff, pupils and a parent.

The school takes on board the difficulties that some ethnic minority families have due to a limited grasp of English. In such cases, the school calls on support from interpreting and translating services and sometimes invites interpreters to the key meetings. The communications with each pupil and parents are carefully considered and, when necessary, teachers work closely with families to develop key word understanding in their first language to support both pupils and parents, guardians or carers.

In the very short time since opening, the academy attracted strong support from parents who expressed their positive views of the school in parent questionnaires and many positive comments in home/school communication books used daily to share messages and information.

The Trust's governors give up their time freely to attend CPD training, including safeguarding, and school events when appropriate and possible. They are supportive of the school's ambition and plans for the future. With the school's expansion and



Report on IQM Inclusive School Award



relocation to new premises in September 2022, the governors will have an additional task of supporting the school with establishing and raising its profile in the immediate community.

Next Steps:

- To continue to explore channels of communication so that parents are aware of the changes and improvements taking place in school.
- To continue to hold regular workshops for parents due to the positive impact on pupils' outcomes and wellbeing.
- To continue to work collaboratively with the governors for further school development and improvement.
- To develop an inclusion governor to increase the visibility and the role of the governors to all parents.



Element 8 - Links with Local, Wider and Global Community

The school is aware of the local community resources available to enhance and enrich learning opportunities and made good use of them before the pandemic. During the assessment day, the children were making references to the trips and visits they attended and they believe that adults are planning to resume them as soon as it is allowed.

There have already been some links established with the local community that the school encourages and welcomes, as there is a clear understanding of mutual benefits of working together. Leadership shares the view that pupils gain in confidence in mixing with other adults and children and include such enriching activities in the curriculum and social aspects of the school's life.

In the past the Headteacher planned and organised the Middlesbrough Inclusion Conference (Belonging) alongside the Trust's Outreach Leader. The academy has been accepted into the World Education Summit with a spotlight on the academy. Such initiatives and events will enable the school to grow in line with their motto: "Through Discovery to Grow" and build a successful special needs' provision that came into existence due to recognised demands for a local special school.

In spite of the academy being only in its early years since it has been established in 2018, there is already a clear sense of direction both for pupils and staff, which is to grow together into an educational provision that effectively supports holistic development of their pupils and professional development of its staff. This view has been echoed by the parent met during the assessment who said that: "The school is new and not many people know about it, but it does everything for my daughter. My only criticism is that it does not care for children after they are 19 years old."

The school is therefore very well positioned to take its existing effective provision further into a broader community including other education establishment. Building on a forthcoming experience with the World Education Summit, the academy is well placed to embrace a global aspect of special needs education.

Next Steps:

- To expand networking beyond the Trust.
- To develop global links and continue to offer an enriched curriculum.
- To continue to share and learn from the cultures within the school community.