Assessor's Evaluation for the IQM Flagship Project

School	West Rainton Primary School 15 School Avenue West Rainton Houghton-le-Spring DH4 6RN
Head/Principal	Alison McDonough
IQM Lead	Ms Susan Firth
Date of Review	6th November 2026
Assessor	Ms Gemma Robertson

IQM Cluster Programme

Cluster Group	Inclusibles
Ambassador	Ms Annette Sowden
Next Meeting	10th Mar 2026 at The Link School

Cluster Attendance

Term	Date	Attendance
Autumn 2025	16th Oct 2025	Yes
Spring 2026	9th Mar 2026	Yes
Summer 2026	26th Jun 2026	Yes
Autumn 2026	16th Oct 2026	Yes

The Impact of the Cluster Group

The Inclusion Quality Mark Cluster meetings are valued by the Inclusion Lead and provide an important opportunity for professional dialogue, reflection and the sharing of effective practice. Participation in the network has enabled the school to stay informed about current developments in inclusive education and to consider how emerging priorities can be effectively embedded within its own context.

The meetings have been particularly beneficial in supporting the school's understanding of evolving inspection expectations relating to inclusion. For example, discussion with a school that had recently had an Ofsted inspection.

The cluster has also provided valuable opportunities to exchange ideas around parental engagement. Hearing how other schools have developed relationships with families and increased participation in school life has offered practical strategies and fresh perspectives which the school has been able to consider within its own community.

Equally important is the opportunity to engage with colleagues facing similar challenges. The Inclusion Lead highlighted the value of hearing that schools with comparable contexts often experience similar difficulties and barriers. We discussed that looking ahead, there would be significant benefit in further networking opportunities with schools of a similar size and demographic profile, enabling leaders to share solutions, compare outcomes and collaborate more closely on inclusion priorities.

Evidence

- IQM Flagship Review Documentation
- School Website
- Last Ofsted Report – February 2023

Additional Activities:

- Tour of school
- Lesson drop ins
- Observation of Remembrance Assembly
- Observation of Celebration Assembly
- Steel Band performance

Discussions held with:

- Teachers
- SLT
- Students
- Governors
- Parents

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Evaluation of Annual Progress towards the Flagship Project

The school has made excellent progress in advancing its Flagship project to raise the profile of career learning and inspire aspirations amongst pupils. Throughout the year, leaders have remained committed to ensuring that all pupils, regardless of background or circumstance, are exposed to a wide range of career opportunities and develop an understanding of the pathways available to them in the future. This work has been particularly significant within the school's context, where employment levels are often low and children may have limited exposure to a broad range of professions beyond their immediate community.

During the review, it was clear that careers-related learning has become an integral part of the school's culture. Leaders have successfully developed a broad and engaging programme that introduces pupils to a variety of employment sectors, industries and vocational pathways. The use of Sparks Tees Valley, alongside employer visits, virtual experiences and themed learning opportunities, has provided pupils with meaningful encounters that extend their horizons. Pupils spoke enthusiastically about these experiences. One child explained, *'Before the visitors came in, I only knew about a few jobs. Now I know there are lots of different careers and ways to get them.'* Another child reflected that hearing from professionals had helped them to understand that *'you can be whatever you want if you work hard and keep learning.'*

A notable strength of the school's approach is the way careers learning has been embedded across the curriculum. Rather than existing as a standalone initiative, links to future careers and aspirations have been carefully identified within individual subjects and incorporated into curriculum planning. The school's career lead demonstrated a clear understanding of how to make learning relevant and purposeful for pupils. During my discussion with her she noted that, *'career learning is now part of everyday teaching rather than something extra. We naturally talk about where subjects can lead and the opportunities they create for children.'* This was evident throughout the school, where displays, learning environments and classroom discussions regularly referenced skills, future pathways and aspirational role models.

During my visit children and staff recalled visits from members of the Fire and Rescue Service, healthcare professionals, human resources specialists, musicians and authors. They spoke knowledgeably about virtual encounters with industries that may otherwise have been inaccessible to them, including aviation, farming and careers within Amazon. These encounters are clearly helping pupils to broaden their understanding of the world of work and challenge preconceived ideas about what future opportunities might be available. One child explained, *'I didn't know there were so many different jobs in one company. It made me think about jobs I'd never heard of before.'*

The school's commitment to raising aspirations was evident not only through curriculum experiences but also through the way achievements and ambitions are celebrated. Careers-related learning is regularly highlighted through assemblies, newsletters, the school website and Class Dojo, ensuring that pupils, families and the wider community recognise its importance. During the visit, displays around school celebrated pupils' aspirations and showcased learning linked to future careers. These

visual reminders contribute to an environment where ambition and future success are both visible and valued.

Parental engagement has become an increasingly important element of the project's success. Leaders have worked proactively to involve families in careers-related experiences, inviting parents to share their own professional journeys with pupils. These opportunities provide authentic role models and help children recognise that successful pathways can emerge from a wide range of backgrounds and experiences. Parents who have visited school have helped pupils gain insight into a diverse range of career sectors, strengthening the connection between learning in school and opportunities beyond it.

Staff recognised the impact that this work is having upon pupils. One member of staff noted, *'Many of our children have limited experience of different professions outside their immediate family and community. The encounters we provide are genuinely widening horizons.'* Another reflected that careers education has become *'a vehicle for raising aspirations across the curriculum and encouraging children to believe that there are no limits on what they can achieve.'*

Particularly impressive is the school's commitment to ensuring that all pupils benefit from these opportunities, including those who may face additional barriers. The continued focus on supporting pupils from traveller communities demonstrates leaders' determination to promote equity and inclusion. During discussions, leaders shared the successful transition of a pupil from a previously reluctant traveller family into the local secondary school following sustained intervention and support from the Inclusion Lead. This represents a significant achievement and reflects the school's unwavering belief that every child should be supported to access future opportunities and fulfil their potential.

Governors have a clear understanding of the importance of this work and recognise the positive impact it is having on pupils. One governor commented that the project is helping children *'see possibilities beyond what they may encounter in their everyday lives,'* whilst another reflected that *'raising aspirations is fundamental to inclusion because children need to believe that success is possible before they can achieve it.'* Governors acknowledged that the careers programme aligns strongly with the school's wider vision of ensuring all pupils are prepared for successful futures.

The impact of the project can be seen most clearly in pupils' growing confidence when discussing their ambitions and future aspirations. Throughout the review day, pupils spoke positively about the careers they might pursue and demonstrated an increasing awareness of the skills, qualifications and personal attributes required to achieve their goals. One Key Stage 2 pupil summed up the impact succinctly, stating, *'The careers lessons make me believe I can do something important when I'm older.'*

Overall, the school has made substantial and highly effective progress towards this Flagship project. Careers-related learning is embedded, visible and valued throughout the school community. Pupils are benefiting from an increasingly rich range of experiences that are broadening horizons, challenging stereotypes and raising aspirations. Most importantly, leaders have created a culture in which every child is

encouraged to believe in their own potential and to recognise that future opportunities are both varied and achievable.

Agreed Actions for the Next Steps in the Flagship Project

The school has made significant progress in raising aspirations through its careers-related learning programme and is committed to building on this success over the next academic year. Leaders will continue to make effective use of the Sparks Tees Valley platform to provide pupils with engaging and interactive opportunities to explore a broad range of careers and industries. The platform has played an important role in widening pupils' knowledge of future opportunities and helping them understand the skills, qualifications and attributes required for different career pathways. By continuing to incorporate these resources into teaching and learning, the school aims to ensure that careers education remains a prominent feature of the curriculum.

The school will also seek to strengthen links with employers, professional organisations and community partners in order to provide pupils with even greater exposure to the world of work. Through additional visitors, workshops, virtual encounters and real-life learning experiences, pupils will continue to develop a deeper understanding of the opportunities available to them and be encouraged to raise their aspirations. This work will support pupils in recognising that their future is not limited by their circumstances and that a wide range of pathways are open to them.

Leaders are keen to enhance parental engagement in careers education by creating further opportunities for families to become involved in the school's aspiration-raising work. By inviting parents to share their own experiences and encouraging meaningful discussions about future opportunities, the school hopes to strengthen families' understanding of the importance of aspiration and achievement. This work will further support the school's vision of encouraging all children to aim high and fulfil their potential.

The school will continue its highly successful work with vulnerable pupils and families, particularly those who may face barriers to educational progression. The successful transition of a pupil from a traveller family into secondary education, despite initial reluctance, demonstrates the positive impact of this personalised support. Leaders will build upon this achievement by continuing to work closely with families to raise aspirations, promote engagement and ensure that every child is able to access future opportunities.

Flagship Project Development for Next Academic Year

The school's next Flagship project will focus on developing inclusive practice beyond the classroom and exploring how existing strengths can be enhanced to promote even greater progress for all pupils. As a highly inclusive school that successfully meets the needs of a diverse range of learners within its own provision, leaders are keen to identify further ways of strengthening support and extending opportunities. The project reflects the school's ongoing commitment to ensuring that all pupils, regardless of need, background or ability, are able to thrive academically, socially and emotionally.

A key aspect of the project will involve learning from specialist provisions and other schools with strong inclusion practices. In addition to visiting specialist settings, leaders are keen to strengthen links with local schools and those operating within a similar context and of a comparable size. Through collaboration, networking and the sharing of effective practice, the school aims to both learn from others and contribute to wider developments in inclusive education. Leaders recognise the value of working alongside schools facing similar opportunities and challenges in order to identify innovative approaches that can further enhance support for pupils at West Rainton, particularly in relation to targeted interventions, enrichment opportunities and social, emotional and mental health provision.

Alongside this, the school will continue to develop its already strong enrichment offer. Educational visits, visitors to school, careers-related opportunities, after-school provision and wider enrichment activities, including the steel band, will remain central to the school's commitment to providing memorable experiences that broaden horizons and develop cultural capital. Leaders are determined to build upon these established strengths and ensure that every pupil has regular access to opportunities that enrich their learning and personal development.

The project will also place a strong emphasis on developing intervention programmes that are increasingly responsive to individual pupil need. Guided reading groups, additional Read Write Inc. support and other targeted interventions will continue to be reviewed and refined to ensure that provision remains effective. Leaders intend to utilise ongoing assessment information to identify pupils requiring additional support at the earliest possible stage and adapt interventions accordingly. The impact of support programmes will be closely monitored to ensure that progress is measurable and that adjustments are made when required.

Particular attention will be given to pupils whose circumstances may have changed and who are no longer identified within specific funding categories, including those who have moved out of the Pupil Premium cohort. Leaders recognise that changes in categorisation do not necessarily mean that barriers to learning have disappeared and are committed to ensuring that these pupils continue to receive the support they need. Through careful tracking, assessment and pastoral oversight, the school will identify those children who may remain vulnerable to underachievement or reduced participation and ensure that appropriate academic, social and emotional support remains in place. This reflects the school's established ethos of responding to individual need rather than relying solely on labels or funding designations.

Success will be measured through regular evaluation of enrichment opportunities, intervention outcomes and pupil progress. Leaders will monitor whether each year group is accessing a broad range of visitors and educational visits throughout the year and will evaluate the impact these experiences have upon pupils' engagement, confidence and aspirations. Assessment information will be used to determine whether intervention groups are securing measurable improvements in attainment and wider outcomes. The school will also evaluate the impact of practices adopted through collaboration with specialist provisions and partner schools, ensuring that new approaches contribute positively to provision and pupil outcomes. Through this project, leaders aim to build upon an already highly inclusive culture, ensuring that every pupil

has access to the support, opportunities and experiences necessary to achieve their full potential while further strengthening West Rainton's role within a wider network of inclusive schools.

Overview

West Rainton Primary School is an exceptional example of an inclusive school community where every child is known, valued and given the opportunity to flourish. From the moment you enter the school, there is a palpable sense of warmth, belonging and care. Governors described how, when you, *'walk into the school, you immediately get the feeling of feeling safe, cared for and loved'*, whilst children spoke enthusiastically about a place where *'no matter who you are you are included'*. This deeply embedded culture of inclusion is evident in every aspect of school life and is clearly understood and shared by leaders, staff, pupils, governors and families alike.

A particular strength of the school is the genuine sense of community that permeates throughout. Staff turnover is exceptionally low, creating consistency, trust and strong relationships over time. Parents and governors repeatedly referred to the school as *'a family'* and *'such a community school'*, noting that the stability of staffing *'speaks volumes'* because children are able to develop secure and lasting relationships with adults who know them well. The Headteacher's lifelong connection to the village and school undoubtedly strengthens this sense of belonging, but stakeholders were equally clear that the ethos extends far beyond any one individual. As one governor explained, *'It's not just about the Headteacher being part of the village, it's everyone. Links in the village are very strong.'*

The school's commitment to inclusion is perhaps most powerfully demonstrated through its work with the Traveller community. Over many years, leaders have invested significant time, energy and care into building trusting relationships with families, creating a learning environment where children and parents feel genuinely welcomed and respected. Governors spoke with pride about *'the way the Traveller community come to this school, even handing over their two-year-old children to us now'*, recognising the trust that has been established. One parent, who identified as part of the Traveller community, stated, *'We don't normally send our kids to school. This school, if I had 20, I'd send them here. Everyone is included.'* This trust has resulted in tangible outcomes, with governors reporting that they are now beginning to see Traveller children progressing to secondary education, something described as *'unheard of'* in the past. The school's determination to remove barriers and create opportunities for every child is evident in its relentless commitment to building these relationships and ensuring that all families feel valued.

Throughout the assessment it was clear that inclusion at West Rainton is not viewed as an additional initiative but as the foundation upon which the entire school is built.

Governors reflected that the curriculum *'caters for all needs, there are no add-ons'*, whilst staff consistently emphasised the importance of ensuring that every child can participate and succeed. This philosophy is particularly evident in the school's approach to children with SEND. Governors praised the SEND leadership, noting that children with additional needs 'are not forgotten' and that they are fully included in all aspects of school life. One governor described how leaders *'fight for the children, particularly the SEND children, advocating tirelessly for both pupils and their families.'*

Relationships across the school are a significant strength. Children spoke warmly about the kindness and respect shown by adults and peers alike, explaining that *'everyone includes everyone and that if somebody is alone, someone will comfort them.'* They described teachers as *'very kind and respectful to anyone'* and explained how Play Leaders ensure that no child is left without someone to play with. The genuine regard that children have for one another was evident during discussions and from my observations across the school, as was their confidence in the adults around them. The school has successfully created a culture where differences are accepted, individuality is celebrated and children feel safe to be themselves.

Pupil voice is highly valued and children are empowered to take on meaningful leadership roles throughout the school. Pupils spoke proudly of their involvement as Maths Ambassadors, Science Ambassadors, Reading Ambassadors, Eco Councillors and School Councillors. They described how they contribute ideas, organise activities and welcome visitors into school. This commitment to children's participation extends into the wider school environment. A particularly powerful example can be seen in the school's reading hut, where children designed the rules themselves and take collective responsibility for maintaining the space. Governors noted with admiration that pupils value the area so highly they will even remind adults of the agreed expectations because *'it's their space.'*

The school's extensive enrichment offer is another outstanding feature of its inclusive practice. Leaders have created a wealth of opportunities that broaden horizons, develop confidence and foster a deep sense of belonging. As one governor observed, 'all of the extra things the school do are on top of a full curriculum.' Parents repeatedly highlighted these opportunities as one of the school's defining characteristics, with one stating, *'What they do outside the curriculum, I've never seen it anywhere else.'* Another parent reflected that the school is *'absolutely amazing because it does not put anyone's light out but instead embraces children's personalities and strengths.'*

The impact of this commitment is perhaps best illustrated through the school's highly successful Steel Band. What began as a club has evolved into a remarkable provision that now involves all Key Stage 2 pupils through specialist teaching, with performance opportunities available to those who wish to develop further. Children perform regularly at community events and prestigious venues, including the Durham Miners'

Gala, the Beacon of Light and local events. I had the opportunity to watch a performance and was genuinely blown away by the quality, enthusiasm and confidence displayed by the children. Stakeholders spoke passionately about the positive impact of the band, particularly for some pupils who may otherwise be vulnerable to disengagement. Staff described how participation has provided purpose, belonging and aspiration for children who *'could easily go off the rails but instead remain connected through their commitment to the group.'* The pride associated with belonging to the Steel Band is tangible, reflected in the band jackets, performances and continued involvement of former pupils who return to participate long after leaving the school.

The arts hold a central place within the life of the school. Annual productions and Christmas performances ensure that every child has an opportunity to participate, perform and succeed. Governors emphasised that *'everyone has a part and has an opportunity to be involved'*, enabling all pupils to develop confidence and experience success. Parents and governors alike spoke warmly about the quality of performances and the opportunities afforded to children, recognising that many of these experiences may otherwise be inaccessible. Similarly, events such as the Christmas Fayre, Remembrance Services and end-of-year celebrations actively bring families and the wider community together, strengthening already strong relationships between home and school.

The school's celebration of achievement further reinforces its inclusive ethos. Weekly celebration assemblies recognise not only academic success, but attendance, effort, reading and personal achievements. Children spoke enthusiastically about receiving certificates and rewards and clearly value the recognition they receive. Importantly, celebrations are inclusive and focus on ensuring that every child experiences success. This culture of recognition extends beyond pupils to encompass families and the wider community, fostering collective pride in the school's achievements.

Perhaps the most compelling evidence of the school's impact comes from the voices of the children and families themselves. Pupils spoke with genuine affection about their school, with one child commenting, '*Every single day, even if you don't want to come to school, when you come in you always feel welcomed by teachers and classmates.'* Parents echoed these sentiments repeatedly. One parent described moving their child to the school as *'the best thing I ever did', explaining that their child was previously 'just another kid but at West Rainton they now feel so seen and have developed significant confidence.'* Another parent summarised the views of many when they simply stated, *'It's just the best.'*

West Rainton Primary School has created an environment where inclusion is not an aspiration but a lived reality. Every stakeholder group spoke passionately about the school and demonstrated a shared commitment to ensuring that every child belongs, participates and succeeds. Children are known as individuals, families are welcomed as

partners and barriers are met with determination rather than limitation. The overwhelming impression is of a school that understands its community deeply, values every individual and works tirelessly to ensure that all children thrive. As one governor reflected, *'You just need to step into the school to see every child is thriving.'* This is a school where inclusion is woven seamlessly into the culture, curriculum and community and where every child is genuinely empowered to flourish.

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 maintain its status as a Flagship School. I therefore recommend that the school retains its 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 Gemma Robertson**

Findings confirmed by Inclusion Quality Mark (UK) Ltd:



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