



Overview

Discovery Special Academy is a school with inclusion at its core. The school is part of the supportive Tees Valley Education Trust. The Trust's vision is: "Delivering educational excellence so that all Tees Valley Education children can achieve their dreams, hopes, aspirations and a great sense of self-worth.

By doing this, our children will become outstanding citizens able to contribute to society with the skills, ability, confidence, and voice, to shape a better future for all".

Discovery Academy live and breathe this vision. Staff are committed to an innovative and relentless approach to find ways to break down barriers to enable children to reach their potential and succeed in their school and in life beyond. Together, leaders share an ambitious vision for pupils with SEND. They are working to create a 'SEND village' at the school for pupils in the local community. Their aim is to cater for pupils from early years to college age. This goal has been embraced by the whole-school community, with one staff member stating, "We have high aspirations and would like to create a community village of schools from birth to college".

The school's vision is '*through discovery we grow*'. All staff in this school demonstrate this vision in their daily interactions. They work tirelessly to ensure children who attend, develop and blossom during their time at the school. This written school vision is evident as soon as you enter. The atmosphere inside is calm, purposeful, and aspirational, with a clear sense of togetherness and belonging.

There is a feeling of ambition, enthusiasm and passion for the students of Discovery. The Executive Headteacher's vision of an inclusive school, whereby everyone can achieve their best and barriers are removed, is lived by all. This is a collaborative school, with everyone contributing to this vision and the strategic direction. The child is at the centre of everything.

The ethos of ambition and development isn't just about the pupils, either. The leaders of this ambitious school want to empower and develop staff and parents. Leaders are keen to nurture staff and allow them to play to their strengths for the benefit of the pupils. Leaders want to develop staff expertise. CPD is well thought out and is evaluated for impact. There is a robust induction process for new staff, and they are offered CPD as soon as possible so they are trained to the school values and ways of working. This allows consistency and cohesion for pupils. Staff value the opportunities they are given and feel that there are progression pathways and effective training programmes. A number of staff talked about the aspiration across the school, with one stating, "Through Discovery I have grown".

There is a strong leadership between the Head of Academy and the Executive Headteacher, and their accessibility and commitment to inclusion and improving the opportunities for all children, is a strength of the school. Throughout my time in the school, it was evident that leadership and management at Discovery Academy is a real



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strength. The vision for inclusivity is clear when speaking to any leader of the school and this was then triangulated in discussions with members of the school community and through the learning walk conducted.

Leaders at Discovery are committed to ensuring a holistic approach to education is offered. Inclusion underpins all aspects of school life. This is evident on the detailed and informative school website and then when one steps into the school, the inclusivity is clear to feel. The school has the needs of the 'whole' child at the centre of all they do. This is a school who is dedicated to ensuring children are safe and happy and that their needs are being met. The leadership qualities of the Senior Leadership Team have created a culture of reflecting and growing.

Staff aim to provide an education which is sensitive to individual needs and accessible to all children regardless of special educational need, sexual orientation, sex, race, religion and belief, gender reassignment or disability. The school seeks to promote awareness, understanding and respect for diversity in our world.

The new school environment is finished to a high standard to reflect the aspirational vision of all. The Executive Headteacher was instrumental in the design of the building. The new building has ensured that this is a purposeful learning environment with every area used to its full advantage. There are purpose-built spaces that are used effectively to engage students. The library is used as an area to further develop the love of reading for pleasure. There are a number of rooms that are used for interventions to take place. Children were enthusiastic about the various rooms they have to use, such as the sensory space. The outdoor spaces have also been effectively developed to allow for fluid learning to take place between indoors and outside.

The school building is vibrant, tidy, organised, and welcoming. Each space is used to ensure maximum impact. The Learning Environment, resources and the use of ICT is designed to create an innovative and enriched experience for all pupils. Displays demonstrate that learners have a range of opportunities to engage them to develop and grow.

There is a strong and stable staff team who have all bought into the school vision. Part of this vision is the curriculum. The curriculum is broad and balanced. Curriculum progression has been a key focus and school priority throughout the academic year. Across the school there is a commitment to the curriculum meeting the needs of all students. Staff are knowledgeable about the specific needs of individual learners. All staff know their pupils and this dedication allows them to ensure children are happy, well-rounded, and achieving. During the learning walk and tour of the school it was clear to see that inclusivity is part of the whole-school ethos. Pupils have a voice and are seen as individuals. Staff are adept at adapting resources, and the curriculum, to suit the needs of all.

This is a school where relationships matter. Relationships are seen as pivotal to success and are valued and nurtured. Staff have worked hard to build strong, effective relationships with pupils, parents, carers, and stakeholders. The leadership team's



commitment to relationships has paid off. Everyone is positive about the school and there is a shared commitment to ensure each child gets the best education possible. There is love in this setting. Staff are warm and genuine.

Parents speak highly about the school and express that this is a school that absolutely meets the needs of their children. The school value strong communication. They have developed a variety of ways to ensure parents are engaged with their child's school life. The school use Showbie, and their website, to effectively keep parents and carers informed of what is happening in school and to share photos of student success. This is valued by families, as they enjoy getting the updates and use them as prompts to talk with their children about their day. Parents and carers are proud of Discovery Special Academy and value all that they do.

Staff know that behaviour is communication. Staff have worked hard to develop an understanding of each child and to ensure they develop into successful young people. Leaders have invested in support for children's Mental Health and Wellbeing.

The school has raised the profile of Mental Health and Wellbeing and work tirelessly to ensure that children's needs are met. Wellbeing for all members of the school community is at the heart of the school. The school is driven by a supportive ethos throughout. Recently, staff had the opportunity to take part in a 6-week mediation and wellbeing course.

The Mental Health and Wellbeing Lead is passionate about this area of the school and is clear that it is a thread running throughout everything. They have grown the Pastoral team, who have developed strong relationships with pupils and parents. The school has also invested in a counsellor who is in school twice a week. Staff are trauma informed and the Trust aim to become a trauma informed Trust.

Mental Health and Wellbeing is taught discreetly but is also embedded though whole school life. The lead talked about initiatives they have developed to engage pupils and families, such as creating bespoke pupil 'Happiness bags' that contain things to make them happy.

It was also evident that the school works effectively with other agencies to ensure the needs of each child are successfully met, as quickly as possible. They work with outside agencies when pupils' needs cannot be met by the school alone. Some of these services include Educational Psychology Service (EP), Speech and Language Therapy (SALT) and Children and Adult Mental Health Services (CAMHS). The school has recently been part of a pilot with eye doctors being based in school. This initiative has proved successful, with a high percentage of pupils identified as needing glasses. Parents are thankful of this multi-agency way of working, stating that their child is more likely to access the services on offer, when in school, as they feel safe in the familiar surroundings.

The positive attendance trends at Discovery Special Academy, which were evidenced throughout the assessment, highlight that this is a place where children are safe, want to



be and want to learn. Whole-school attendance is currently at 93% and leaders are driving to get this higher.

Leaders at Discovery Special Academy are clear about the vision and next steps for the school. They are a reflective team who ensure all staff are included and valued and buy into the school vision. This is an outward facing school who share best practice and are keen to learn from others. They offer outreach in the local authority and Tees wide, to support schools in the area, through an offer of observations and feedback on pupils.

They sit on a number of boards, such as the SEND strategic board and Safeguarding board and have also been involved in initiatives such as the local Special Educational Needs and Disability Co-ordinator (SENDCo) mentoring network.

Throughout the review, staff made comments that illustrated their commitment to inclusion and the children in their care, such as, “We are Future proofing; ensuring our pupils have a successful place in the world” and “No one is left behind”. This commitment is inspirational.

It is clear from the review process that the team continue to be fully committed to inclusive practice and they successfully demonstrated the positive impact of their work towards the IQM Centre of Excellence targets over the past 12 months. They have proved their expertise over the years of IQM accreditation and I believe they have the passion and capacity to continue to drive the inclusion agenda in their own school and beyond.

I continue to be firmly of the opinion that the academy fully meets the standard required by the Inclusion Quality Mark to maintain its status as a Centre of Excellence. I therefore recommend that the school retains its Centre of Excellence status and is reviewed again in 12 months. The next review will look closely at how the school has interacted with its Inclusion Cluster and promoted continuing outreach. Evidence of Cluster working will underpin the capacity for the school to maintain its Centre of Excellence status.

Assessor Mrs Emily Carr

Findings confirmed by Inclusion Quality Mark (UK) Ltd:

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



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