



Assessor's Evaluation for the IQM Flagship Project



School Discovery Special Academy
Sandy Flatts Lane
Acklam
Middlesbrough
TS5 7YN

Head/Principal Ms Jennifer Duncan

IQM Lead Ms Ann Titchener

Date of Review 11th February 2025

Assessor Mrs Emily Carr

IQM Cluster Programme

Cluster Group Inclusivators

Ambassador Mrs Emily Carr

Next Meeting 12th March 2025

Meeting Focus Careers and Attendance

Cluster Attendance

Term	Date	Attendance
Autumn 2023	09th Oct 2023	Yes
Spring 2024	03rd May 2024	No
Summer 2024	24th Jun 2024	Yes
Autumn 2024	13th Nov 2024	Yes
Spring 2025	12th Mar 2025	
Summer 2025	25th Jun 2025	

The Impact of the Cluster Group

The school is an active and committed member of the Cluster Group. The IQM Lead articulated how they are pleased to be part of the IQM Cluster and enjoy the opportunity to network with other schools and share good practices. They have gained new ideas and approaches from attending the meetings and speaking with colleagues from other settings.



Assessor's Evaluation for the IQM Flagship Project



The IQM lead was able to give examples of how the Cluster meetings have impacted their thinking and allowed Discovery colleagues to reflect on their practice and develop. She shared how the meeting at Academy 360 prompted leaders to look at their transition offer, explaining that the opportunities to share ideas regarding supporting pupils with additional needs at key transition points were really helpful and that the focus on all aspects of transition was useful, particularly in linking to the academy's 'preparing for adulthood' themes.

The recent Autumn term meeting, at High Tunstall College of Science, allowed colleagues to see how a mainstream secondary school supports pupils with additional needs and the creative way they have approached the curriculum. The IQM lead enjoyed the visit to the school.

Due to their commitment to inclusion, Discovery Academy colleagues attended the IQM National Conference to have the opportunity to attend workshops and network with inclusive schools across the country. The IQM lead shared how they attended workshops about supporting EAL learners, preventing ESBS and also a workshop on dual and multiple exceptionality. They found the workshops to be engaging and thought-provoking.

The school leaders at Discovery are committed to continuing to develop strong links with schools within the cluster group and the IQM family. Due to their commitment to networking and sharing best practices, the school is hosting the summer term cluster meeting, and they are also hoping to be part of a series of free online CPD webinars with IQM.

Evidence

Over the course of the one-day assessment, the assessor evaluated the school's commitment to inclusion, and progress made against their action plan, through a range of written evidence, including:

- The school's Annual Review and Action Plan document
- School website
- School social media pages
- Previous IQM reports
- Ofsted report (January 2023)
- School policies
- Curriculum planning
- Discovery Reading Record document



Assessor's Evaluation for the IQM Flagship Project



- Discovery guide to Non-verbal Interventions at Discover Special Academy
- Pupil work
- Discovery pupil feedback evidence
- Article in Tees Skills magazine
- Discovery parental feedback evidence
- Discovery guide to help support good attendance
- Discovery Pupil Passports

The assessor also toured the school and visited classes, talked with staff and children, and viewed displays.

Meetings with:

- Head of Academy and IQM Lead
- Deputy Head of Academy
- Assistant Headteacher
- Parents and carers
- Junior Leadership Team
- Pupil Family Support Advisor



Assessor's Evaluation for the IQM Flagship Project



Evaluation of Annual Progress towards the Flagship Project

The Flagship project followed on from the evaluation of previous targets that the school have worked on as part of their focus on inclusion. Leaders at Discovery have a clear vision to create outstanding environments which promote the academic, therapeutic, communication and social and emotional development of all pupils. Leaders have ensured that supporting and enabling every individual child to develop their full emotional, social, and academic potential is central to the school's aims and vision.

At the last IQM review, leaders identified a number of target areas they would work on, as part of their Flagship project. The targets set were:

- To audit current provision and practice to identify strengths and areas for development.
- To carry out a range of research to support decision-making, referring to current research and practice both locally and nationally, with a focus on trauma-informed practice, outdoor provision, health and well-being, and regulation.
- To develop a CPD package for the whole academy to support knowledge and understanding.
- To implement a complete staged action plan of environment development, refining and reviewing during the process.

The Flagship project was established to create a focus on developing the school environment - physically and in terms of the school culture and ethos. From the meetings with all staff involved in coordinating and leading the Flagship project, it is evident that they are all highly committed to providing pupils with a deeply enriching, inclusive environment that involves supporting children in a holistic way. They talked with passion about the progress they have made this year against the set targets.

Since October 2024, all pupils and staff are now on one purpose-built site. The academy is very well presented, with purposeful and welcoming environments throughout. The impact is that pupils feel safe and secure, as evidenced in the review day learning walk, and in the reduced behaviour incidents and improved progress in learning that leaders discussed.

The Head of Academy shared, 'it has been great to see our vision come to life. We are really proud of our school and what we have achieved.' Throughout the day it was evident that all staff and children are proud to be part of the Discovery family.

Leaders have thought carefully about every inch of the building and how to utilise every part for maximum impact. Corridors have sensory and communication stations. Classrooms have areas for group work and independent learning. Group rooms are now well presented and purposeful to allow sensory support. Leaders shared how they use



Assessor's Evaluation for the IQM Flagship Project



these rooms to support pupils to access sensory programmes or 1:1 and small group teaching to aid regulation and increase focus and attention.

A big focus over the academic year has been to develop the outdoors. The outdoor provision has supported progress, as well as enhancing social and emotional development to support self-regulation and readiness to learn. Use of the RHS Nature Park grant has enhanced areas through the addition of plants to add nature inside and out, for the benefit of pupils and staff.

The Discovery farm area, lovingly named 'Cluckingham Palace,' is developing and being accessed by pupils – hens are on site and there are plans for guinea pigs to join in the spring. All policies and consents are in place to support this. Older pupils are involved in the care of the hens and the maintenance of the farm.

Leaders shared how this area is to be further developed and used to educate children, provide a space for family work and give pupils (and staff) the opportunity to learn how to be environmentally friendly and support mental health and wellbeing. Leaders are clear that outdoor learning helps to support the development of the whole child. They are a school that is invested in the outdoors and believes that there are many important benefits of providing students with an outdoor curriculum and therefore remain fully committed to this project and ensuring that the Discovery Farm, and curriculum offer, is of a high standard.

Leaders are also passionate about the positive impact being outdoors can have on mental health and wellbeing. On the review day, the Junior Leadership Team echoed the passion of the staff and talked with enthusiasm about the farm and how they are working with staff to consider further animals to become part of it, such as guinea pigs. Leaders shared how opportunities to be exposed to nature and animals have supported pupil and staff mental well-being, reducing stress and increasing resilience. Leaders are also looking at how they can use the farm to develop enterprise opportunities such as selling hen eggs.

Leaders are in the process of further developing the outdoors and have purchased polytunnels to go outside so that their curriculum can be further enhanced with opportunities for gardening and horticulture. A big focus for the coming year is on developing the environment, particularly the outdoor spaces, further.

Another key target area over the academic year has been to develop a CPD package for the whole academy to support knowledge and understanding linked to school priority areas of communication, trauma-informed practice, health and wellbeing and regulation. Leaders shared how their CPD offer for teachers and TAs has raised the profile of the importance of communication environments.

A full communication audit has been carried out with actions and follow-up. This ensures that communication remains a priority for all and the positive impact on the regulation of pupils was seen during the learning walk on the assessment day. Leaders



Assessor's Evaluation for the IQM Flagship Project



discussed how their quality assurance systems evidence that communication is consistently seen in classrooms and other spaces to support independence and emotional regulation.

Staff at Discovery are aware of the importance of trauma-informed practice as a means for reducing the negative impact of trauma experiences and supporting mental and physical health outcomes. They were keen to embed trauma-informed practice across the school and ten Discovery Academy staff members have completed trauma-informed practice with a Trauma Informed Lead from Teesside University. All staff in the school have undertaken in-house CPD following this and leaders have ensured that all whole school CPD has a trauma-informed approach embedded throughout

The Head of Academy shared how decision-making informed by trauma-informed practices has led to safer learning environments, improved emotional support, and better academic progress for students facing trauma. The Head of Academy and the Deputy explained that a more compassionate approach has promoted a positive school culture and supported the emotional recovery of pupils fostering long-term well-being.

Another focus area has been on developing the Preparing for Adulthood offer and the careers programme, particularly as they now have more secondary-aged pupils. Leaders have worked hard to create an ambitious culture within the school. All staff have high expectations of pupils' behaviour and their academic outcomes. Senior leaders are focused on raising pupils' aspirations and ensuring their future employability by further developing their offer.

The Year 9 curriculum is now in place, with pupils accessing Functional Skills qualifications alongside the Discovery Explore and Expand curriculum. Pupils are enjoying the curriculum and making good progress. On the review day, three Y9 pupils were proud to show some of their functional skills work and talk about how they have been making progress towards their future. The school is now an exam centre and offers qualifications such as entry-level awards, Functional Skills English, maths, ASDAN and the Arts Award.

Throughout the review day, it was clear that progress had been made against all planned targets and that leaders had identified clear next steps to continue to drive the project forward and meet the needs of the school community.

Agreed Actions for the Next Steps in the Flagship Project

Project Title:

To create outstanding environments which promote the academic, therapeutic, communication and social and emotional development of all pupils (year 2).

Outline of Project:



Assessor's Evaluation for the IQM Flagship Project



Discovery Academy is committed to enhancing the lives of all the pupils in its care to enable them to secure the best possible life chances as they move through their educational career and beyond. Staff ensure pupils are confident, tolerant, and resilient by offering a challenging and exciting curriculum through which they can take risks and grow with each and every learning opportunity. The aim of the Flagship project is to develop the academy environments to ensure that every pupil has access to a provision that fully promotes the school's preparing for adulthood themes, on a personalised level for each pupil.

The Discovery Academy preparing for adulthood themes fall into four categories: Employment; Friends, community, and relationships; Independent living, and Good Health. Leaders are clear that enabling pupils to have agency, and the ability to selfadvocate and have influence in decision-making, is integral to these themes. Supporting emotional well-being and the development of resilience are also important aspects to consider when developing school environments.

The school's mission is to deliver educational excellence for all of its pupils by fostering a culture of creativity, curiosity, care, courage, and commitment through all they do, including through their environments. The Academy is dedicated to delivering outstanding inclusive practice through a culture of co-production, experiential learning, and growth where carers and professionals work together to support the holistic development of the child in which all therapies are an integral part of pupils' education. Leaders remain clear about their vision for the Flagship project and how it ties in with their school's focus on developing the whole child.

In discussions about the Flagship project, the IQM lead was reflective about the progress they have made and some of the issues they have encountered. Leaders have identified a number of key actions and next steps to ensure this flagship project continues to be a success and are committed to working with the wider community to enhance the project further.

- To continue to implement the development of the internal and external environments to support communication, social and emotional development, and self-regulation.
- To continue to implement the staged action plan of external environment development, refining and reviewing during the process.
- To continue to develop the year 9+ semi-formal curriculum and secondary informal curriculum.

Overview

Discovery Special Academy continues to be an inclusive school with the child at the centre of every decision. Inclusion underpins all aspects of school life. Ofsted reported in January 2023, 'Leaders have created a highly inclusive school environment. Pupils are happy at school.' It is evident that this statement is still true. Staff are passionate, skilled,



Assessor's Evaluation for the IQM Flagship Project



and committed to their school community, recognise all children as unique individuals and help them to develop the values, behaviours, and attitudes to equip them for successful futures.

Leadership is a strength at Discovery. The Leadership Team have a strong knowledge of the school and the local context and a clear vision of the ever-changing educational landscape. At Discovery, all staff are focused on improving outcomes for pupils and are uncompromising in their ambition, but ensure their high standards are wrapped in love and support. Across the school, there is a sense of love, nurture, and family. All staff know their pupils and this dedication allows them to ensure children are happy, wellrounded, and achieving.

Leaders are committed to ensuring the best outcomes for all children and have developed a strong staff team who share that aim. They have a clear moral compass and part of that is about the need to nurture and support staff. As the new building has been developed and the pupil intake has grown, the staffing has grown. Since September, approximately 30 new staff have joined the school. Due to the well-planned and robust recruitment and induction process, all new staff have quickly become part of the Discovery family and are having a positive impact on the school.

In order to support all staff, particularly new staff, leaders have recently created a handbook guide to Non-verbal Interventions at Discovery Special Academy. This document sits alongside the staff handbook and allows all staff to be clear about expectations. Leaders are passionate about empowering and developing staff and ensuring that they all understand the school's vision and values and Discovery way of working. They ensure staff engage fully in focused professional development so that professional knowledge consistently improves over time.

As the Deputy Head explained, 'we ensure that CPD is bespoke and targeted and linked to the needs of our staff and children. We constantly reflect and ask ourselves, 'what do staff need to support children's needs?' A staff member commented how leaders care about them and explained, 'Support for staff is high.' Another shared how they have been able to grow and develop whilst at Discovery, describing how they started at the school as a supply TA and due to their love of the school, applied for a Level 2 TA position and was successful. They then developed into a Level 3 position and have recently started in a new role, working with children and families across the school.

Safeguarding and attendance continue to be a high priority. The Safeguarding Lead continues to work closely with a wide range of agencies. The whole school attendance is currently 94%. Attendance is monitored closely as the leaders recognise the relationship between attendance and progress as well as the emotional and social development of the pupils. There are clear procedures in place to tackle absence and reduce persistent absenteeism, based on supporting families to improve attendance.

This is an area that leaders will continue to prioritise. They want all children in school so that they access the Discovery offer and make the progress they are capable of. The school works hard to welcome pupils and meet their needs from the moment they



Assessor's Evaluation for the IQM Flagship Project



join. Detailed admissions processes ensure information is gathered from home and previous educational settings.

Relationships between staff and pupils are strong. Children respond well to staff in the school and interactions are positive. The Pupil Parent Support Advisor, shared about how they work hard to support their children and their families, updating how they support parents in a wide variety of ways, such as offering termly informal parental coffee mornings, with agencies such as Early Help attending to offer support, to support in terms of making referrals and completing paperwork. She was clear that they work hard to develop positive relationships with parents and carers.

Parental feedback suggests that positive relationships are embedded, with parents sharing comments such as, 'I am very happy with the care and education my child receives. Staff are always friendly and helpful,' 'couldn't ask for a better provision for my son,' and 'amazing school. So proud of the progress my child is making.' On the day of the assessment, some parents were in school as part of a planned course they can access, delivered by Discovery staff, about autism, they also talked positively about the school.

Leaders have further developed their supportive offer to ensure children's needs are met. They have a child-centred approach through innovative assessment processes and supportive packages that tap into the complex needs of pupils. Leaders updated that the local PCSO comes in weekly to speak with secondary-aged children and that they also continue to work with specialist agencies such as Speech and Language, Occupational Therapy, CAMHs and the school nurse service.

As it says on the school website, 'The Academy is dedicated to delivering outstanding inclusive practice through a culture of co-production, experiential learning and growth where carers and professionals work together to support the holistic development of the child in which all therapies are an integral part of pupils' education.' This statement was evidenced throughout the assessment review day.

Curriculum developments have continued as leaders are continuously reviewing and refining their offers. The curriculum has been carefully refined to ensure that children's needs are met. Curriculum provision at Discovery is dependent on the needs of the child. The school's philosophy is that all pupils can make great progress and that they can take control of their own learning when provision is tailored to suit need and ability. Staff have high expectations of every child and support them to achieve academically, physically, and therapeutically.

Reading remains high profile and a key driver in the curriculum and the school website clearly outlines the importance of the school phonics programme. On the review day, children from the Junior Leadership Team shared how they enjoy reading and love visiting the school libraries (1 for primary-aged children and 1 for secondary-aged children).



Assessor's Evaluation for the IQM Flagship Project



A key focus of leaders has been to ensure that staff offer a range of sensory and practical activities to help engage pupils in lessons. On the learning walk of the school children across the key stages were engaged in practical activities such as using shaving foam to practise letter formation or the use of play dough.

The overarching theme of the curriculum throughout the school is Preparing For Adulthood - PFA, as leaders advocate equal life chances for all pupils as they move into adulthood. Leaders are relentless in their determination to ensure that the curriculum meets the needs of all and allows children to have a strong post-16 pathway mapped out. Due to the diverse range of needs across the school, the curriculum has been designed to cater for a range of pupils, providing equal opportunities for all.

Leaders have mapped out well-structured curriculum pathways with the PFA focus embedded throughout. Each pathway has been developed to meet pupils' needs. The children are at the heart of every decision staff make to ensure that they are happy and confident and that the opportunities that are provided for them are relevant to their needs both now and in the future. The Head of Academy articulated this when saying, 'we begin to prepare children for adulthood as early as possible so that all children have high aspirations for their future.'

Leaders are relentless in their determination to ensure that the curriculum meets the needs of all. Discovery students benefit from the Leadership Team's innovative thinking and this was demonstrated when some Y9 pupils shared how they had applied for 'jobs' (such as PA to SLT) in the school and been interviewed for them and secured positions that they could earn money, once they have submitted their time sheets to senior leaders.

The school has also worked with local companies and organisations such as The Careers and Enterprise Company, Teesside University, and the Department for Working Pensions to offer children an enriched careers programme.

On the pupil tour of the school, with 2 Y9 pupil ambassadors, they talked passionately and articulately about how they have been involved in designing the building and making it fit for purpose. They were proud to show rooms such as the new Virtual Reality immersive room, the secondary library, and the art classroom. These children were a delight to listen to and demonstrated the values that the school promotes.

There is a myriad of opportunities where children are rewarded for their good behaviours, attitudes to learning and personal development. Most of these rewards are built around the school and Trust values. The school reward systems are valued by the whole school community.

The leaders have recently developed school passports which will allow children to work through '20 things to discover at Discovery.' These passports are closely linked to the school values and children will be awarded rs when they achieve these milestones and



Assessor's Evaluation for the IQM Flagship Project



demonstrate the important school values. This new initiative will be rolled out in the summer term.

Due to the positive reputation of the school and the impact they have, the school is active in the community, supporting a wide range of schools and academies, and therefore learners. Leaders shared how they support schools (particularly primary mainstream and special schools) in a range of ways, from welcoming visitors to their school to see their practice, to also supporting the Local Authority, who they have a strong relationship with, in leading the local SENDCo network. Leaders discussed how they also offer outreach support as needed. The Discovery Team have also trained passenger assistants to support the Middlesbrough transport team.

The culture of inclusion is woven into the very fabric of the school, evident from the purposeful, ambitious, and welcoming learning environment, through the communication and sensory resources on offer in every classroom, to school displays, and to the carefully planned curriculum.

It is clear from the review process that the staff team at Discovery continue to be fully committed to inclusive practice. Leaders are committed to continually drive the school forward to improve the outcomes for the pupils. They have proved their commitment to inclusion over the years of IQM accreditation and I believe they continue to have the passion and expertise to continue to drive the inclusion agenda in their own school and beyond.

I am therefore firmly of the opinion that the school continues to fully meet the standard required by the Inclusion Quality Mark's Inclusive School Award to maintain its status as a Flagship School. I therefore recommend that the school retains its Flagship 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 Flagship 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