



Assessor's Evaluation for the IQM Flagship Project



School Homerswood Primary and Nursery School
Kirkland's
Welwyn Garden City
Hertfordshire
AL8 7RF

Head/Principal Ms Mica Kettle

IQM Lead Mrs Maxine Wilson

Date of Review 26th June 2024

Assessor Ms Sian Morris

IQM Cluster Programme

Cluster Group Inclusion London

Ambassador Ms Andrea Atkinson

Next Meeting 15th November 2024

Meeting Focus TBC

Cluster Attendance

Term	Date	Attendance
Autumn 2022	4th November 2022	Yes
Spring 2023	10th March 2023	Yes
Summer 2023	9th June 2023	No
October 2023	10th October 2023	Yes
March 2024	5th March 2024	Yes
June 2024	14th June 2024	No

The Impact of the Cluster Group

Overall, the school has found the cluster group meetings helpful, having attended two out of the last three. They find meetings more useful when there is a specific focus and when there is an opportunity to tour the host school and see it in action. It is less helpful when a lot of time is spent with everyone feeding back on their IQM projects.

In terms of practical impact, attendance at cluster meetings has led to the school purchasing packs to help support children with specific learning difficulties and also with the support of children with complex needs within a mainstream early childhood setting. The school values the opportunity to visit other settings and share good practices with colleagues.



Assessor's Evaluation for the IQM Flagship Project



Evidence

- IQM review and plan.
- School website.

Meetings and discussions with:

- Inclusion Manager.
- Special Educational Needs (SEN) Governor.
- Assistant Headteacher.
- A range of subject coordinators.
- Groups of children from Years 5 and 6.

Additional Activities

- Tour of school.
- Time spent in nursery and reception classes, including informal conversations with children.
- Attendance at the nursery sharing assembly.
- Conversations regarding the gender project.



Assessor's Evaluation for the IQM Flagship Project



Evaluation of Annual Progress towards the Flagship Project

The school previously completed two others, focusing on secondary transition and pupil aspirations. This is the first year of a new IQM Flagship Project. The reception lead is new to the school this year and has done similar work in a previous setting. Staff wanted to do a project that focused on removing the limits placed on children, which sits within a wider cultural change to a more child-led way of working.

This project is currently focused on the Years and reception in particular. The project title is:

To implement an inclusive approach to Early Years education by reviewing practice to offer a non-gender stereotypical experience for our children.

The project intends to “recognise and correct unintentional gender bias that can be present in the school environment, curriculum, and routines.” The aim is to use early intervention to address gender stereotyping and promote gender equality, to give all children a positive early experience that does not confine them to gender norms.

As this is the first year, the project is at an early stage of development. Initially, the school undertook a literature review of key texts, with a specific focus on gender equality and the Early Years. Over the year, the school has taken several practical steps to begin to address the issue. These include a review of the Early Years curriculum, the texts used with and available to the children, and a self-audit tool to look at staff use of gender-specific terms. This has helped to raise awareness of unconscious bias in the provision made for children and in the language, staff use when talking to children of different genders. The reception class also has Hal the hippo, who is referred to as they and them rather than he or she, and the children performed a less traditional Nativity at Christmas. In addition, staff have taken opportunities to address and challenge gender bias, for example, by inviting a woman farmer to speak to the children.

The school is also working with a Camden-based charity, Lifting Limits, to look at the issue of toxic masculinity in boys and its impact on their mental health. This is more focused on children in upper Key Stage 2 and is aimed at supporting boys in expressing their emotions in healthy and appropriate ways. Some adaptations and additions are being made to the Relationships, Sex, and Health Education (RSHE) curriculum to support this, and the school has put in a bid to be part of the pilot Boyhood Project for the next academic year. This will offer a programme tailored to each class and will focus on developing awareness of boys' mental health needs with all children.



Assessor's Evaluation for the IQM Flagship Project



Agreed Actions for the Next Steps in the Flagship Project

The next step is to roll out the initiative to the rest of the staff. Initially, this is intended to include whole-staff awareness training from Lifting Limits to encourage the wider staff to reflect on their use of language and unconscious bias and the impact it may have on the children. It will be interesting to see how things change as the children in Early Years progress through the school, particularly as the school is competing with potentially different perspectives from home and in the media.

There will also need to be a careful transition to Year 1 so that the receiving staff understand the purpose of the project and can build on the work that has been started.

Staff will need to consider how to share the project with parents and how best to help them understand the intentions behind it. As a member of staff stated, "we have a duty of care to show the children that this is the world we're in." It is always challenging to effect change and get buy-in from stakeholders. This is likely to be in year three of the project.

This is an interesting and pertinent project that aims to tackle a significant issue for all children, in particular the pressure on boys to be traditionally masculine. It fits well with the whole school approach to inclusion and the emphasis on the value of each individual.

The school may also wish to consider further amendments or additions to its curriculum to reflect this ongoing work.



Assessor's Evaluation for the IQM Flagship Project



Overview

Homerswood Primary and Nursery School is a small one-form entry school set on the outskirts of Welwyn Garden City in Hertfordshire, with around 230 children on roll. Most pupils are white British, with a small but increasing number of children from other ethnic backgrounds. A small minority of children have English as an Additional Language (EAL).

Homerswood prides itself on being an inclusive school where every individual is welcome and made to feel valued. There are currently ten children who have Education and Health Care Plans (EHCPs), as well as a small number of children with additional special educational needs. A further two children are going through the statutory assessment process. There are around thirty children on the Special Educational Needs (SEN) register, and there is also a wider inclusion register for children who need any kind of additional input or support.

There is a lovely community feel to the school from the moment you walk in. During the nursery sharing assembly, it was lovely to see the reactions and support the older children gave the youngest. For example, one child was upset and did not want to perform, but he was quickly reassured by a member of staff, and none of the children laughed at him or made fun of him. All the children in the audience were kind and appreciative of the efforts the nursery children made. When I mentioned this to a Year 6 child, she said, "that's Homerswood for you!" The nursery children themselves were generally very confident and proud to be performing. The assembly was extremely well attended by family members and there was a real buzz and pride in the children's performance.

The overarching ethos of the school is one of care and inclusivity, right from the nursery up until Year 6. The fact that the school is quite small helps, as children often have siblings and know children in other year groups. The school also uses a buddy system so that the older children support the younger ones when they start, having lunch with them and visiting to read with them.

The children I met and spoke to were fantastic ambassadors for the school. They have a strong sense of trust in adults and know who to go to if they have a problem. They also felt listened to by the staff. Staff know their pupils well and have patience and care for them. I saw one child who was highly distressed at the end of playtime being gently supported by an adult and slowly calming down enough to return to her class. One 5 year old child told me, "we're such a friendly school; we accept anyone who is different; we accept them for who they are".

I was particularly struck by the care and consideration the children gave to each other. For example, one child accidentally hit another with a tennis ball; not only did she apologise but she also went and hugged the other child. Generally, children were working and playing harmoniously, with even the youngest taking turns and listening to others. The children I spoke to told me about the Buddy Bench, where they could sit if they wanted someone to play with; although one child said, "no one really has to sit on it. Everyone has a friend at the school."

The school has what one member of staff described as a therapeutic approach to behaviour management. Children are supported to think through difficulties that arise



Assessor's Evaluation for the IQM Flagship Project



and look at ways of restoring harmony rather than being punished. Staff make an effort to ensure all pupils feel heard. Each classroom has well-begins and learning scales to support children in expressing their emotions and taking responsibility for their learning. Children have access to a member of staff with whom they can discuss worries or concerns in the "Bubble Room." One child said, "You can sit on the sofa, and the teachers help." There is also a school dog, Buzz, belonging to one of the teachers, who sometimes acts as a therapy dog and has helped encourage reluctant attendees to come to school.

The provision for children with additional needs is carefully thought out and tailored to the individual. For example, many classrooms have individual workstations for children; before these are set up, a conversation is had with the pupils about where they want it to be and what they need to make it successful for them. Visual prompts and clearly defined spaces make it easier for pupils to understand the expectations. Pupils are encouraged to self-advocate for themselves and others. Homerswood receives some support from Hertfordshire's advisory team and this is reported to be of good quality. They have input from the Early Childhood Advisor and the autism team, which they have found helpful in supporting individual children.

Like most schools, Homerswood is facing challenges in terms of the provision of specialist services such as speech and language therapy. Screening is used regularly to assess the children's needs. The school has taken active steps to address this need by employing a Higher Level Teaching Assistant (HLTA) to lead on speech and language in the Early Years who is Elklan trained. She oversees the programmes and targets set by the National Health Service (NHS) Speech and Language Therapist and she also liaises with the families to try and get them involved. This role has evolved since it was first established, and the school is now considering how best to use this expertise to support children with English as an Additional Language. For those children with private speech and language therapists, the school works closely with those professionals to ensure consistency. The school is also looking into the possibility of Makaton training for staff.

The school does have some additional support from a volunteer reader who works with key children twice a week for the academic year to improve their reading skills. She uses quizzes and book reviews to motivate the children and keep them engaged; staff report, "the increase in their confidence and enthusiasm is amazing."

Homerswood offers a wide range of extracurricular clubs and activities that the children can access. These include a breakfast and after-school club, which is run by the school and has a waiting list as it is so popular. Children also have the option of joining a range of clubs run by staff, including homework, rounders, Do It Yourself (DIY), choir, gardening, yoga, gymnastics, football, street dance, knitting, ukulele, and netball. One 5-year-old child said, "the opportunities are very wide."

Children have opportunities to take on a range of responsibilities, particularly in Year 6. They have pupil leaders and sports leaders, as well as a school council. The week I visited was Enterprise Week, and Year 6 was busy with a range of money-making projects to raise funds for their end-of-year celebrations. The children also appreciate the trips and events the school provides, such as opportunities for sports and performances. They spoke enthusiastically about the residential trips and trips into central London to the Tate Gallery.



Assessor's Evaluation for the IQM Flagship Project



Children are encouraged to be aspirational from a young age, within the theme of "people who help us." Early years have had visits from a vet, postperson, dental nurse, and farmer. They learn to express themselves and to think carefully about different issues; each week there is a special assembly that gives children a topic to consider, which they then vote on in class. Often, this is linked to topical or world events and can include quite hard-hitting issues. Children are encouraged to articulate their views and consider the perspectives of others and this is evident in their interactions with adults and each other.

Homerswood is set on extensive grounds with plenty of access to natural spaces, including wooded areas. There are many different outdoor activities for the children to do, with a range of play equipment, and the attractive outdoor areas are well utilised by the school. One child said, "I like that there's fun stuff outside." The school also has its own vegetable garden. Many children live in flats so access to outside space is crucial for their physical development.

The school itself has a light and airy feel, with large classrooms. There is a common display theme running through the school, with all displays in hessian and neutral tones. This encourages a calm and natural feel in each room and enables the quality of the work itself to be appreciated. Each class begins the year by making a display about themselves and what is important to them, entitled "Proud to Be Me," using photos and pictures from home. There are many positive affirmations and quotes in classrooms and around the school.

Every classroom also has a display relating to "Celebrating Us," where children can choose which pieces of their work to display. Over the past few years, the school has tried to make the classrooms feel more homely with the addition of soft furnishings and pot plants. This has the added advantage of providing more sound absorption so that the classrooms are less noisy.

As a community school, there are a number of events throughout the year that families can take part in. These include GLAM and FUDGE events, which are targeted at female and male family members and encourage them into school to do an activity with their child; for example, the school held a mini Olympics on a Saturday and encouraged parents in with a bacon buttie. Often, families use school events to socialise with other families, such as having an impromptu picnic following Sports Day.

The school has links with local businesses, which help supplement the offer for the children. Tesco provided bedding plants and community volunteers to plant up a beautiful new flower bank by the new Early Years' building. The school also utilises the local area, for example, by taking children to the Post Office to post their thank you cards to their buddies.

Early childhood staff place a lot of emphasis on the prime areas of development. In particular, they spend a lot of time working with parents to develop children's independence, including providing toilet training. The focus this year has been on Personal Social, Health and Emotional (PSHE) development, as this is the biggest area of need currently.

The children I saw in nursery and reception were very independent and able to access the learning environment confidently. They were also happy to chat and talk about their experiences; one group explained that they had built a volcano and were trying to escape



Assessor's Evaluation for the IQM Flagship Project



the lava, while another child told me about eating the strawberries that were growing. Drawing Club is used as a tool in Early Years to introduce children to high-quality texts and encourage them to be explorative and imaginative in their play. In particular, children write for a purpose.

There is a private preschool next door, and staff work closely with colleagues as some children attend both settings. At present, the school only offers morning places, so children with a thirty-hour code can attend school in the morning and the private nursery in the afternoon. Numbers are quite low at present, possibly because more parents are seeking full-time care so that they can work. There is an extended transition process from nursery to reception, as well as stay-and-play for the children who are attending preschool.

The school is also exploring ways of making the curriculum more inclusive and representative of society as a whole. For example, the art coordinator has introduced Artist of the Week alongside Music of the Week and Inventor of the Week. Each week, a particular artwork is shown and discussed in assembly, selected from a wide range of cultures and traditions as well as representing both male and female artists. In history and geography, thought is given to cultural representation and local links. When children study societies where people had very prescribed roles, such as the ancient Greeks and Romans, they are encouraged to reflect on what has changed and why. The school also makes use of topical events to reinforce positive messages, such as the recent success of the Lionesses' football team.

Thought has been given to the range of texts available to the children, with efforts made to ensure that different disabilities, neurodiversity, and family set-ups are represented, as well as a variety of communities and cultures. Children can contribute to reflection books, which enable them to think about what they have read and recommend books to others.

I was impressed by the determination of all the staff, to whom I spoke, to tackle difficult issues with the purpose of making things better for the children.

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 Siân Morris

Findings confirmed by Inclusion Quality Mark (UK) Ltd:

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