



Assessor's Evaluation for the IQM CoE Award



School Name Nettlesworth Primary School
 Nettlesworth
 Chester-le-Street
 County Durham
 DH2 3PF

Head/Principal Mrs Donna Lee

IQM Lead Mrs Donna Lee

Date of Review 13th March 2026

Assessor Ms Mandy Elkin

IQM Cluster Programme

Cluster Group Trail Blazers

Ambassador Ms Annette Sowden

Cluster Attendance:

Term	Date	Attendance
Spring 2025	10 th March 2025	Yes
Summer 2025	3 rd July 2025	Yes
Autumn 2025	22 nd September 2025	Yes
Spring 2026	9 th March 2026	Yes
Summer 2026	26th June 2026	-



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

Summer 2025

The hub meeting was replaced by attendance at the IQM Conference at Sunderland University. Sessions attended included Jon Tait from Northern Arch Learning Partnership (Engaging with Parents), Steve Waters from Teach Well Toolkit (Workload Control and Beyond: addressing burnout in inclusive classrooms), and Sarah Martin-Denham (Sharing approaches to prevent exclusion and school-based anxiety).

Information from these workshops was taken back to school and discussed with staff. Focus was given to how work fosters alignment between school learning practices and home routines and identified sources of teacher stress. Strategies were implemented to promote staff mental health and inclusive alternatives to exclusion were also discussed.

Autumn 2025

Ouston Primary School hosted the autumn meeting. The focus was on racism, Alternative Provision, and support for children. Discussions held with staff regarding the impact of racism on student, on how racism can lead to lower self-esteem, disengagement, and academic underachievement. Information was shared with staff on education provided outside mainstream schools for students who cannot attend due to exclusion, illness, or other reasons.



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Evidence

This was Nettlesworth Primary's third annual review as a Centre for Excellence. An incredibly detailed evaluation of the current year's action plan had been submitted, and the timetable for the day facilitated appraisal of supporting documentation, and discussions with a variety of stakeholders.

It was therefore possible to review progress towards the Centre of Excellence action points and the school's on-going commitment to the 8 IQM elements. In addition, the proposed Flagship project was put into context and discussed in further detail.

Evidence included:

- An evaluated Centre of Excellence (Yr 3) Action plan
- School Website
- School Improvement Plan
- Assessment and Moderation timetable
- Lesson plans and children's workbooks.
- Careers Project outline and details of training.
- Investing in Children report.
- Rights Respecting School Gold Award evidence.
- School Belonging Research Project outline
- Learning walk
- Lesson observations
- Observations at lunchtime and playtime.

Discussions with:

- Headteacher/SENDCo
- Deputy head (Y6 teacher)
- EYFS teacher/Assistant SENDCo
- Teaching Assistants
- Pupils
- Parents / Governors



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Evaluation of Targets for last 12 Months

Target 1: To take part in a pilot programme partnership with Northeast Local Enterprise Partnership (NELEP) to strengthen careers guidance for pupils and help open their eyes to the range of possibilities their futures hold.

The focus of this project is to identify and promote links between careers and skills developed within the school curriculum. As part of this, pupils could meet real people with real jobs - from their school community and beyond, to learn more about, not just the current employment of these individuals, but their journey to it. As part of these experiences, stereotypes are challenged, bias reduced, and aspirations raised. Having registered with the "Start Small, Dream Big" project, the headteacher has completed all training modules, delivered by Teach First. These have been shared with staff, giving teachers the knowledge and skills needed to incorporate Career Related Learning into every classroom and every part of the school curriculum. Key skills for employment such as teamwork, communication and problem solving are identified and developed in lesson plans, and in the overall ethos of the school. In addition, links between specific academic skills such as numeracy, writing, or oracy and a range of relevant careers are routinely planned for and discussed with pupils during lessons.

This is a whole school philosophy, starting in Early Years, where each learning area links to careers, e.g. statements such as "I could be a writer" "I could be an engineer" are displayed in the mark making and construction areas. Year 6 pupils were excited to talk about their upcoming "Come dine with me" event, organised as part of their class project "Bloodheart." Having learnt about healthy foods, the class have been tasked to work in groups to plan and produce a healthy three course meal, working to a budget, factoring in time restraints and health and safety considerations. Invitations have been designed and distributed, and RSVPs collated. A wide range of skills and talents has been used, drawing on the strengths of each individual child. The diversity of potential careers linked to each aspect of this challenge has been fully explored, and many biases, particularly gender stereotyping, robustly challenged.

Every class has at least one "career experience" each term – some of these from the local community such as the vicar, or Police Community Support Officer (PCSO) as well as parents, ex-pupils, and students from Durham University. A key learning point from these experiences is to illustrate that the journey to a chosen career may not be straightforward. Pupils have met people who left school having passed few exams, then went to college later to obtain the qualifications they needed. Others have worked for years in one career, then changed to something completely different. Pupils are helped to understand that determination and resilience over time can facilitate positive and exciting career choices and changes. They are encouraged to "dream big," and to believe that their dreams can be achieved.

Next Steps:

To identify more potential local employers and virtual opportunities for career encounters. Lead practitioner to attend upcoming sessions on Career Related Learning (CRL) and share insights.



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Target 2: To further well-being for all parts of the school community, including consideration of workload.

Well-being may be defined as “feeling good and functioning well physically, mentally and socially.” It is a priority at Nettlesworth Primary, and this is apparent on entering the building. The school aims to work “as a family, where everyone is cared for,” and discussions with pupils, staff and parents confirm that it is successful in this aim.

Doors open early (8.30am) each morning, and children are invited to come straight into school, rather than congregate in the yard. Currently all class teachers are available to parents for a “quiet word,” to pass on information or voice concerns. This is valued by parents, who feel listened to, and reassured that any issues will be addressed in a timely and appropriate manner. The early start is also a valuable time for pupils who may be dysregulated at the start of the school day. Time is given for calming activities, and the opportunity to discuss any feelings of anxiety.

There are regular “check-ins” throughout the day for all pupils. These are an integrated part of every class timetable, not just for those children with identified emotional needs. The vocabulary used to describe and express feelings is taught and developed as appropriate for each class, alongside the use of resources such as feelings fans and story stones. More informal check-ins occur throughout the day. Every member of staff knows every child in the school, and understands their needs, whether these are on-going, or more transient. Children are fully aware of the role of the Peer Mentors, explaining that “You can talk to them if you have a worry.” The purpose of the “Worry Box” was also described in detail, pupils being clear that any worry placed in the box would be addressed and “you will get some help to sort it out.”

Staff feel well supported both professionally and personally. Teaching and support staff work together as a team, with every member of the team clear on their role and its value. Information sharing is effective which facilitates seamless transition between groups, classes, and year groups. The headteacher operates an open-door policy and solutions to any issues raised are sensitive, practical, and constructive.

Parents describe the school as a “welcoming, nurturing space,” with excellent communication between parents and staff. The visibility of staff at the main door every morning is appreciated, as is the prompt response to emails or requests for meetings. The school is an important part of the village community, where parents have full confidence in the staff, and their willingness to support not just the pupils of the school, but also their families.

Next Steps:

To continue to audit workload and well-being. To simplify marking and feedback strategies, reducing paperwork and duplication by using digital tools effectively. Prioritize CPD on well-being. Create peer-support networks or mentoring systems. Include pupils and parents in future discussions about well-being initiatives.



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Target 3: To continue to provide more opportunities for access to formal qualification and accreditation routes across all staff groups.

The staff at Nettlesworth Primary provide the best possible school experience for their pupils, and keen to access all available opportunities for additional training and qualifications that will facilitate this goal. Leaders have developed a rigorous training programme which identifies specific training for individual needs, development of subject knowledge across every curriculum area, and progression routes for middle and senior leaders.

Available routes to further qualifications and accreditation are continuously highlighted, and useful links have been forged with providers such as local universities, online platforms, and other training providers.

Training needs are identified through performance management discussions, and managers take responsibility for enrolling staff on courses. The expertise of subject leaders is fully utilised to provide tailored support to teachers, identifying and sharing good practice effectively. Leaders access effective CPD to ensure knowledge and skills in areas beyond their current teaching experience are developed. By doing so, staff can be supported effectively in all areas, and succession planning can be secured.

Key teachers and teaching assistants are supported with opportunities for specific training and professional development relevant to individual children or groups. This is a flexible, supportive process which enhances professional development whilst addressing specific training needs.

There is a robust appraisal process to ensure that additional training and qualifications improve practice and student outcomes. All governors have responsibility for given subject areas and commit to at least two monitoring opportunities each year. They are rigorous in their approach to school improvement by holding leaders to account for the quality of education. The headteacher holds half termly discussion with subject leads to evaluate the impact of their work on raising standards and pupils' achievement and through this, also evaluate the effectiveness of teachers' training and qualifications. Supervision by subject leads provides tailored support to teachers, resulting in the quality of teaching being consistently strong across the school and performance data for children being in line with, or better than, targets.

Next Steps:

Continue to highlight available qualifications (including NPQs, Levels 3 & 4 TA courses, SEND specialisms. Continue to explore and develop progression routes for teaching and non-teaching staff. Explore apprenticeship levy, CPD budgets and external grants. Allocate time for study within workload planning. Provide access to resources (library, online learning tools). Track participation and completion rates. Continue to assess how qualifications improve practice and student outcomes.



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Target 4: To develop sensory areas in each classroom for children to go to when they need space to regulate.

Emotional well-being is a priority at this school, and this is evident in every classroom and corridor. Each child is treated a unique individual known by all the adults in the school, and most of the other children.

Strategies and resources to facilitate successful self-regulation are part of the school day, and most importantly, are accessed by every pupil, every day. Staff recognise that most interventions and resources introduced for a specific individual or group will, in fact, benefit many other children who may successfully mask some degree of additional need daily. By making resources such as feelings fans, visual timetables, and fidget toys accessible to everyone, any stigma in using them is removed.

In all classrooms each child has a special folder containing items identified as being helpful to them, i.e. selected for specific and individual needs. These may include coloured overlays, number lines, or individualised spelling/grammar reminders. A pot in the middle of each table holds additional resources such as left-handed scissors and finger spacers as well as the usual pens, pencil, and rulers.

Check-ins with feelings fans, and regulation strategies such as brain gym, are also timetabled into the school day.

The number of children accessing these resources, and the positive impact evidenced from the regulation strategies already in place has highlighted a growing need, and the development of a sensory area in every classroom is a response to this. Schools with nurture hubs have been visited to research how best to use limited space and explore the most appropriate resources.

Staff have been hugely imaginative in creating sensory areas in corners, alcoves, and cubbyholes, each one easily accessible, yet discreetly positioned within the classroom. In addition, the positioning, style, and materials used to create and resource each sensory area have been designed with children in mind. There is a space-themed area in one classroom, a fairy tale, princess-like themed corner in another, to encourage those children with high need to use the area and feel comfortable within it.

The impact of these areas has been monitored and assessed over time. Children are fully aware of the sensory areas and their purpose. Staff report a reduction in emotional outbursts, replaced instead by requests from pupils to access the areas appropriately, demonstrating improved self-regulation.

Next Steps:

To provide further training for staff on how to support pupils to use the areas effectively. Gather feedback from staff and pupils to identify any adjustments needed. Plan for regular updates to resources based on pupil need. Track pupil engagement and outcomes. Continue to network with other schools for best practices and latest ideas.



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Agreed Actions for Flagship Project

Project Title: Cosy Cove Nurturing Room Development

Context:

This project has developed from the successful implementation of sensory areas in each classroom, and the school's on-going commitment to the emotional well-being of their pupils. A detailed planning and needs analysis were conducted, which included pupil voice and staff input, to ensure an explicit understanding of existing need, and gaps in provision. Visits to school with nurture hubs provided an opportunity to explore resources and strategies first-hand, facilitating optimal design choices and intervention priorities.

Target 1: To finalise room setup and resources procurement.

Comments

The needs analysis clarified an increased demand for speech and language interventions, and emotional support for vulnerable groups, including children with SEND. The aim was, therefore, to create a safe, nurturing space to be used to deliver interventions effectively, but also to be available as a calming area, to facilitate emotional regulation. Most importantly, the room was to be a whole school resource, familiar and accessible to all pupils. The position of the room was therefore extremely important and has been well-chosen, allowing discreet access from more than one area. It is a calm and uncluttered space, with both a working area for interventions, and an area with carefully selected resources for emotional regulation. With a provisional timetable of interventions already in place, pupils are becoming used to the room as a safe space where they can go for help and support.

Target 2: To source and deliver appropriate staff training.

Comments

The school employs an independent speech therapist to work in school on a weekly basis. The advantages for staff and children are clear; staff can be trained on specific speech and language strategies and supported to deliver these effectively. A teaching assistant is ELSA (Emotional Literacy Support Assistant) trained, and delivers interventions to identified children, working closely with class teachers to establish targets and monitor progress.

School also access support from Durham County Council's EWEL (Emotional Well-being and Effective Learning) Team. This can take the form of consultation and advice, or training for specific school-based initiatives. Staff have received targeted training on a variety of intervention programmes including Lego Therapy, Circle time, social stories, sensory activities such as movement breaks and calming strategies.



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Target 3: To launch The Cosy Cove, and to monitor and review impact.

Comments

Staff are committed to this project and have contributed enthusiastically to every phase of its development. The space has been designed sensitively with specific children in mind, but aims to provide a safe, calming space that is welcoming and familiar to every pupil. Training is targeted and supportive, providing teachers and support staff with the confidence and tools to deliver high quality interventions, and accurately monitor impact by identifying measurable improvements in communication and emotional regulation.



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Overview

Nettlesworth Primary School is a small village school at the heart of its community where Inclusion, Respect and Pupil Voice are central to every aspect of school life. Staff are passionate in their drive to provide the best possible learning experience for pupils, enabling every child to find their own unique talent and achieve their full potential.

The school is a Gold Rights Respecting School, an award granted by UNICEF to those schools that have fully embedded children's rights into school practice, policies, and ethos. Posters showing the articles related to the Rights of the Child Convention are visible in every classroom and referred to as appropriate in displays and lesson plans. Weekly assemblies are held to review and discuss how the articles relate to various parts of the school day, e.g. the right to relax and play (article 31) and the right to education (article 28.) Pupils can quote specific articles and explain their relevance to school activities. The respect they show for each other, the adults in school, and their school environment is evident everywhere. Older pupils take their roles as Peer Mentors, or Sports Leaders seriously, and carry out the related responsibilities diligently. This is appreciated by their peers, who report that "there is always someone to talk to, someone looking out for you." At playtimes Sports Leaders set up and lead activities such as dodge ball, encouraging active participation and fair play. The atmosphere in the yard was observed to be one of enjoyment and cooperation, with pupils resolving any differences independently and fairly.

Rights respecting schools aim to strengthen their pupils' sense of belonging and voice, and this is evidenced further by the selection of Nettlesworth Primary as one of only sixteen schools nationally to participate in a research project focussing on the impact of "school belonging" on achievement and attendance.

The importance of pupil voice is emphasised by the Pupil Improvement Plan (PIP) – a dynamic document displayed at the centre of the school, which outlines ideas for improvement from a range of student groups, including School Team representatives, the School Council, Rights Respecting Council and Waste Warriors. The PIP shows evidence of children's views and wishes, and of those ideas that have been taken forward and acted upon. Pupils are fully aware of the PIP and can quote examples of suggestions forwarded from their school team. They will talk about new clubs that have been set up in response to requests from pupils, and requests for career encounters that have been heard.

The school's career project has formalised and strengthened the determination of the staff to raise the aspirations of their pupils and inspire them to "Start Small, Dream Big." Career based learning is embedded within the school ethos and aspirations supported by career encounters tailored to specific groups of children, or even an individual child. Pupils talk enthusiastically about what they have learnt from visitors representing a variety of careers and university courses. Often these encounters are extended to include practical activities linked to the career or area of study, which fully engage and enable pupils to see themselves in each role.



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National criteria for emotional well-being in schools include the provision of “open channels through which pupils can seek or be offered support, without stigma and with appropriate confidentiality,” and these criteria are undoubtedly met at this school. Emotional well-being is of paramount importance, with an extensive network of support established over time, including a child mental health first aider, pastoral staff including teaching and non-teaching pastoral assistants, and coordinated support from a number of external organisations.

The development of the “Cosy Cove” as a safe space, accessible to all, has developed from school's continued drive to improve pupil outcomes both personally and academically. Following on from the positive impact made by the provision of sensory areas in each classroom, this designated space can be used to deliver a wide range of interventions, and provide a secure, private space where pupils can be helped to regulate or discuss concerns.

School leaders are currently working with Durham County Council to support other schools in the development of their inclusion policies and practice. Staff undertake outreach work, visiting schools to offer advice and practical support. Staff from these schools are then encouraged to visit Nettlesworth to observe its inclusive practice first hand. It is anticipated that the Cosy Cove will be an ideal resource to share and discuss with these colleagues.

Well-being and a sense of belonging was evidenced in conversations with all stakeholders. Parents spoke of the school being “at the heart of the village, a big part of the local community.” School events such as coffee mornings and information-sharing sessions with external providers are well attended. Parents enjoyed debating with their children during a “Parliamentary Day,” at which different groups campaigned for a special event to be held in school. (A “Break the Rules” day was voted in by an overwhelming majority!) Communication between staff and families is clear and effective, and parents are confident that staff know their children well. Parents and carers are appreciative that each child is included in every school event, with appropriate adaptations made as needed to meet individual needs.

Leaders support staff and each other. Expertise amongst staff is fully exploited and good practice shared effectively. Inclusion is a common value described as “the lifeblood of the school, the foundation on which it is built.” The diverse range of needs within the school population is viewed in a positive light – as an opportunity for professional development.

Pupils feel safe and happy in this school. They talk at length about the different after-school clubs available to them, and the way their teachers “make learning fun.” They know when they are doing well, and enjoy the reward systems in school, celebrated in a special assembly each Friday. They are taught that “sometimes things are hard” and are helped with difficulties by the comments teachers write in workbooks, and the questions they ask in lessons. The development of resilience and determination is evident as pupils explain that “you can learn from your mistakes” and it is always important to consider “the next step.”



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Nettlesworth Primary radiates a positive, nurturing atmosphere where everyone is included and can achieve their full potential. Inclusion is a priority for this school, and is demonstrated routinely throughout the school day by the staff, who act as consistently positive role models. Pupils respond to this by mirroring their inclusive, caring approach. As one pupil commented: "It is all one big family. You know everybody."

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 focus on how the school has developed its dedicated sensory room - The Cosy Cove - and the impact this has had on the emotional well-being of its pupils. It will also look closely at how the school has interacted with its Inclusion Cluster and continued to promote and support inclusion through networking and outreach. Evidence of cluster working will underpin the capacity for the school to maintain its Flagship status.

Assessor: Ms Mandy Elkin

Findings confirmed by Inclusion Quality Mark (UK) Ltd:

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Chief Executive Officer of Inclusion Quality Mark (UK) Ltd