



## Assessor's Evaluation for the IQM CoE Award



**School Name:** Discovery Special Academy  
Kedward Avenue  
Brambles Farm  
TS3 9DB

**Head/Principal:** Ms Jennifer Duncan

**IQM Lead:** Ms Ann Titchener

**Date of Review:** 11<sup>th</sup> March 2022

**Assessor:** Sylvia Cramp

### **IQM Cluster Programme**

**Cluster Group:** Trailblazers

**Ambassador:** Sarah Linari

**Date of Next Meeting:** 24<sup>th</sup> March 2022

**Next Cluster Group Meeting Focus:** Visit to Academy 360, Sunderland

### **Sources of Evidence during IQM Review Day:**

- Detailed Self-Evaluation Report
- Website including videos and galleries
- Tour of school and visits to classrooms
- Celebration assembly

### **Meetings held with:**

- IQM Lead/Deputy Headteacher
- Headteacher
- Assistant Headteacher for Wellbeing and Mental Health
- Safeguarding, SEND and Inclusion Manager
- Junior Leadership Team
- Staff group of Year 3/ Year 4 Teacher, Level 3 Administrator, Teaching Assistant and Care Assistant
- Parents via telephone



## Assessor's Evaluation for the IQM CoE Award



### Summary of Targets from 2020-2021

The targets for last year are clearly focused on a curriculum which values academic achievement alongside social and emotional development and therapeutic intervention. The central aim is to prepare each child for adulthood by increasing their ability to be independent, take responsibility and to be safe. During the Covid pandemic, Discovery Special Academy continued to offer education on site and by remote learning. By the second lockdown most children were in school. A staff rota allowed vulnerable staff to work from home. Continuity has been provided by keeping classes with the same teacher during the pandemic when possible.

#### Target 1

##### **To continue to implement the post-pandemic restart curriculum.**

Senior Leaders are passionate about offering an ambitious curriculum which places no limits on learning. The Headteacher explained how the academy is extremely proud to offer every opportunity to their children – “not a lesser offer,” a philosophy underpinned by Vygotsky’s philosophy of changing the sign, not the meaning.

The academy provides a semi-formal and an informal curriculum depending on need. The semi-formal curriculum is subject based whilst personalised for each child. Work in science, history and geography was displayed in all classes. The Assistant Headteacher in Year 5/Year 6 explained there is a continual focus on retrieval so that children can begin to apply their knowledge in different contexts.

The high quality of activities available for children reflects the staffs’ specialist understanding of the small steps needed to consolidate learning. In Year 3/Year 4 children completed maths activities independently or with adult support, by matching shapes, ordering dolls by size and sequencing a story. Talk for Writing is used to support story telling alongside Makaton and examples of story writing were displayed in classrooms. Maths challenges are available in Year 5/Year 6, with adult support if children are unable to complete the tasks independently. Children I spoke to told me that their favourite books included The Wild Things, Mr Blueberry and The Very Hungry Caterpillar. They explained how they made a plan for writing and would ask a teacher for help.

The informal curriculum provides topic-based practical and sensory activities, as evidenced in early years and for children with significant communication needs. Flexibility in the curriculum pathway enables children to move between the two approaches as appropriate.

#### **Next steps:**

To continue to develop the academy curriculum for science, computing and foundation subjects (particular focus on DT skills development).

#### Target 2



## Assessor's Evaluation for the IQM CoE Award



**To develop the Junior Leadership Team both as a vehicle for teaching and understanding of democracy and to increase an opportunity for peer-to-peer interaction across KS2.**

The Junior Leadership Team (JLT) meets formally twice every half term and also informally. Groups of children are involved so that all children are included. The Safeguarding and Inclusion Lead explained how the children are supported in researching different topics such as online safety and present their ideas in assembly. Recently they organised class voting for new playground equipment, using symbols. The children proudly told me the results including a “catcher football net” and “a trampoline – I will jump really high.”

The members of the JLT also told me how they represented the academy at special events, for example, “Poppies – cenotaph – put crosses on poppies.” Another child remembered “Be quiet – 11.00.”

The Safeguarding and Inclusion Lead later told me how proud he was by the way the children spoke to me during our meeting, especially one child who was usually very quiet.

### **Next steps:**

Continue to develop pupil voice including feedback on curriculum areas and development of resources for the new build.

### **Target 3**

**Strengthen distributed leadership approach in line with the current SLT and middle leaders' development.**

Growing from a small staff team, the Headteacher explained how appointing Assistant Headteachers has strengthened the academy's ability to support staff and nurture their potential. Staff at Discovery Academy know that they are valued. They are encouraged to develop their interests and access training – like the children, there is no limit placed on their development if they wish to pursue it. A detailed programme of staff training is available to ensure staff knowledge is up to date. This includes different aspects of SEN, therapies, wellbeing, subject areas, online training. The key training is understanding that behaviour is communication.

Several staff spoke of beginning as a lunchtime supervisor or office volunteer and developing to become care assistants, teaching assistants and permanent admin staff. The Headteacher explained how staff appointed in the early stages of Discovery needed previous experience but as they have grown, it is possible to provide a wide range of development opportunities. Potential is nurtured. The ethos from the Headteacher directly supports growth as she recognises that “we are all human and can falter.” The Assistant Headteacher for Mental Health and Wellbeing described how staff support each other all the time and have recognised the challenges of lockdown. Over 20 staff have signed up for the new course on mindfulness.



## Assessor's Evaluation for the IQM CoE Award



### Next steps:

Develop leadership structure to include the secondary phase,

### Target 4

#### **To continue to develop the pupils' communication skills through effective oracy and development of augmented and alternative communication aids.**

Children use a range of communication tools as part of their daily routine. Visuals are available to provide directions and reminders. Children have their own timetable strip and have readily available visuals to make requests. I observed intensive interaction used for children at the earliest stages of their communication development.

All information and signs in the school combine the written word with a pictorial symbol, for example, Steps to Success posters in each classroom. With verbal children, Makaton and visual supports are always available in recognition of each child's reduced ability to communicate when distressed. There has been a focus on developing communication opportunities outside which will be extended in the new premises.

There is a continual focus on developing oracy by all staff. In the Year 5/Year 6 maths lesson I visited, the teacher supported children to extend their sentences and emphasised appropriate vocabulary, for example, heavy and light. Time was given for children to process their ideas and the quality of the exchanges during Talking Partners reflected the consistent expectations and routines. As they shared what they had learned in maths that day, comments included: "We did the months of the year and I counted." The same focus on vocabulary was evident during assembly. Children waited to tell the teacher what they had seen growing, for example, "I got an apple tree at my dad's greenhouse." One child pointed out that "actually we are growing a big age." The Headteacher asked what 'enthusiasm' meant, receiving the response "Really work hard."

### Next steps:

Communication is well embedded across the academy. Staff need to ensure this continues as they move to the new building.

## Agreed Targets for 2021-2022

The School's targets for this academic year continue to build resilience and confidence in children and their families to ensure children can be part of their community, with friends and interests.

### Target 1

#### **Pupils know they have a voice and will be heard and that they are able to make choices and have independence and control within their lives (agency).**



## Assessor's Evaluation for the IQM CoE Award



All decisions made at Discovery Special Academy are based on what each child will need in their adult life. The Year3/Year 4 class teacher explained how the world was not always a safe place for their children so they “need foundations for the world they are going into. We are always looking to the future – the here and now is influenced by the future.” Opportunities already exist for children to take responsibility, for example, being a Buddy and helping in the playground and lunch hall. Plans include:

- Enabling all children to take part in activities to develop their self-esteem and confidence in their local community.
- Extending links with external groups to promote wider skills and build confidence beyond the safety of the school, for example, the Primary Enterprise Programme delivered by Middlesbrough Football Club. Discovery is the first special school to have taken part.

### Target 2

**Continue to refine and embed the academy's curriculum offer further so that it: continues to develop pupils' learning breadth and depth across the curriculum, allowing pupils the opportunity to understand how to stay safe online and offline (Steps to safety).**

There are ambitious plans to develop the curriculum offer, building on opportunities presented by a new location and extending into secondary education. The impact was already in evidence during my visit:

- Children have been introduced to Steps to Safety – posters are in each classroom with pictorial and written information. Several times children referred to these strategies during my visit. One child told the Deputy Headteacher how he was only watching safe things and that he had checked with an adult. On the playground a child in Year 5 reminded other children that they should not talk to visitors in school when they gathered to meet me.
- It was the beginning of Science Week which was introduced in the school assembly. Great excitement was already in evidence with the hatching of chicks. The new location will extend the Forest School and a wider range of activities for outdoor play.
- Really strong links have been made with the Friends of Nature's World volunteers who already work with the children and have allocated an area for the school to grow plants and vegetables next to the new building.

### Target 3

**Improve further parental engagement in their children's holistic learning journey.**

The academy is currently reinstating the programme of meetings and coffee mornings for parents and carers. Parents usually attend face-to-face reviews for EHCPs with



## Assessor's Evaluation for the IQM CoE Award



interpreters available if needed. The Safeguarding and Inclusion Lead described how coffee mornings provide information in addition to social support by offering topics such as internet safety and personal hygiene. The academy delivers Early Bird training for parents and is planning to offer Teen Life for families with children aged 10 and older. Parents have also supported each other by forming their own WhatsApp groups and organising their own social events, for example, holding a birthday party. The academy is acutely aware of the negative experiences of many families in the school and the overall need for support. One parent told me how much she was looking forward to attending more school events and after-school activities when the school moved.

### Target 4

**To action the development of the secondary phase provision with the Local Authority team including scoping potential sites, development of curriculum and application.**

The Trust has been granted permission by the DfE to extend the academy's provision up to 16 initially, with the further intention of offering education up to 19. The whole school community is excited by the prospect of providing education beyond Year 6, ensuring a smooth transition from the early years to adulthood.

The Headteacher and Deputy Headteacher shared their vision for providing apprenticeships and supported internships in the academy by developing a site for a vocational curriculum including a café, hair salon and shop. Opportunities to provide work experience include working in cafes in special schools and helping at the garden centre close to the new build.

### The Impact of the Cluster Group

The IQM Lead is finding it useful to develop contacts in the Cluster group although all the meetings so far have been held virtually.

**7<sup>th</sup> July 2021 Mental health and wellbeing of pupils as a result of the Covid - 19 pandemic.** This was already a key area in the academy on the recovery plan. Following this meeting the academy introduced therapy dogs.

**17<sup>th</sup> November 2021 Roles, responsibilities and deployment of the SENDCO.** The IQM Lead shared the clear structure of support for pupils with SEND.

**24<sup>th</sup> March 2022.** There will be a tour of Academy 360, Sunderland and a presentation on an area of best practice.



## Assessor's Evaluation for the IQM CoE Award



### Overview

Discovery Special Academy encapsulates the warm heart of a primary school. A relentless determination to ensure each child achieves their full academic potential is combined with a focus on wellbeing and emotional literacy. Independence and responsibility are developed as the key skills to ensure each child can make a full contribution to society. I was overwhelmed by the depth of care and ambition promoted by the Headteacher and Deputy Headteacher in creating an aspirational family for children, parents and staff.

Discovery Academy is a Special Free School which opened in temporary accommodation in September 2018 as part of the Tees Valley Education Multi Academy Trust (TVED MAT). The move to the purpose-built academy will hopefully take place in June 2022. All children at the academy have an Education Health and Care Plan identifying a prime need of severe learning difficulties alongside communication needs, physical, sensory and medical needs. Nursery provision from September 2021 has provided assessment places for 10 pre-school children. The academy has now reached its full capacity from reception to Year 6 with plans in motion to develop secondary provision. Eight languages are spoken in the school including Polish and Urdu.

Each child in the academy is known as an individual and the potential is valued in every single one. The Safeguarding and Inclusion Lead described how “staff really get to know every child – all their quirks and needs.” The curriculum and classes are organised around individuals. Smaller classes for children with significant communication and interaction needs have been set up to ensure access to an appropriate sensory experience. Each classroom I visited presented a warm and welcoming environment, ensuring children were happy, relaxed and safe in their learning. The high level of organisation and presentation supports the children in developing independence, for example, individual trays containing TEACCH activities for each child to access. In Year 5/Year 6, children complete a task before finding their name label to place next to it and photographing it on the iPad.

Each child's needs are displayed in classrooms via a Pen Portrait. Staff have worked together to interpret each EHCP and provide clear statements of how to support each child. Medical needs are responded to immediately by qualified staff and senior leaders. Children with sensory needs have individual programmes and access to sensory resources in their classrooms, for example, therapy peanut balls. One child in a class for more complex communication and interaction needs was holding a battery-powered toothbrush above his ear as the vibrations helped him self-regulate.

Discovery Academy has leased its own minibus which has opened up a new world for the children to explore, including the local museum and visiting sensory play areas. Children are able to attend external events including singing in the choir at the Parish Church of Guisborough. The new location for the academy will open up a whole new wealth of experiences and opportunities for extending links with the community. Pride in the children's achievements is evident throughout the academy. The Assistant Head for Wellbeing described how a child had told her “I held his hand like you told me to” in the playground.



## Assessor's Evaluation for the IQM CoE Award



In Year 5/Year 6, children were chosen to receive Maths Magician stickers. Children have the opportunity to reward another child in class to acknowledge each other's skills. The IQM Lead explained how displays are for the children so they can see their achievements. Photographs in classrooms and corridors capture children deeply engaged in their learning and wider experiences. In the hall are large photos of children who have been awarded Explorer of the Week and children referred to them as they spoke to me. Every space is utilised including the library which runs along a corridor with artwork linked to stories, promoting a love of reading. The lending library system is based on picture labels so children can borrow books independently.

Celebration assembly demonstrated the flexible, responsive approach and the family spirit. Classes filed into the hall to listen to the Headteacher, watching a power point containing pictorial symbols. One child sat in the doorway alongside an adult as they obviously found the busy hall too overwhelming. During assembly, a small number of children ran around or became upset and were quickly and quietly supported by staff. The children receiving certificates were obviously pleased and the other children clapped enthusiastically. Everyone clapped quietly for a child who was already feeling distressed. The joy of the song was magical as all children and staff joined in by signing and singing.

As a special school, there is an expectation of inclusion inherent in its focus. Senior leaders at Discovery, however, continue to explore the concept in depth to unpick its full impact within their school community. Books are planned to reflect all ethnic groups and festivals are celebrated such as Black History Month. Each classroom has its own reading area displaying a wide range of multi-ethnic images and contexts. Home corners have a range of multicultural food. Dolls reflect the needs of the children, for example, one child with Down Syndrome was connecting with a doll with Down Syndrome. Transition is planned to ensure children feel safe and secure whilst their parents and carers are fully aware of what happens in school and are kept in regular contact. Whilst starting the academy includes home visits and welcome packs, this year every child will need supporting to make the transition to the new building. It is hoped to take place in June to provide time for children to be introduced to their new home before the summer holidays. The Safeguarding and Inclusion Lead explained how any child needing extra support for transition would be invited to the summer school programme in weeks 4 and 5 of the summer break.

Safeguarding is promoted with all staff and children. Nearly 10% of children are on Child Protection plans whilst an additional 23% of families are regularly monitored. Discovery Academy plays a central role in supporting social care and takes the lead in referring to a wide range of agencies including medical and psychological support. The Headteacher has advised the LA on social care thresholds for children with disabilities which resulted in a change of approach.

Relationships with parents are regarded as a particular strength of the academy. The Headteacher emphasised that parents needed to be shown ways their child could achieve within the reality of their limitations. The website includes photos and videos to celebrate the children and model how to share stories and support learning. Coffee mornings are held regularly and parents attend Stay and Share sessions. As the majority of children travel to Discovery by bus or taxi, contact with families is often made by





## Assessor's Evaluation for the IQM CoE Award



phone calls. Showbie, a newly introduced app, enables staff to share little messages and videos with parents who can respond and add their own photos. Office staff have supported parents to learn how to access it on their phones.

Parents and carers I spoke to could not praise Discovery Academy highly enough, describing it as “a brilliant school.” Special touches included the use of a home-school book which enabled staff and family to record what the child has enjoyed, eaten, toilet routine etc. Another mentioned feeling at ease speaking to staff as they used their first names. “It makes you want to be open up,” she explained, before adding “The children are blessed to have staff like that. All they want is for your child to succeed.” It was clear that staff in all their different roles enjoy their jobs. One TA described immediately feeling part of the family. Another spoke of everyone being willing to show you the ropes and help each other. The Safeguarding and Inclusion Lead encapsulated the overall view stating it is “more of a family community than a school. We all intermingle and everyone helps each other.” He concluded “It is a privilege to work with these children – they are amazing.”

A special mention is needed for the warm welcome I received from everyone in the academy – every single member of the staff team, the parents and the amazing children. The older children had lots of questions to ask and were extremely sociable. Many children smiled and said goodbye as they left the assembly. None of the children seemed to be unsettled by my visit.

Discovery Special Academy fully deserves to retain its Centre of Excellence Award following the updating of their Action Plan with new targets. Ambition and high expectations are in evidence throughout the academy and children, staff and families have risen to this challenge. The next few years will be extremely exciting as the staff and children move to their new building and extend into nursery and secondary provision. The Headteacher and Deputy Headteacher continue to create far-reaching plans to ensure their children can take their place in society. Their vision of inclusion is an aspirational example for everyone.

**Assessor: Ms Sylvia Cramp**

**Findings confirmed by Inclusion Quality Mark (UK) Ltd:**

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