



## Assessor's Evaluation for the IQM CoE Award



**School** Discovery Special Academy  
Sandy Flatts Lane  
Acklam  
Middlesbrough, TSS 7YN

**Head/Principal** Ms Jennifer Duncan

**IQM Lead** Ms Ann Titchener

**Date of Review** 26<sup>th</sup> February 2024

**Assessor** Ms Annette Sowden

### **IQM Cluster Programme**

**Cluster Group** Trail Blazers

**Ambassador** Ms Rachel Campbell

**Next Meeting** 24<sup>th</sup> June

**Meeting Focus** TBC

### **Cluster Attendance**

<b>Term</b>	<b>Date</b>	<b>Attendance</b>
<b>Autumn 2022</b>	6 <sup>th</sup> October 2022	Yes
<b>Spring 2023</b>	26 <sup>th</sup> April 2023	Yes
<b>Summer 2023</b>	26 <sup>th</sup> June 2023	No
<b>Autumn 2023</b>	9 <sup>th</sup> October 2023	Yes
<b>Spring 2024</b>	11 <sup>th</sup> March 2024	

## **Summary of Targets from 2021-2022**

### **Target 1:**

*Establish high quality secondary provision by continuing to embed the year 7/8 curriculum and further developing the curriculum from year 9 to year 11, including a comprehensive approach to work experience, employment and enterprise.*

Extensive work has been carried out by the Head of School and one of the Assistant Headteachers, both of whom were originally secondary teachers. They are at present extending the curriculum for year nine pupils at the same time drafting progression through to year eleven. The extension for the secondary building should be completed ready for the academic year 2024-2025.



## Assessor's Evaluation for the IQM CoE Award



The overarching theme of the curriculum throughout the school is Preparing for Adulthood- PFA. From the moment the children enter the school their journey starts with the end in mind, that of being an adult with independence skills, who is socially able to maintain friendships as well as have financial and work skills.

Whole academy enterprise projects take place at Christmas and end of the summer term. At Christmas all pupils were involved in creating items to sell, older pupils were involved in selling the items at the events and totalling funds raised. Each class was then able to vote to decide on a new toy/item for their classroom which was purchased with the money raised. Pupils have taken part in a range of enterprise and STEM events with Teesside University to develop enterprise skills and develop confidence.

A careers overview is in place and uploaded on the website. A Careers and Enterprise co-ordinator has supported the academy with its self-assessment for the Gatsby benchmark. It evidences that this aspect of the curriculum is developing well and providing a strong foundation for pupils. The academy has been linked with an enterprise advisor from a local business to further support the careers provision. The academy has purchased Talentino, a programme for careers education, which has a SEND specific programme of teaching and resources.

Links have been established with Priory Woods School another local special school, to support their post 16 pupils with work experience opportunities continues. This is also supporting raising aspirations amongst our pupils.

Internal work experience within the nursery and in the dining hall continues to provide real life experience for pupils, in addition to the enterprise events.

Year 7 have adapted the steps to safety to make online safety more prominent and online safety continues to be a focus with all pupils across the academy.

### Next Steps:

- Continue to develop the careers programme into year 9+.
- Consider how Compass benchmark 2 can be addressed to bring it up to 100%.
- Continued development of the curriculum into year 9+.
- Further develop work experience opportunities.

### Target 2:

*Raise understanding amongst staff and parents to support good attendance.*

The school have worked closely with parents and carers regarding attendance. Consequently, the attendance stands at 94.1% at the present moment, which is 8% above the national average for this time of year. Their persistent absence is 8% lower than the national average for attendance below 90%. The 90% for persistent absence has been set by the Trust. Some of the absence is due to medical issues.



## Assessor's Evaluation for the IQM CoE Award



Talking to parents they stated that their children loved coming to school. During weeks four and five of the summer break the staff run a two-week summer school, which is very well attended. One parent said her child really enjoys the summer school and needs it because he responds well to the structure of school and being with his friends. The catchment for the school is large with some pupils traveling in excess of twenty miles so time spent with their friends is very important.

### Next Step:

- Share the work the school does on parental engagement with the Trust and through the LA to other Special provisions. The level of communication and engagement with parents and carers and being there with help and advice has enabled the school to achieve a high level of attendance.
- Continue to embed and develop the graduated approach to attendance that Ofsted highlighted as being particularly successful and responsive to the needs and context of the children and the school.
- Ensure the website Attendance page is regularly updated with the latest Government rulings regarding attendance as this is constantly evolving.

### Target 3:

*To ensure a consistent and sequential approach to the teaching of mathematics to support progress of all pupil groups across the academy including EAL, and disadvantaged.*

Planning review of all phases of the academy (SLT) is regularly undertaken by leaders in school. Planning documents and long-term plans for maths reviewed and finalised to inform future planning.

CPD (Continuing Professional Development) has been delivered to enhance teacher knowledge of concrete, pictorial and abstract approaches (including examples of how to plan for area provision). Learning walks and Evidence for learning reviews have been conducted following this to monitor the impact.

Data is closely monitored to ensure there is no ongoing pattern of decline in the progress of all pupils, including disadvantaged pupils, and those with EAL. MAPP targets are reviewed by SLT to ensure mathematical development is appropriate and challenging. Focussed monitoring of key groups and individual pupils in mathematics takes place half termly (pupil progress meetings). This is as well as moderation being timetabled into the academy assessment schedule at academy and Trust level.

The academy maths lead monitor and mentor staff where required including organising ECTs to visit to other classes and special schools with focus on mathematical teaching and provision.



## Assessor's Evaluation for the IQM CoE Award



Maths is promoted on the academy website with support offered to parents/ carers. Maths is celebrated as part of the academy galleries and is visible throughout the academy.

Using and applying statements have been incorporated to number and shape, space & measure PIVATS documentation to ensure the application of knowledge and skills is applied and embedded in a range of contexts. Calculation policies have been reviewed and shared with staff linking to other mathematical documentation.

Next Step:

- Continue to track progress of all pupils alongside their personalised targets.
- Continue to develop, and then implement, accreditation routes for all year 9+ pupils.

### Target 4:

*Continue the consistent and sequential approach to the teaching of reading and phonics throughout the academy, fostering a love of reading by all.*

Reading is a passion through the school to the point the school have purchased 'indestructible books' these are rip-proof (and I tried), waterproof and can't be destroyed by chewing. This allows all pupils regardless of need to access books. Throughout the library, which is extremely inviting with arm decorations, soft lighting cushions and tents, and the classrooms, you will find books in different languages and about different faiths and cultures displayed and readily available.

Phonics is taught in very small and sometimes individual groups, with ten-minute sessions throughout the day to develop confidence and enjoyment in learning to read. Some of the sessions take place in break out rooms where there are several resources to assist pupil learning, for example large 'peanuts' to roll and re-regulate on when situations become a little stressful.

The sister of one staff member is a local author and she has been into school numerous times to share her books with the children. This enables the children to meet authors work with them and see that local people or people they know can be authors.

Staff upload videos of the class staff reading the class text. This has had a very positive impact on parental reading at home. It illustrates how to read a story to child and also allows the videos to be shared to help with 'talk about books'.

Next Step:

- Look at a possible Online Christmas Story Advent Calendar. All staff and local people the school engages with could read a Christmas story each night and these can be shared at home.



## Assessor's Evaluation for the IQM CoE Award



- Look into the possibility of a sponsored Reading Challenge with a company such as Osbourne Books who will double the amount raised so the school can add to their classroom and library collections.
- Continue to track progress of all pupils alongside their personalised targets.
- Continue to develop, and then implement, accreditation routes for all year 9+ pupils.

### Agreed Targets for 2022-2023

#### **Target 1**

*Audit of current provision and practice to identify strengths and areas for development.*

- Learning walks built into monitoring overview (indoor and outdoor).
- Clear expectations and deadlines given regarding displays and classrooms.
- Communication Audit completed by each class team and reviewed with SLT – actions and follow up.
- Staff / Pupil/ Parent consultation.
- Action plan to be developed for project.

#### **Comments**

This is ongoing but the pupil and staff representatives spoken to all feel they have a say in decisions that are being made in regard to the Flagship Project.

Throughout the school the work on display is having an impact on the pupils and staff confidence. There are communication stations at regular points in all corridors. Feedback is extremely positive on how these are helping pupils communicate when they are in or coming out of a period of crisis. In all rooms are the word of the day for that room with the associated Makaton sign, this allows staff entering the room to ask the children to reinforce.

#### **Target 2**

*Range of research to be carried out 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, regulation.*

- The Head of the Academy is part of the LA strategic PfA group and has shared good practice from the academy.
- CPD Trauma Informed Practice had been delivered by Lynn Burt -Trauma informed practice lead for Tees Valley Education Trust, for all members of academy staff through rolling programme plus whole school CPD.
- The SLT have organised visits to other settings, both specialist and mainstream, for staff to gain ideas/inspiration.



## Assessor's Evaluation for the IQM CoE Award



- To grow the external environment to enhance the curriculum staff and pupils have worked with Pentagon Play to develop ambitious plan for outside field area. As these are extensive and costly a plan has been drawn up to be implemented in stages throughout next three years.
- Two members of staff attended IQM cluster meetings to hear good practice which can be implemented in developments and designs.
- Continue to explore and develop approaches to Mental Health and well-being for all.
- Planning review of all phases of the academy (SLT) is regularly undertaken by leaders in school. Planning documents and long-term plans for maths reviewed and finalised to inform future planning.
- CPD (Continuing Professional Development) has been delivered to enhance teacher knowledge of concrete, pictorial and abstract approaches (including examples of how to plan for area provision). Learning walks and Evidence for learning reviews have been conducted following this to monitor the impact.
- Data is closely monitored to ensure there is no ongoing pattern of decline in the progress of all pupils, including disadvantaged pupils, and those with EAL. MAPP targets are reviewed by SLT to ensure mathematical development is appropriate and challenging. Focussed monitoring of key groups and individual pupils in mathematics takes place half termly (pupil progress meetings). This is as well as moderation being timetabled into the academy assessment schedule at academy and Trust level.
- The academy maths lead monitor and mentor staff where required including organising ECTs to visit to other classes and special schools with focus on mathematical teaching and provision.
- Maths is promoted on the academy website with support offered to parents/ carers. Maths is celebrated as part of the academy galleries and is visible throughout the academy.
- Using and applying statements have been incorporated to number and shape, space & measure PIVATS documentation to ensure the application of knowledge and skills is applied and embedded in a range of contexts. Calculation policies have been reviewed and shared with staff linking to other mathematical documentation.

### Comments

Another aspect of the project that is ongoing. Being a standard item on staff meeting agendas ensure that research findings are shared with all staff either through internal training, Trust training or external deliverers. National College is a platform that all staff are encouraged to use to 'self-develop' their pedagogy.



## Assessor's Evaluation for the IQM CoE Award



### Target 3

*Develop CPD package for whole academy to support knowledge and understanding.*

- Leaders (Trauma Informed Practice)
- Staff (Trauma Informed Practice)
- Outdoor provision
- Environments
- Emotional regulation
- Communication
- Treetops/therapies
- LTS training

### Comments

Investment in all staff is highly regarded. The belief that all are an asset and as such be invested in is evident through the CPD programme the school has and continues to develop. Staff are highly appreciative and feel valued hence are totally committed to the school. There is a large staff room that is designed to help and reflect wellbeing. In one corner is a single comfy chair used by a member of staff who wishes to be in the staff room but really likes to sit on edge of the group. Along with the curriculum this is an area that is constantly evolving and being refined in response to staff voice and school need.

### Target 4

*Implementation – complete staged action plan of environment development, refining and reviewing during process.*

- Shared learning spaces – review and development of spaces to meet needs of classes.
- Communication audit actions/development areas implemented.
- Farm/ horticulture area developed, then established and used by all pupils.
- Development of field area in stages.
- Continued development of playgrounds.
- Curriculum development to support pupils to access the different outdoor environments with purpose and focus, ensuring PfA themes are effectively supported and developed.

### Comments

The enthusiasm for this project is palpable. All staff and pupils speak with excitement of its impact. The chicken sheds have been erected and 'fox-proof' fencing has been installed.

The plans for the playground to improve and aid with physical development are displayed and staff have a programme of installation.

This is an ambitious project but the rewards will be extensive for the holistic approach to education that the school advocates.





## Assessor's Evaluation for the IQM CoE Award



### The Impact of the Cluster Group (with details of the impact of last three meetings)

Date of Meeting	Location of Meeting	Topic(s)	Outcome(s) for School
26 <sup>th</sup> April 2023	Thorntree Academy	Attendance, transition and interventions	Opportunities to share ideas regarding external providers to support secondary students preparing for adulthood was valuable. Some ideas from the meeting were explored, particularly in empowering boys. We have used Karate Chris and are currently exploring Commando Joe.
9 <sup>th</sup> October 2023	Ponteland Primary School	Adaptations to curriculum/behaviour systems for children with unmet needs and challenging behaviour - what are you putting in place? How do you support transition for these pupils?	Considering different ways of implementing strategies to aid with communicating emotions. <b><i>Implemented and visible in corridors and rooms.</i></b>
27.11.23	Birmingham	National Inclusion conference	An informative day. Classroom based interventions gave us some approaches to discuss; Blanks approach to language and learning is being adopted in the academy. CPD taking place for all teaching staff Spring term. Attendees talked animatedly about this approach.

### Overview

My arrival at Discovery Academy set the tone for the day and immediately illustrated the inclusive ethos of the school. As I visited the cloakroom prior to entering the main building there was a notice on the wall that simply told you to 'Breathe and take a moment.' For a parent or carer who may have been having a fraught day or morning, that may have been just the thing they needed to help them calm themselves and take stock before they met to discuss their child 's progress or needs.

When you enter the main building, you are greeted by a beautiful large tank and an overwhelming sense of calm and quietness. That is not to say incidents don't happen, they do, but the staff have a very calm manner of dealing with things.

Moving through the school and its grounds you see that Discovery Special Academy and the Trust recognise the uniqueness of every child and promotes inclusion through their





## Assessor's Evaluation for the IQM CoE Award



holistic approach. The leaders involve staff, pupils, and parents to understand the school's vision and (deservedly) are proud of their school and what it offers its pupils and families. Leaders share clearly that their mission is to serve their community within the building and the local area. Documentation refers to their priority for all children achieving their full potential. The staff see that adapting teaching to support children to learn effectively in all areas, is their job and they actively seek the support of each other and outside agencies.

Staff across school are passionate about supporting all children and everything they do places the children firmly at the centre. Staff work as a close team and feel trusted to work for the good of all. They are innovative in their approach to supporting the needs of children. The clear systems and processes evidenced in their daily day-to-day practice make school a calm place to learn and work.

The school is keen to ensure the whole child is nurtured and has a robust personal development offer and children have a strong sense of belonging. The children said that they love their school, they have a strong voice - one member of the Junior Leadership Team proudly told me that their role was to tell the teachers what they think the school needs like new bikes and then they do it. When asked what they liked about their school the instant answer from one child was 'they meet your medical needs'. This may sound strange but when a child has such serious medical needs it is important that they feel cared for and they trust the staff with their personal and intimate care. The Junior Leadership were also proud of the jobs they have in school such as Lunchtime Buddies. As part of the Buddy System, they had lanyards and hats so children could spot them. Their job was to help the staff and to pour drinks and to sit with people whilst they ate their lunches. One child was very excited by the after school and lunchtime clubs their school had. She could play football and do Yoga.

Having an holistic approach to ensure the children made progress socially and emotionally as well as academically was evident and underpinned every decision the school leaders and staff made.

Parents are extremely supportive and appreciative of the work of the school. One parent said of the staff 'It's like having another parent for my child'. Another said, 'Everything I need is here from the staff because through their support they know the children better than we do'. Through the work of the Pastoral Team the school is keen to continue to encourage parents to play a part in school life. Their Early Bird Programme for children under the age of five, supported by the National Autism Society, is proving very successful at helping to totally embed parental engagement. This warm welcome into the family of Discovery Special Academy starts with a programme that runs over ten weeks. Two places are offered to each family and provides parents and carers with strategies to help children with autism. It also affords opportunities to network and to realise they are not alone. The last group formed their own WhatsApp group and arranged playdates outside of school for the children. The school website is an extremely comprehensive window into the daily life and working of the school and communicates the important messages of welcome and belonging. Communication with parents is vital therefore is very strong. The pastoral team work tirelessly to ensure parents are supported, through events such as regular coffee



## Assessor's Evaluation for the IQM CoE Award



mornings during which they host a 'thrift shop'. Staff help parents' complete applications for disability allowances and to highlight aid available in the community. One major 'aid' staff provide is to help parents of children in year six apply for a secondary place. The children must apply for a mainstream school place along with a place in Y7 at Discovery Special Academy and this can prove to be traumatic for some parents.

One aspect of support that the school staff work hard on is changing the conversation and belief around having a social worker. For some families, prior experience or even childhood experience can make involvement of a social worker to be seen as a negative. Having established strong bonds with the families they are able to work with them to see the benefits and need of social worker involvement.

A connection with the Family Foundation enables some of the parents to have access to a caravan for a family holiday. For those parents really struggling, the school can arrange food vouchers. School leaders and staff recognise that working in partnership with parents is key to ensuring successful outcomes for children however small they may be. The staff know the pupils well therefore learning programmes are personalised to include a range of therapies.

The school's core purpose is to support and develop all their children through a planned curriculum and ethos that expands and explores. The staff welcome all its children and ensures their and their family's needs are well supported. Leaders make it clear that the school's core purpose is to work to support all pupils and their families and carers. They work hard to make sure pupils receive the support they need so they can achieve their full potential. They recognise that sometimes support needs to be gained from outside of school and work effectively to find the additional expertise and support within the Trust and the Council. Curriculum plans, pupil profiles, therapeutic support plans and the warm relationships observed all evidence the excellent work in making sure each child is valued and cared for.

The curriculum is tailor made for the children within the school. The staff have arranged groupings on formal and semi formal basis. Children who are able to access the national curriculum do so in the more formalised classroom bases. For others whose needs are greater, their curriculum is less formal with a great emphasis on social and emotional development. One parent voiced their greatest desire was that their child grew into an adult that had friends and could go out to the pub and have a social life and cope.

The secondary curriculum PFA – Preparing for Adulthood at its heart, with the aim of enabling pupils to mature with financial knowledge, independence, skills and strategies to help build and sustain social relationships. The Head of School and Secondary Leader have designed the curriculum to ensure learners are given opportunities to explore themes and expand their knowledge. Afternoons are planned thematically on physical development, Creative Arts, Social and Cultural, STEM and Community Engagement. The final being targeted towards careers and enterprise skills. Two programmes are used to enrich pupil knowledge in writing CVs and what a job is.



## Assessor's Evaluation for the IQM CoE Award



Cultural capital experiences are well planned because the staff realise how difficult it can be for families of children with additional needs to access experiences outside of school. Whilst the parents mentioned the great experiences the children are given, they wished for more. They stated that whilst some venues offer quieter sessions for neurodiverse children, they were either early on a morning or around 6.30 pm and who wants to get their child all excited and hyper then fight to try and get them to sleep. They said it had a huge knock-on effect on the family that day and the next as they had the aftermath of little sleep etc. All staff feel that it is important to provide opportunities for children to take part and experience events in the local community and beyond. Links to curriculum subjects ensure visits complement and enhance learning, provide memorable experiences, and help children to place their learning in context. They are working with the wider community to get people involved in a community garden and were actively approaching companies to ask for volunteers with time and expertise to help.

The leadership team recognises that every member of staff has an important role to play in the development of the school and its ethos, from supporting parents' carers and guardians and appreciates the work of everyone in supporting families. There is very much a 'village' around each child and their family at Discovery Academy. Staff were steadfast in their belief that it was not only the pupils and family that were supported but they themselves. Several of the Teaching Assistants had started as parents and moved on to being helpers and lunchtime staff before moving into teaching assistant roles. Two staff moved from parent to teacher through support of the school and its mission to be fully inclusive of all learners. One teaching assistant mentioned how she had started on supply and after a number of weeks became anxious that if she had to leave, she wouldn't find a post that she enjoyed as much as she did at Discovery. She was delighted when a permanent post became available and was able to stay. There is very much a feeling of everyone being involved in decision making and that everyone 'was an asset and treated as one'. Staff stated that whilst there was a hierarchy in roles, there wasn't a hierarchy as all staff were asked for their opinions and for advice as they knew the children so well. They appreciated that the Senior Leaders rolled up their sleeves and 'got stuck in'.

The leaders see no job as too big or too small and the emphasis on positive relationships ensures for a harmonious school where people feel valued and appreciated. You leave Discovery Special Academy feeling that it is a haven of calm and hope for children who have special needs. You appreciate the processes they operate so that wherever a child is in the building they know what to expect. The corridors allow them to re-regulate should they go into crisis as there are resources at several points. These stations have communication aids, toys to calm and equipment to appeal to a child needing a sensory break allowing any adult to interact with the child in a moment of need. The large sensory room is amazing with equipment to permit every child in the building 'therapy'.

Within the community the school is working tirelessly with local businesses to make a chicken run and a community garden. They fervently believe that the child's development is hugely enhanced by working outside and caring for plants and animals. They have plans for a school farm and already have a list of the animals they would like



## Assessor's Evaluation for the IQM CoE Award



the children to care for. The enterprise element of the garden and the farm will go a long way to embedding the Preparing for Adulthood trajectory the children are on.

The school does a significant amount of outreach work within the Trust and with the local authority. It started as a Free School with a small number of pupils and, through a growing reputation, has grown rapidly over the past two years. Its aim is to extend through to Sixth Form. This is a heartfelt desire of many of the parents.

I would like to thank the staff and pupils for a wonderful day and sharing their love and enthusiasm for Discovery Special Academy.

The school continues to move from strength to strength in terms of its superb inclusive practice and I am firmly of the opinion that the school fully meets the standard required by the Inclusion Quality Mark to pursue Flagship School status. I therefore recommend that the school moves to 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: Annette Sowden**

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

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