

Overview

It was a pleasure to return to Derby Moor Spencer Academy and review how the academy continues to build upon its Centre of Excellence foundations as it prepares for the next stage of its IQM journey. Throughout the day, I was struck not only by the quality of the provision on offer but by the clarity of the school's moral purpose. Derby Moor is a school that has worked hard to create a culture where inclusion, belonging and aspiration are inseparable. Whilst systems, structures and processes are clearly well established, it is the quality of relationships and the academy's unwavering belief in the potential of every young person that leaves the strongest impression.

What became increasingly apparent throughout the visit was the academy's commitment to ensuring that pupils feel seen, heard and valued. Conversations with leaders, staff and pupils consistently returned to the importance of belonging and emotional safety. Staff spoke about helping pupils feel "*validated and heard*" and described a culture where support is shaped around individual needs rather than expecting pupils to fit predetermined systems. This commitment to listening is reflected through the academy's use of pupil voice, personalised reviews and strengths-based planning processes. One leader described the school's approach as continually seeking to "*reframe what we do through pupil voice*", ensuring that young people remain at the centre of decision-making.

What was particularly impressive was the academy's sophisticated understanding of the community it serves. Leaders demonstrated a detailed awareness of the multiple and often overlapping barriers that some pupils experience, including SEND, disadvantage, EAL and social and emotional vulnerabilities. However, discussions were never framed through a deficit lens. Instead, there was a clear determination to identify strengths, remove barriers and ensure that all pupils can participate fully in school life. This strengths-based philosophy could be seen throughout the review, from the development of pupil passports and personalised pathways to the design of enhanced provision and the academy's preparation for adulthood programmes. The message was clear: pupils are recognised for their potential, not defined by their challenges.

The academy's culture is characterised by a thoughtful balance of nurture and challenge. Staff demonstrated a deep understanding of the barriers that some pupils face, yet there was a collective refusal to allow those barriers to define future outcomes. Instead, there is a strong emphasis on identifying strengths, broadening horizons and creating opportunities for success. One member of staff explained that the aim is to "*take away the blame, but keep expectations*", a phrase that perfectly encapsulates the academy's inclusive philosophy. Pupils are supported with compassion and understanding whilst continuing to experience ambitious expectations and encouragement to achieve their potential.

The continued development of the Inclusion and Belonging Team has been instrumental in embedding this culture. During discussions, it became evident that inclusion is not viewed as the responsibility of a small group of specialists but as a shared commitment across the entire organisation. The increasingly integrated nature of the team, alongside regular collaboration between pastoral leaders, inclusion staff, curriculum teams and



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external agencies, has created a coherent structure through which support can be coordinated effectively. Staff spoke positively about the clarity of systems, the accessibility of support and the collective responsibility that now exists for ensuring positive outcomes for pupils. This collaborative approach has strengthened consistency whilst ensuring that provision remains flexible and responsive to changing needs.

The learning walk reinforced these messages. Classrooms were calm, purposeful and highly structured, creating safe, predictable learning environments in which pupils could engage confidently with learning. Consistent routines, explicit vocabulary instruction, adaptive teaching strategies and carefully planned support were evident across a range of subjects. Staff and teaching assistants worked collaboratively, drawing upon detailed knowledge of pupils' strengths, needs and aspirations. The academy's focus on language, literacy and communication was particularly impressive, with explicit vocabulary teaching, reading strategies and oracy development embedded throughout the curriculum. There was a palpable sense that staff genuinely know the young people in their care and are committed to helping them succeed.

Leaders have invested significantly in professional learning and continuous improvement developing staff expertise through coaching, instructional practice, evidence-informed approaches and collaborative enquiry. Throughout the visit, staff demonstrated confidence when discussing adaptive teaching, literacy, emotional regulation and inclusive practice. Importantly, there was a strong sense that professional development is viewed as an ongoing process rather than a series of isolated training events. Staff spoke openly about learning from one another, refining practice and remaining professionally curious. This culture of reflection has undoubtedly contributed to the consistency observed across the academy and provides a strong foundation for the academy's future Flagship work.

The academy's willingness to engage critically with its own practice is equally commendable. Leaders were open about areas they continue to refine and demonstrated a clear understanding that inclusion is an ongoing journey rather than a destination. The review provided numerous examples of systems that have evolved in response to pupil feedback, staff reflection and emerging needs. Whether through the development of reading profiles, the refinement of graduated response systems, the introduction of strengths-based reviews or the continued evolution of enhanced provision, there was clear evidence of a school that is committed to learning, adapting and improving. This capacity for self-evaluation and improvement is a significant strength and reflects leadership that remains ambitious for both pupils and staff.

I was particularly impressed by the academy's unwavering focus on aspiration and preparation for adulthood. Leaders consistently spoke about helping pupils develop confidence, independence and a belief in their own futures. Through careers education, cultural capital opportunities, enrichment activities, apprenticeships, university links and personalised curriculum pathways, young people are encouraged to move beyond perceived limitations and consider a wide range of future possibilities. As one member of staff reflected, success is ultimately about ensuring that young people become *"in control of their future."*



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The academy's commitment to inclusion extends beyond the classroom. The Inclusion and Belonging Team, enhanced provision pathways, graduated response systems and extensive partnership work with families and external agencies demonstrate a highly coordinated approach to supporting pupils. Staff spoke positively about the culture of collaboration that exists across the academy, where expertise, responsibility and decision-making are shared in the best interests of pupils. The phrase *"not against you, with you"* perhaps captures this ethos better than any policy document could. It reflects a school where relationships are valued, barriers are addressed collaboratively and every effort is made to ensure that young people experience success.

The review also highlighted Derby Moor's growing influence beyond its own setting. Through active engagement in IQM cluster activity, collaboration across the Spencer Academies Trust and a willingness to share resources and practice, the academy is increasingly contributing to wider professional dialogue around inclusion. Leaders have embraced opportunities to learn from others whilst demonstrating equal confidence in showcasing their own work. This outward-facing approach reflects a school that is not only committed to improving outcomes for its own pupils but is increasingly supporting wider system improvement and helping other settings strengthen their own inclusive practice.

Derby Moor Spencer Academy has continued to make significant progress over the last twelve months. Leaders have developed a deeply embedded culture in which belonging, aspiration and achievement are mutually reinforcing. The academy combines highly effective systems with genuine care for its pupils, ensuring that support is personalised, ambitious and focused on improving life chances, and is increasingly recognised as a beacon of inclusive practice; a place that not only transforms outcomes for its own pupils, but actively supports other schools to develop cultures of belonging, aspiration and success.

The progress made since achieving Centre of Excellence status, together with the strength of the proposed Flagship project and the academy's growing contribution to the wider educational community, provides compelling evidence that Derby Moor Spencer Academy is exceptionally well placed to move forward as an IQM Flagship School.

I am therefore firmly of the opinion that the school fully meets the standard required by the Inclusion Quality Mark to pursue Flagship School status. I 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: Ms Alison Williams

Findings confirmed by Inclusion Quality Mark (UK) Ltd:

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