



Assessor's Evaluation for the IQM CoE Award



School Name Ashwood Spencer Academy
Amber Street
Derby

DE24 8FT

Head/Principal Mrs Paula Baines-Chambers

IQM Lead Mrs Elizabeth Fisher

Date of Review 21st October 2025

Assessor Mr Richard Kitching

IQM Cluster Programme

Cluster Group Inclusion Fusion

Ambassador Ms Alison Merrills

Next Meeting TBC

Meeting Focus TBC

Cluster Attendance

Term	Date	Attendance
Autumn 2023	14-11-2023	Yes
Spring 2024	07-02-2024	Yes
Summer 2024	26-06-2024	Yes
Autumn 2024	18-11-2024	Yes
Spring 2025	13-02-2025	Yes
Summer 2025	18-06-2025	Yes

Evidence

This was Ashwood Spencer Academy's third annual Centre of Excellence Review. A wide range of evidence was analysed as part of the review process. This included the following:



Assessor's Evaluation for the IQM CoE Award



- Inclusion Quality Mark (IQM) Centre of Excellence Review documentation
- Academy website
- Spencer Academies Trust website
- Government 'Get Information About Schools' (GIAS) web pages for Ashwood Spencer Academy
- Office for Standards in Education, Children's Services and Skills (Ofsted) Report: February 2023
- A Learning Walk throughout the academy carried out jointly with the IQM Lead

Meetings were held with:

- The Senior Leadership Team
- Governor Representative
- The Inclusion Team
- The Physical Education (PE) and English as an Additional Language (EAL) Team
- Teaching Assistants, Teachers, and Mid-day Supervisors
- Pupils – School Council representatives
- Pupils – Eco Team



Assessor's Evaluation for the IQM CoE Award



Evaluation of Targets for last 12 Months

Target 1: Development of Inclusion Teams Across the School

Since the last review, the development of a focused Inclusion Team at Ashwood Spencer Academy has ensured that more holistic but refined, targeted systems are in place to ensure the individual needs of pupils and their families are met in a timely manner. Central to this is the multi-agency approach that is now in place where the Attendance Lead coordinates input from the Attendance Officer, Special Education Needs Coordinator (SENCo), Deputy Designated Safeguarding Lead, Family Support Team and Behaviour Mentors and regular meetings are conducted. This system enables the team to apply more holistic strategies that benefit not just the pupil at the centre of the concerns, but the wider family. During the review day, staff spoke about how this enabled a more joined-up approach where a cohesive, strategic plan could be implemented to address a broad range of need and targeted interventions could be put in place quickly.

Alongside the close communication between the internal team of professionals and specialists that meet regularly at Ashwood Spencer, the academy also has strong links with external professionals as well as specialists from within the Spencer Academies Trust that it is part of. The pastoral capacity of the team at Ashwood has been further expanded with the appointment of an additional staff member. Further afield, links with In Year Fair Access (IYFA) at Derby, Respect Collaboration and Educational Psychologists have provided additional specialist support where required.

A consistent approach to behaviour has been rolled out across the school and this is having a positive impact on the learning culture. All staff have received training to ensure they effectively implement the policy, and this has been further enhanced by sharing the policy with parents, carers, and stakeholders. The policy itself is very clear, logical, and sequential and is illustrated with visual cues to further ensure it is accessible. Aligning with this is the 'social norms' guidance where, following consultation with staff and pupils, information has been drawn up to help support pupils with social norms including establishing routines across the school. Leaders recognise that although this consistent approach to the implementation the behaviour policy and social norms is having a positive effect, there are still times they will have to show a flexible approach in order to meet the needs of individual pupils. Throughout the visit, the IQM Lead could provide various examples of how they have adapted their approach to serve individual needs to positive effect. Behaviour mentors provide both planned and reactive sessions for pupils to help address individual behavioural needs.

Ashwood serves a diverse and multi-cultural community, and this means that a wide variety of languages (38 at the most recent count!) are spoken in total amongst the pupils that attend the academy. As a result, leaders have taken appropriate steps to implement the right support and make the necessary adaptations to ensure pupils are supported in not only accessing the curriculum but also feeling a sense of belonging in the academy community. Assessment processes for language acquisition are now in place and are embedded giving staff clearer insights into pupil needs. Regular assessment cycles are planned in throughout the year ensuring reliability.



Assessor's Evaluation for the IQM CoE Award



Strategies to promote 'belonging' for everyone in the academy community are at the forefront of academy development plans moving forward. They have made a great start in embedding these strategies and during the review I was shown examples of the multi-lingual signage that is visible throughout the school. When a new pupil with English as an Additional Language (EAL) joins the academy, leaders are quick to establish a buddy to link with them from elsewhere in the school who is fluent in their language. Not only does this support in a practical sense in terms of helping to explain routines and expectations, but it also helps the pupils to feel welcomed within the setting.

The capacity of the EAL team has increased enabling wider support across the school and staff have received continuous professional development (CPD) in strengthening skills to meet the diverse needs of the pupils, particularly though adaptive teaching for pupils with EAL. Speech and language interventions in the Early Years Foundation Stage are having a positive impact on EAL pupils and the Assistant SENCo has recently implemented NELI (Nuffield Early Language Intervention) and it is also having a positive impact.

Overall, the cohesive and targeted approach, brought about by the formulation of specifically constructed teams with inclusion at the forefront, has had an extremely positive impact and has enabled excellent progress towards meeting this target.

Next Steps:

Building on the positive steps that have already been taken since the last review, the academy development plan will prioritise 'belonging' and will implement further strategies to deepen the sense of belonging for all stakeholders within the academy. The buddy system will be further developed to strengthen support for families within the Ashwood community.

Expanding on the recent success it has had, the remit of the Inclusion Team will be further expanded in terms of its scope to ensure strategies will benefit a wider range of pupils from across the academy.

An Ashwood Pastoral Support Panel will be established and embedded to deliver a timely, proactive approach to supporting pupils' mental health and wellbeing.



Assessor's Evaluation for the IQM CoE Award



Target 2: Attendance Target- Closing the Gap on National Attendance Figures

Acknowledging the complex nature of attendance issues, and how they can often be a symptom of a broad range of underlying challenges, leaders have taken steps to ensure that academy attendance leads are now part of an internal multi-agency Inclusion Team. As mentioned in the comments under Target 1, this approach allows for a more holistic and strategic approach towards tackling attendance issues and leaders have been able to identify and implement the right support and interventions for specific pupils at a much quicker pace than previously.

As a result of this refined, multi-agency approach, attendance has improved for specific focus pupils alongside improved wellbeing and attainment outcomes. For example, leaders spoke enthusiastically about a pupil who in previous years had significant attendance concerns but was now attending the academy regularly and making progress across a whole range of areas. The pupil's attendance had increased from 54% in the previous academic year to 100% this year as a result of the coordinated approach.

During the discussions held and from observations carried out on the review day, it was clear that Ashwood had an extremely rigorous approach in place in order to raise attendance rates for all groups of pupils. Robust systems ensured that no pupil went unnoticed and staff promptly followed up with families in the cases of pupils that were causing concern. I was told about how on numerous occasions, staff (working in pairs) had physically called on pupils' houses if there was an unexpected absence and had walked the pupils to school where required.

The academy adopts a holistic strategy towards improving attendance and they have implemented a blend of more traditional attendance improvement methods alongside interventions that fit into the wider curriculum offer at the academy. Staff follow the EBSNA (Emotional Based School Non-Attendance) framework to support pupils and families experiencing regular barriers to attendance as well as ongoing use of the Attend Framework to ensure systematic monitoring of attendance data and to address any particular 'spikes or trends that appear from that.

More holistically, staff have made adaptations to the wider curriculum and personal development offer to help raise attendance rates for all pupils. An enhanced extra-curricular and enrichment programme is being implemented and ensures the academy is offering a range of activities that appeal to a broad variety of pupils' interests. The introduction of House Teams has successfully established a sense of belonging and pupils from the school council spoke enthusiastically about this on the review day. In addition to the wide range of lunch time and extra-curricular club opportunities that the academy provides, there is also an onsite breakfast club that runs each morning that offers flexible options to support pupils that may be struggling with attendance.

The approach that the academy has taken in the last year seems to be working; persistent absence levels have reduced compared to previous years and a data comparison with schools and academies serving a similar demographic show that Ashwood compares positively. Staff are aware that there is no room for complacency when it comes to sustaining and improving attendance rates and they are relentless in



Assessor's Evaluation for the IQM CoE Award



ensuring they continue to review and adapt where necessary improve their current approaches to improving attendance for the academy community.

Next Steps:

Building on the current successful approach, the identified next step is to expand the scope and impact of the Inclusion Team meetings ensuring that strategies benefit a wider range of pupils from across the academy.

Addressing the impact of the wider curriculum on attendance, staff will continue to review and enhance their enrichment and extra-curricular club offer for pupils to ensure it caters for a broad variety of interests, needs and backgrounds and is adapted to ensure it is accessible and inclusive for all, particularly pupils with SEND and EAL. Leaders have noticed that attendance for White British pupils, particularly boys, is lower in comparison to other groups and a comprehensive plan is in place to explore the issues behind this and address any barriers through a coordinated strategy going forward.



Assessor's Evaluation for the IQM CoE Award



Target 3: Embedding Outdoor Learning and Physical Development

During the last year, the outdoor provision for SEND pupils has been carefully developed and resourced to meet a wide range of gross motor, fine motor, and sensory regulation needs.

The outdoor area in the Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS) is a wonderful environment for the academy's youngest pupils to develop and enhance their learning across a whole range of thoughtfully implemented learning areas. Over the last year a new sensory regulation area has been established in EYFS to support early intervention, and this is already having a positive impact. There has been a careful focus on the transition from EYFS to Year 1 and one of the outcomes of this has been to enhance the outdoor spaces for Year 1 pupils to ensure continuity in physical development from the previous key stage. Strong partnerships exist with a local special school, and this has enabled bespoke training in sensory regulation and sensory circuits for key members of staff, and, in turn, this has informed the design and use of outdoor areas.

The academy has recently acquired the acquisition of a plot of grassland adjacent to the current site and already there have been numerous plans considered and presented in order to maximise the learning opportunities from this plot of land. Leading the development of this area has been the pupil led 'Eco Team' and during the review day they provided an impassioned presentation of their ideas for this plot of a land as well as describing the various other initiatives that they have led in recent months. The Eco Team described how they presented their ideas to their fellow pupils during whole key stage assemblies. Supporting the Eco Team in this regard are the school council. They have recently been involved in a community based outdoor as part of 'Derby in Bloom.' This involved the pupils designing and making bird boxes and insect boxes for the local community centre. Pupils spoke with great enthusiasm about this project and clearly this positive experience of community service has resonated deeply with them. One member of the school council stated, "We just wanted to help the community and for people to know how much we respect the world."

From the review day, it was apparent that sport, Physical Education (PE), and outdoor learning were clearly high profile across the academy and staff spoke passionately about how it not only develops physical development and skills but also adds to the sense of community within the academy. Sports coaches are employed directly by the academy, and they usually lead PE lessons in the afternoon. However, when not teaching PE, they also work in classes alongside teachers to provide additional support and targeted interventions. This all contributes to the community ethos and carefully targeted transition process as the sports coaches know all of the pupils well and maximise the breadth of relationships with the pupils, they have developed in PE lessons alongside academic learning and personal development opportunities. An example of this are the targeted literacy sessions delivered by sports coaches to improve movement skills and confidence.

Pupils at Ashwood benefit from numerous opportunities to participate in competitive sport alongside pupils from other academies. This included being involved in Spencer Trust leagues as well as participating in competitions coordinated by Derby County. There is an inclusive approach to Ashwood's rationale behind entering the sports



Assessor's Evaluation for the IQM CoE Award



competitions and all pupils, including pupils with complex additional needs, are given opportunities to participate in sports events thanks to the carefully organised and inclusive competition offer.

The academy is a strong advocate of the benefits of 'Forest School' and Forest School leaders have made effective use of the available outdoor spaces to support self-regulation and development of personal skills for targeted pupils. Recognising the positive effect Forest School can have for pupils of all ages, pupils from every year group have access to this provision.

Enrichment trips and residential visits have a high profile within the academy and leaders ensure resources, including funds from the Pupil Premium Grant, are deliberately targeted to ensure as many pupils as possible can access these opportunities without making it financially difficult for parents and carers. I particularly enjoyed hearing about the visit to the seaside at Cleethorpes as well as the 2-night residential visit to Whitemoor Lakes. For many of the pupils that attend Ashwood, access to experiences and opportunities such as this would simply not happen without the resolute determination of staff to organise and provide these enriching opportunities.

Next Steps:

In the next year, Ashwood will be working on developing the Forest School Area and Eco Garden ensuring it is an inclusive and calm place for the school community. They will be planning and delivering community events to strengthen engagement through the shared use of outdoor spaces. Additionally, they will be building on the school's recently acquired Eco Award status through embedding sustainability practices and broadening pupil involvement.



Assessor's Evaluation for the IQM CoE Award



Agreed Targets for next 12 Months.

Target 1 - To ensure there is a deep appreciation, belonging and celebration of cultural diversity at Ashwood Spencer Academy by all stakeholders.

Comments

To address this target, leaders plan to further embed cultural diversity across the curriculum. They will carry out an audit of the curriculum content to ensure that there is a balanced representation of different cultures, identities, and experiences across all subjects. Additionally, they will ensure the curriculum highlights cultural contributions in subjects such as history, art, literature, and music.

As a setting that sincerely values the views of the pupils, a 'Cultural Ambassadors' pupil group will be established and will represent different backgrounds and perspectives of pupils that attend Ashwood. Building on the current excellent practice in EYFS, further opportunities will be created for pupils to present their cultural heritage through assemblies, storytelling, and classroom projects.

In order to garner the views of the wider community, parental voice sessions will be held in order to audit their feelings behind a sense of belonging at Ashwood. Additional opportunities for parents and carers to feel included as part of the community will be implemented through the development of Showcase events at the academy. Leaders will ensure that displays, library resources, and classroom texts are accessible to all pupils through dual coding.

There will be an ongoing commitment towards high quality staff training in inclusive practice including CPD in culturally responsive teaching, unconscious bias, and opportunities to share and experience case studies showcasing excellent examples of how to embed diversity and belonging across the academy.

All of the above actions and their impact will be rigorously monitored, evaluated, and adapted as necessary by leaders and will be presented to Governors so they can provide appropriate support and challenge.

Target 2 - To understand the specific barriers to attendance faced by White British pupils at the academy, particularly boys.

Comments

A comprehensive review of attendance of White British pupils will be carried out through robust monitoring of data outcomes including analysis of any specific trends. Pupil voice interviews will be carried out with White British pupils with low attendance to explore pupils' perspectives. Additional informal and formal discussions with parents and carers will be held to try and identify any wider challenges which may be having a negative effect on attendance. Anonymous surveys will also be sent out to parents and carers to try and gather any wider insights from the community.



Assessor's Evaluation for the IQM CoE Award



The Inclusion Team will take the lead in analysing and evaluating data gathered and compiling case studies to share with staff and governors to highlight barriers and possible solutions and then put in place targeted interventions to address these identified issues. Drawing together all of the findings, a targeted attendance strategy specifically for White British pupils with low attendance will be compiled and this will include clear actions, time scales, and accountability. The impact of this will be monitored termly and approaches refined where necessary.

Target 3 - To increase enrichment opportunities for all pupils at Ashwood Spencer Academy, including those with SEND and EAL

Comments

In order to make progress towards achieving this target, an initial audit and review of existing enrichment opportunities will be carried out and any gaps in provision, particularly for SEND and EAL pupils, will be identified.

From this review, leaders plan to expand the offer of clubs and enrichment opportunities to ensure that they reflect pupils' interests, cultures, and strengths as well as a balance of academic, creative, physical and wellbeing opportunities.

Enrichment opportunities will be adapted where required to ensure that they are accessible to pupils with SEND and EAL. This may include bilingual support resources, visual timetables, 'sensory friendly' adaptations and additional adult support. The approach to the revised implementation of enrichment opportunities and clubs will be continually monitored and adjusted if required.



Assessor's Evaluation for the IQM CoE Award



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

The Inclusion Lead explained how the opportunities to attend the IQM Cluster Group meetings and reflect on inclusive practice had been invaluable. She noted that it had not always been her that attended as the academy felt it was important that a range of colleagues were given the opportunity to network with others in the group. The detail and impact of the last 3 meetings are outlined below:

On 18th June 2025, the Vice Principal attended the meeting held at Edgewick Community Primary School in Coventry. The focus of this meeting had been Performance Management Approaches as well as Oracy. The visit included observations of Oracy practice, and this provided an opportunity to reflect on current practice in place at Ashwood Spencer. It also enabled the opportunity to reflect on the current Performance Management offer and processes at Ashwood. As result of this reflection, leaders decided to continue with the current offer, as it currently includes a personal development target for all. The reflection also enabled the opportunity to recognise the importance of ensuring that personal research and development opportunities are protected and going forward and leaders are looking to build this into CPD offer at Ashwood.

On 13th February 2025, the IQM Lead attended a Cluster Group meeting held at Westfield Infant School in Hinkley. The focus for this meeting was 'Zones of Regulation' and also the "Everyone's Welcome" initiative. As an outcome of this meeting, leaders at Ashwood reviewed and refined their current 'Zones of Regulation' offer and amended it to include easily accessible strategies for pupil self-regulation. The IQM Lead also shared the 'Everyone's Welcome' initiative core ideas and values with the Ashwood PSHE (Personal, Social and Health Education) lead and from this the current offer was reviewed through taught sessions and assemblies.

On 18th November 2024, the IQM Lead attended a Cluster Group meeting at St Giles Spencer Academy in Derby. The focus for the meeting was 'Beyond the Curriculum' and 'Pupil Passports.' Attendance at this meeting enabled leaders at Ashwood to reflect on their current enrichment offer for their SEND pupils, including the development of life skills. As a result, leaders and staff planned for further life skills opportunities and this included provision classes accessing school trips, weekly swimming sessions, and also whole academy events with adaptations. Another example of impact from this cluster meeting was that the Ashwood approach to pupil passports was reviewed and the IQM Lead completed further CPD with a local Special School to develop an approach that is purposeful. Further adaptations to pupil passports at Ashwood are taking place.



Assessor's Evaluation for the IQM CoE Award



Overview

Ashwood Spencer Academy has inclusion at the heart of its ethos. Leaders are united in an unwavering purpose to deliver an enriching and ambitious curriculum that meets the needs of all of its pupils and, wherever they can, support the wider needs of their pupils' families. Everyone is welcomed here, and no one is left behind.

Situated in an area of comparatively high deprivation, the academy embraces pupils and their families from a wide variety of cultures, faiths, and backgrounds. The demographic is constantly changing and evolving; for example, the academy recently welcomed a large proportion of families originally from Nigeria. Leaders, staff, and pupils are rightly proud of their diverse and vibrant academy community. This was encapsulated by one member of staff who stated during the review day, "we don't just tolerate diversity and difference, we celebrate it." Leaders are ambitious for every pupil without exception.

There are challenges that extend beyond the academy gates that leaders have to contend with and manage on a daily basis. Many pupils could be regarded as living in vulnerable circumstances and safeguarding leads and all staff have to be extremely vigilant to the extenuating factors that may be affecting their pupils and families. This does not deter their ambition though. At the beginning of the review day the Principal exclaimed, "we don't allow a post code to define our children."

Walking around Ashwood Spencer Academy was an absolute joy. A calm and purposeful learning atmosphere permeated the school environment and pupils of all ages, and with various additional learning needs and challenges, were all engaged in their learning. Beginning with the Early Years Foundation Stage classes, I witnessed how pupils engaged with the thoughtfully deployed learning environment (both inside and outside) and watched how staff skilfully enabled them to explore learning opportunities.

Recently, pupils' language and communication skills have been significant areas of development as they start in Reception, and the academy have carried out several purposeful actions to develop pupils' skills in this area. The environment has been adapted to ensure that there are a wide range of pictorial cues alongside written labels to help pupils to develop vocabulary awareness. In each learning area there are written prompts for staff to refer to when trying to develop pupils' communication and conversation skills. The teacher actively model verbal sentences and encourage pupils to develop what can often be single word responses into full sentences. Further efforts have been made to establish close links with local nurseries who often have children that transfer to Ashwood, particularly with the rise of additional needs being prevalent as pupils begin at the academy.

At the very centre of the academy, there are 2 classes dedicated to teaching pupils with very complex needs. One of the classes accommodates pupils that are largely non-verbal and have severe learning difficulties, whereas the other class provides for pupil that are deemed to be higher functioning. Staff have worked hard to draw up a bespoke curriculum that effectively meets the needs of pupils at all levels to allow them to progress. Central to the ethos for this provision, is the ambition to ensure that each and every pupil is involved as much as possible with the life of the academy. Considerable efforts are made by staff to ensure that pupils are able to attend academy trips, partake



Assessor's Evaluation for the IQM CoE Award



in whole academy events and have opportunities to engage with and experience community life. The Inclusion Lead explained to me how there was a distinct drive to promote life skills for these pupils. As part of the learning walk, I spent time in both of the provision classes, and I was overwhelmingly impressed by the incredible skill, knowledge, patience, and commitment shown by all staff. Every single pupil was engaged in their learning, and it was truly heartwarming to see.

Although there has been some instability in staffing in recent years at Ashwood, every single staff member that was spoken on the review day was united in their determination to provide a high quality, inclusive education for the pupils that attend. They valued how approachable leaders were, the wealth of training opportunities offered to them and how communication across the staff team was really clear despite there being a high number of personnel working at Ashwood. One staff member stated, "we are passionate about giving the children the right opportunities." Another stated, "we are really trying to establish a community."

Throughout the day, and in each meeting, the word 'community' kept on being mentioned and there was certainly a defined sense of community from within the academy. The range of thoughtful adaptations to the curriculum and academy life really emphasised just how much care went into creating this welcoming spirit. For example, I heard from one staff member how the history curriculum had changed this year; the focus had previously been the Mayan civilisation but was now going to be focused on African history as this was more relevant to their demographic. In another example of how a sense of belonging is being fostered at Ashwood, I heard about how last year Christmas dinner at the academy involved a choice of choosing a dinner from 5 different countries in a 'Christmas from Around the World' theme. In a recent initiative from the EYFS team, families of pupils have been invited in to read 'Stories from Other Cultures.' As well as making each family feel welcomed and valued, it is a wonderful example of how at Ashwood diversity is not just tolerated but celebrated.

The Governor representative that was spoken to as part of the review day demonstrated an excellent understanding of the academy's strengths and challenges going forward. She was extremely knowledgeable about the shift in focus on inclusion noting how the focus is not just about the curriculum but also ensuring that it relates to the wider context and evolving demographic that the school operates in. She rightly emphasised how it was important not to make assumptions about different backgrounds that the pupils have. Additionally, she gave several examples of how has challenged leaders to ensure that they continue to be inclusive for all and to not let divisive language be accepted within the academy community.

Throughout the review day, the IQM Lead for Ashwood Spencer demonstrated her own exceptional knowledge about inclusion, and she could relate it to every aspect of academy life. She spoke articulately about the needs of specific pupils and how they were being addressed, and she recounted numerous examples of success stories where pupils, who had previously had difficult experiences in the education system, had since joined Ashwood and were now beginning to thrive.

The pupils that were spoke to on the review day were an absolute delight. They enthusiastically described the initiatives they had been involved in to promote the



Assessor's Evaluation for the IQM CoE Award



environment and to help the community. They spoke passionately about the 'Dream Assemblies' and the exciting topics that were covered in them and also about the newly revised 'House Point' system. They love the range of learning opportunities that are available to them at Ashwood, and they spoke warmly about the staff that care for them. One pupil exclaimed, "This is an extremely fun school to come to. You never run out of things to do." It was a privilege to carry out the review day at Ashwood Spencer, and I thoroughly enjoyed my visit.

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: Mr Richard Kitching

Findings confirmed by Inclusion Quality Mark (UK) Ltd:

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