



Assessor's Evaluation for the IQM Flagship Project



School: Homerswood Primary & Nursery School
Kirklands
Welwyn Garden City
Hertfordshire
AL8 7RF

Head/Principal: Ms Debbie Shirley

IQM Lead: Ms Maxine Wilson

Date of Review: 1st July 2022

Assessor: Mary Hewitson

IQM Cluster Programme

Cluster Group: Inclusion London

Ambassador: Andrea Atkinson

Date of Next Meeting: 27th September 2022

Sources of Evidence during IQM Review Day:

Discussions with:

- Headteacher
- Deputy Headteacher
- Inclusion Lead
- SendCo
- Early Years Lead
- Class Teachers
- Teaching Assistants
- Play Therapist
- Chair of Governors
- Parents

Additional Information

- IQM Submission
- Website
- Telephone conversation (prior to and after the assessment day)



Evaluation of Annual Progress towards the Flagship Project

Raising Aspirations for Year 5 Pupils

For some time, senior leaders at Homerswood Primary and Nursery School have been accessing opportunities to develop aspirational attitudes in their pupils. The limitations of poor self-image and low expectations for the future have caused concern, so teachers are working together to help children develop self-belief and a 'can do' attitude towards gaining qualifications and fulfilling careers. Pupils have participated in an 'Open Primary Day' at the University of Hertfordshire entitled 'Widening Access,' which focussed on opening young minds to future life chances. More recently, the school has become involved with another organisation called 'Primary Futures' which is more closely aligned to the needs of pupils and aims of the school. Positive links with the local University will be sustained so that opportunities to support the 'in-school' programme are not missed.

Primary Futures has developed a pedagogy based on sound research which demonstrates that disadvantaged children often benefit most from activities involving strong role models. As with many closed mindset situations early aspirational interventions can be the key to social mobility and meeting role models from the world of work can increase motivation to learn.

Primary Futures is a free resource for state primary schools with resources designed to help teachers plan different activities. It helps schools access a wide range of volunteers in different work roles and sectors so that pupils understand the various career routes available to them. Stereo-typical misnomers can be explored, especially those related to gender, age, and social background so that children grow up believing in themselves and the opportunities available to them. Workshops involving local employers can be arranged and the project feeds into the imagination and creative thinking of teachers.

Using the Primary Futures on-line platform teachers at Homerswood have initiated a wide range of innovative activities to stimulate discussion and reflection by the Year 5 pupils. NHS careers have been explored and stereotypical gender misunderstandings dispelled. A Festive Special with a 'What's my Line' quiz involved children in detective work as they tried to identify professions after being given just a little information. During a TV and Tech module children learned from a TV presenter how her work is mostly about 'telling a story through pictures,' and a Sales Director from Vodafone described how Sim cards can be used to power drones. The virtual, interactive resources have enabled pupils to engage with volunteers in a wide range of roles, inspiring and challenging doubts, and misconceptions.

Involvement in a 'Mini-Police' scheme has given pupils the opportunity to participate in a six-week course addressing several community issues and future employment possibilities for pupils. Visitors are well informed by staff before they work with pupils so that they do not give an idealised view of their work and its challenges. It is important that the employees 'behind the scenes' are acknowledged so that pupils can have a real understanding of the teamwork involved. A PCSO has led a session on the work carried out by himself and his colleagues and gave information about local crime



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figures. Another session focussed on bullying and the victims, dispelling stereo-typical beliefs as to who can be regarded as a victim and who might regard themselves as being the person bullied. Other sessions focussed on:

- anti-social behaviour – and the difference between this and unsocial behaviour.
- the work of Police Cadets and their training.
- speed awareness and how the Police handle motorist speeding situations.

Staff at Homerswood continue to investigate opportunities to broaden the life experiences of their pupils and the school has also made use of the resources provided by 'Retune Wellbeing.' This organisation 'inspires young people to improve their mental wellbeing through creative outlets such as music and the arts.' Working alongside the NHS and Mind 'Retune Wellbeing' led a workshop for Year 5 pupils with a focus on emotional resilience. Pupil participation through performance and discussion helped explore attitudes and behaviour influencing aspirations for the future and its relationship with wellbeing.

Agreed Actions for the 'next steps' in the Flagship Project

In order to maintain rigour and clarity of approach to the Flagship Project staff have considered a wide range of academic research in order to ensure that work with pupils is based on sound educational and empirical research. To this end documents such as The Aspiration Gap 2020 Report by The Princes Trust, The Education Endowment Foundation (EEF), Close the Attainment Gap and the Ambition Institute website have all been used as part of the school's research.

Following the onset of Covid 19 The Princes Trust has identified an impact on the aspirations and ambitions of young people, with a high percentage having abandoned plans for their future. Figures increase for those who are 'not in employment, education or training' (NEET). To quote just a few findings in the Trust report.

- 44% of 16 to 25-year-olds say that as a result of the Pandemic their aspirations for the future are now lower.
- 38% feel they will "never succeed in life".
- 35% believe they will have to give up their dream job "for any job".
- 47% of those in higher education but from poorer backgrounds, believe their education has "gone to waste"

The EEF has a focus on the link between improving pupil attainment and enrichment approaches. Research by the organisation shows that there is growing evidence that social and emotional, non-cognitive or essential life skills underpin success in school and beyond. These are recognised by the individual's ability to **'build relationships,**



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manage emotions and cope with difficult situations,' social skills that are underpinned by motivation and resilience.'

The Ambition Institute helps schools tackle educational disadvantage and states, ***'our vision is an education system where every child can thrive, no matter what their background.'*** It quantifies the gap between disadvantaged pupils and their non-disadvantaged peers and how this gap widens over time, ***'the gap doubles by the time they finish primary school and doubles again by the time they complete secondary school'*** meaning that at this stage disadvantaged children are 18 months behind their non-disadvantaged peers.

The research described supports the outline of the project which aims to:

- improve aspirations.
- change mindset about accessibility and the power of education.
- improve knowledge of careers.
- improve self-confidence.

In practice the ongoing project aims to:

- highlight and develop pupils' awareness of careers and opportunities around the world.
- show a connection between what they are learning at primary school and options for the future.
- use early intervention as an effective way of raising expectations and broadening their horizons.
- show pupils the relevance of school learning through 'real world' experiences.

During the coming school year all Year 5 pupils at Homerswood will participate in the project and its impact on selected pupils will be measured. Experiences will include:

- learning objectives linked to career choices and real-life experiences.
- opportunities to join extra-curricular clubs centred around career choices and interests.
- presentations from a variety of sources in various career pathways.
- Curriculum 2021; including "Be Aspirational" as a key vision/objective within the framework.

Outline of action planned to take the project forward, the SendCo, Inclusion Manager and staff team will:



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- Re-evaluate Year 5 pupils' self-esteem using the Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale. This is a widely used tool evaluation tool to assess global self-worth by measuring both positive and negative feelings.
- Explore availability and book inspirational speakers and visits for pupils. One such visit has already been planned with groups of 10 pupils attending a dog grooming business. The business structure will be explored and its relevance to success in core subjects. Pupils will be supported with the choice of questions to ask during the visit.
- Strengthen links with the local community by inviting members into school to talk to pupils about their career paths. Prepare questions with the pupils and ensure the sessions are interactive.
- Develop an understanding of role models. Plan a letter writing exercise so that children can write to their chosen person.

The Impact of the Cluster Group

The school was represented at two of the three planned Cluster Group Meetings. The third meeting was missed because of an increase in Covid infections at Homerswood.

The first meeting was hosted by The Pioneer School who shared progress made on a number of school developments. The main focus was a power point presentation demonstrating a total communication strategy using communication boards to promote social interaction for those pupils unable to relate positively to their peers. A positive outcome from the meeting has led to collaborative work between staff at Homerswood and The Pioneer School. Time to Sign resources have been shared and the use of Core Boards at Homerswood is being considered.

The second meeting was hosted by Warren Dell Primary School who shared their work developing an understanding of the 'engagement model' to enhance learning and progress. This was considered within the context of social and emotional development and all staff present were able to share current priorities and challenges in their own schools. In particular, helpful discussion about transition from mainstream to specialist provision was appreciated.

Background Information

Homerswood is a single form entry Primary School with a 26-pupil place Nursery. Most pupils transfer to the main school for the Reception Class and stay at Homerswood until the age of eleven. Educational provision for those with additional needs is excellent, demonstrated by the significantly high number of successful applications for Education Health Care Plans (EHCPs). Its reputation for this strong area of support has made the school very attractive to parents who are seeking a sympathetic and knowledgeable setting that will meet the needs of their child. Approximately 23% of pupils are in receipt of Pupil Premium Funding with a smaller percentage having English as an Additional Language (EAL).



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Overview

The school community at Homerswood Primary and Nursery School has been led by an inspirational Headteacher whose vision to provide a vibrant learning environment, meeting the needs of every pupil, is fulfilled. She will be moving on from the school at the end of the summer term and leaves behind a legacy of energy, inclusive practice, and amazing achievement. Senior Leaders have clearly defined roles and are well established in their management responsibilities. The Deputy Headteacher has been in post for several years and in September will succeed the current Headteacher giving staff, parents, and pupils a sense of confidence and continuity.

On entering the school, the immediate impact is one of vibrancy and creativity and visitors are met with a warm welcome from office staff. The entrance, opening into the attractive child friendly dining area and the buzz of activity just beyond gives an indication of the exciting life within the school. Displays support learning and also provide a colourful introduction to Homerswood. Every area within the school demonstrates how space has been identified and maximised to enhance learning opportunities so that the curriculum is rich and exciting. Outdoor learning areas have been designed to incorporate the views of pupils and it is clear that a great deal of thought and care ensures that this provision is well maintained and most importantly is used by the children.

The SendCo and non-teaching Inclusion Manager work closely to monitor provision for all pupils especially those with additional needs, ensuring that across the school there is an ethos of understanding the wider context for learning. Respect for diversity, encouragement of self-belief and the offer of a wide variety of relevant real-life experiences underpins their vision for holistic education. Early language development is seen as a key to future success and the skills of a speech and language therapist helps staff focus on the assessment and monitoring of the youngest children in the school. Termly reviews of learning across all Year groups involve senior leaders, class teachers and Teaching Assistants. The meetings support the review of pupil progress and the identification of emerging additional needs.

During Covid19 lockdowns the needs of Homerswood families were closely monitored, through home visits, phone calls and on-line meetings. Food parcels were delivered, and extra support was put in place when needed. Fortunately, before the Pandemic, the school had invested in Chrome Books and teachers were familiar with Google Classroom. This gave the school community a flying start with remote learning imposed by further restrictions on face-to-face learning. Children who had been receiving different therapeutic support continued to access their specialised learning programmes because of the commitment of so many staff.

Pupil Leaders from the Year 6 class spoke animatedly of their involvement in important aspects of school life. They are immensely proud of the responsibilities they have been given as they contribute to the interview process for new staff as well as meeting with governors to discuss important decisions. With transition to secondary school happening in the near future they feel very well prepared especially through the strong relationship between Homerswood and the nearby Secondary provider. During the



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second half of the Summer Term a member of the Secondary School support team - a Higher Level Teaching Assistant (HLTA) - spends two mornings a week at Homerswood so that the needs of every child are understood before they move on. A support programme using NESSie resources supports a specific group of pupils who may find transition more challenging. 'NESSie supports the mental wellbeing of children and young people through one-to-one and group therapy, and through the training of parents and professionals in educational settings.' Pupils spoke of the reassurance they feel knowing that a member of the Secondary School team will already know them well as they continue their educational journey when they move on and feel confident that she will provide a reassuring link between the primary and secondary settings. They spoke enthusiastically about the Pathways curriculum that is now in place and reflected on the opportunities and experiences it has given.

Senior Leaders at Homerswood have developed a strong educational vision for curriculum delivery. Over time this has been reviewed and developed so that pupils understand the learning journey they are experiencing. It provides opportunities for pupils to negotiate and identify 'Footprints' in their memories by participating in special experiences – keeping these memories in a 'Pathway Pad.' Through this approach pupils take greater responsibility for their learning with activities that enrich and personalise the National Curriculum. For example, most recently pupils in Years 5 and 6 have worked with their teachers to identify footprints/experiences they would like to explore including:

- a visit to an art gallery.
- listening to an orchestra.
- planning a journey using public transport.
- cooking a budget three course meal.
- visiting a courthouse.

Learning outdoors has been hugely developed and it is very clear that these areas are extremely well resourced, maintained and used by pupils, having become an integral part of their learning experience. A member of staff has responsibility for developing and overseeing the impact of outdoor learning and the Forest School approach across the school, providing safe and stimulating resources accessible to all pupils. Staff are very aware of the impact of Covid19 and the social isolation of many pupils during this time. Year 1 children missed many of the practical experiences that are associated with Early Years pupils so the most enticing outside learning area (including a mud kitchen) has been developed beside the Year 1 classroom. Teaching Assistants described how outdoor experiences are linked to indoor classroom learning and how they track children's choices so that every individual has a balanced experience. They described the inclusive practice in place to support the additional needs of one pupil and the understanding and kindness shown by the other children.

Year 2 children have also been targeted for extra emotional and social support as staff are aware of particular gaps in their development and wellbeing caused by limitations



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for social interaction during Covid times. Extra classroom support has been put in place to nurture the wellbeing of all pupils in this year group.

Homerswood can be described as a 'generational' school as several parents and grandparents have attended it still living in the catchment area. A strong ethos of self-belief, respect for diversity and the choices afforded by different life experiences are important values expressed by senior leaders. Recently, a Fathers, Uncles and Grandfathers day known as a 'Fudge Day' welcomed the male members of families to visit the school and join in activities to discover the special approach to learning at Homerswood.

Inclusion permeates every aspect of school life at Homerswood and information about children who are being supported can be very emotionally moving. A non-verbal child in an Early Years class has learnt to communicate using an innovative iPad application. In a search to find a way to support this child his Early Years teacher discovered the resource when she visited a nearby specialist school. It enables this remarkable child to ask questions and express his feelings by selecting an appropriate response to stressful situations. For example, when he was on a family holiday, he exhibited distress but was unable to communicate with the adults to explain the cause of his anxiety. However, he was able to select the phrase 'I am confused' and his carers were then able to reassure him that his time away from home was temporary and that they would soon be returning to their familiar surroundings. On another occasion he was able to tell his parents that he had been 'hit' by another child again by selecting the correct phrase from his iPad app.

Eight children at Homerswood have been identified as 'young carers' and the teacher responsible for ensuring they are supported has an in-depth understanding of the complexities of this phrase. She ensures that staff have accessed clear information and training so that all adults in school can understand the pressures on these children. She arranges opportunities for the group to get together to share and talk about their caring responsibilities and in this way, they offer each other support. Special outings are arranged for the group and individuals and the receiving schools are prepared for their transition.

Music is an important part of school life at Homerswood and the teacher who leads the subject has ensured that high quality performance is only part of the musical experience. All children are included and given the opportunity to benefit from the many experiences made available and the ability to sing in tune is not a deciding factor. The music curriculum is built around the concept of opportunity so that every child is able to discover and express their musical talent. The misnomer that boys are not interested in singing has been dispelled and the teacher responsible gives all children the opportunity of performing at prestigious venues such as the O2 Arena. Musical performances by professionals are welcomed in the school and on the day of the IQM review a group of musicians were in school demonstrating Beat Boxing, Acapella and other talents. Children were enthralled, and the skill of the performers gave a strong message that it is important to explore music through a different, sometimes unconventional medium. Performances by a male Voice Choir have also been enjoyed and the school commits to participation in many local musical events.



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Over a period of time the school has supported the training of a Play Therapist by offering supervised work experience. Her training has progressed, and she is now attending the school and working with pupils more regularly. The therapy helps children come to terms with worrying situations within their world and to safely explore areas that are difficult to talk about. Play therapy helps children release stressful thoughts and map out possible solutions. School staff identify children who may benefit from play therapy such as those with emotional or behaviour concerns or a diagnosed disorder. The therapist offers 12 sessions for each child she is working with, building up trust whilst offering play opportunities such as art, sand, games etc. Her role is not to interpret what the children say or do but rather to share comments such as 'I noticed, I wonder, I imagine.' In this way she gently encourages the children to explore their feelings and find solutions to worries they may have. During our conversation she stressed the importance of making the child feel important so that they feel a sense of empowerment whilst developing coping strategies and making sense of their worries.

The newly appointed Chair of Governors is also the Link Governor for Inclusion and SEND and is very positive about her new role and responsibilities. She acknowledges the difficulties caused by the limitations of face-to-face meetings during Covid times but is now a regular visitor in school. She appreciates the 'community atmosphere' within the school and is complimentary about the openness with which school staff share information with the Governing Body. She meets regularly with the SendCo to discuss budgetary constraints and to ensure that the needs of the most vulnerable children are being met. Similarly, Pupil Premium expenditure is discussed at full Governing Body meetings when school leaders can explain how funding is allocated. Governors are familiar with the 'pathway approach' to the curriculum and as a parent of a child in the school the Chair appreciates its positive impact.

A parent of three children, two still at Homerswood and one who has moved to secondary school, spoke very positively about the support she has received from staff, especially during Covid lockdowns. These times were particularly challenging as she was also diagnosed with a serious illness as well as coping with the anxiety of a child with additional needs. Regular contact with school staff provided tremendous support and helped her through the challenges. The support she received has continued and she is overwhelmed by the kindness emanating from the school.

Buzz, based in the Year 4 class, is a trained and qualified 'therapy dog' whose presence in the classroom is seen to offer comfort and reassurance to pupils. It is hoped that he might receive further training as research strongly suggests that therapy dogs can support progress in learning as well as giving emotional support. Therapy dogs are believed to 'help develop students' reading skills, improve behaviour, attendance and academic confidence as well as increasing student understanding of responsibility and empathy.'

Homerswood Primary AND Nursery School is a strong IQM Flagship school. The commitment to inclusion is strengthened by an appreciation of the high importance of aspiration and self-belief underpinning practical action across the school. The intuitive understanding of limitations caused by deprivation and disadvantage has been strengthened through the academic research undertaken within the school. In particular, the Inclusion Lead and SendCo have considered the academic evidence and



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translated it into practical action to enrich the lives of the children and further the professional understanding of staff.

Homerswood school leaders have the energy and commitment to continue their journey of excellence. Having discussed the progress made since the last IQM review and the school's plans for the future, I am of the opinion that the school should continue to hold Flagship School status and be reviewed again in 12 months' time.

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: Mary Hewitson

Findings confirmed by Inclusion Quality Mark (UK) Ltd:

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