



Report on IQM Inclusive School Award



School Name: St Joseph's Catholic Primary School

School Address: Mill Lane
Gilesgate
Durham
DH1 2JQ

Head/Principal Mr D Miller

IQM Lead Mrs Emma Turnbull

Assessment Date 20th June 2024

Assessor Ms Elli Rhodes

Sources of Evidence:

- Lesson Observations in Maths Key Stage (KS)1 and History KS2 and discussions with teachers.
- Tour of the school including in-house additionally resourced provision 'Lighthouse Hub'.
- Pupils' books from Humanities subjects.
- Floor books from Lighthouse Hub and Personal, Social, Health and Economic (PSHE) lessons.
- IQM evidence file curated by Inclusion Manager.
- School Website.

Meetings Held with:

- Senior Leadership Team (SLT) - Executive Headteacher, Head of School and Inclusion Manager.
- Special Educational Needs (SEN) - Inclusion Manager and Trust Special Educational Needs Co-ordinator (SENDCo).
- Maths Subject Lead.
- History/Geography Subject Lead regarding Opening Worlds Curriculum.
- Staff Members.



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- Pupils - School Council, Mini Vinnies, Equalities Ambassadors, Wellbeing Group.
- Governors - Chair and SEN Link Governor.
- Positive Futures Worker and Mental Health Leads - support for vulnerable children and families.
- Senior Mental Health Lead/Effective Learning Service (ELS) and Youth Mental Health Lead/Emotional Literacy Support Assistants (ELSA).
- Phonics, Early Reading and Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS) Lead.
- Parish and Community Links: Parish Priest and Sanctuary 21 Volunteer.
- Parents and Grandparents.



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Overall Evaluation

I would like to express my thanks once again to everyone who contributed to such a successful Assessment Day and also acknowledge all the hard work and preparation that was done beforehand. I experienced the welcoming, inclusive atmosphere from the moment I arrived and the whole school community was so generous in sharing the St Joseph's way with me. Words which cropped up again and again included love, time, respect, family, community, welcome and care.

Staff and pupils are steeped in an ethos of inclusion and support which truly values every unique individual, celebrating strengths and sharing in helping each other where needed. Parents and guardians appreciate the staff's care and attention, communication and respect of all pupils and know how special the school and parish are.

Pupils are able and keen to express deeply perceptive, articulate and mature perspectives on their own learning, the school community, their charitable work and the care of others. They are being very well prepared for global citizenship and making positive contributions both locally and on a larger scale. Lessons are astonishingly effective in terms of pace, vocabulary, the inclusion of all pupils, the celebration of success and support when misconceptions arise.

Inclusion at St Joseph's is the starting point for all endeavours, never a bolted-on afterthought. It underpins every policy, decision and element of practice across the school, both in mainstream classes and the Lighthouse Hub. All staff are passionate about what they are trying to achieve and committed to succeeding for each person they work with. They are a happy team who collaborate on projects as well as striving individually to be and do, the best they can.

Senior Leaders are available and ready to help their pupils and colleagues as well as parents, family members and other professionals. There is a well-established culture of open conversation, mutual support and non-defensive discussion which facilitates the sharing of best practice and improvement for individual practitioners as well as teams and groups of staff.

Staff are confident and knowledgeable, committed to their areas of responsibility and all hold an attitude of 'we could do more' which keeps them striving for further development. They model positive attributes to their pupils, who talk warmly about the teaching and support staff and feel part of 'even more than a family' as one person said. Respect is mutual between children and adults and between adult colleagues, which allows both professional and personal relationships to flourish.

Governors are enthusiastic about the good work of the school and play key roles as critical friends, holding staff and Senior Leaders to account. They are clear in their stance that St Joseph's is a community faith school, not a specialist provision and have worked hard to strike the balance for all learners to be fully included through in-house investment into buildings, staff training and curriculum provision.

Links with other schools, the parish and the wider Catholic church are fostered to benefit all learners and nobody is excluded from opportunities for any reason, such as faith, economic status or first language. Pupils and staff have a voice which is sought



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and listened to and they feel seen and heard by the leadership and management. Professionals who work within and beyond the school commented repeatedly about how St Joseph's is a shining example of inclusive practice and 'going the extra mile'.

The learning environment, classroom spaces, resources, curriculum development and pedagogy are exemplary. It is clear that the staff's aims of including all learners, reducing cognitive load and sensory overwhelm from displays and presentations, keeping lessons pacy and exciting and ensuring that learning lands and stays with pupils in memorable, useful ways, are being met.

Teaching staff are energised and excited about the curriculum and acknowledge the SLT's awareness of workload and efforts to reduce this where possible, meaning that time and energy can be spent on things which are of the most benefit to the pupils. This principle is applied across planning and assessment, preparing lessons, keeping displays up to date and keeping parents and carers informed of their children's achievements.

Everything that St Joseph's staff commit to is done with their school mission statement 'Live fully; act justly' in mind and they certainly go the extra mile to do justice to their responsibilities. Strong relationships are sought, fostered and maintained not just within school and with the immediate community of families, but across the parish and diocese, the local authority and through their national and global links.

There are a lot of programmes and initiatives in place, including No Outsiders, Mini Vinnies, Year 6 Ambassadors for wellbeing and equalities, the St Joseph's Way Behaviour Curriculum, the Opening Worlds' curriculum with its ten teaching principles, the UNICEF Rights Respecting Schools award, Catholic Social Teaching, the teaching of British Values and many others. I list them all partly to highlight the amount of work being done which staff are very modest about and also to say how well they complement each other and have clearly been selected with care and attention to the unique needs of St Joseph's school.

I am of the opinion that the school fully meets the standard required by the Inclusion Quality Mark's Inclusive School Award. I recommend that the school be awarded the Mark and be reassessed in three years' time.

I would recommend the school as a Centre of Excellence (CoE) straight away, however, I appreciate that they may not want to move to this status at this stage. With curriculum rollout and other potential changes shortly, the required commitment to the IQM cluster groups may be too much to add. That is entirely the school's decision. If they do wish to proceed to Centre of Excellence, I feel the school has a lot to offer in leading on inclusion and sharing its excellent practice with other settings. They are also likely to benefit from the time spent with like-minded practitioners and bring new ideas to St Joseph's.

Assessor: Ms Elli Rhodes

Findings confirmed by Inclusion Quality Mark (UK) Ltd:

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



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Element 1 - The Inclusion Values of the School

Senior Leaders, staff members, pupils, Governors, parishioners and parents/grandparents all articulated the inclusive ethos of the school and it was clear to see how central this is to everything at St Joseph's.

The SLT referred to the school mission, 'Live fully; act justly' and expressed their inclusive ethos as 'all are welcome'. They said, "We look at it through the eyes of a child; what would they consider to be inclusion?" Displays and examples of pupils' work throughout the school reflect their knowledge of the Equality Act (2010), the UNICEF Rights Respecting Schools award, the 'No Outsiders' programme and the British Values – and how these are linked and complementary. Pupils talk comfortably and knowledgeably about diversity in its many forms and how the school staff helps them when they have questions.

Staff commented that "dignity and respect underpin everything and how we interact with every pupil. Inclusive practice needs to be your everyday core business; it's not a bolt-on, it is central and integral". They said, "Every child, irrespective of what's going on, is valued and encouraged to reach their full potential".

The school's stance is firmly against exclusion and it has been successful in supporting pupils to increase their attendance and engagement in lessons and social times, by adapting practice, building excellent relationships, validating children's and families' experiences and providing support for many aspects of life, not just those directly implicated in school.

In recent months there has been a focus on Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND) provision with the opening of a brand new in-house 'Lighthouse Hub' additionally resourced suite of classrooms, outdoor areas, intervention rooms including Occupational Therapy (OT) and cloakroom. This has not detracted from the overall focus on inclusion in its broadest sense, or the provision for those children successfully accessing the mainstream classrooms, however, it was a dominant feature of the IQM self-evaluation report.

Assessment of need is timely, accurate and ongoing, with easily accessible progress trackers in classrooms for children's achievements to be noted immediately and monitored accurately, particularly in the Lighthouse Hub. Reading is assessed across the school by the SENDCo, who carries resources at all times to top up and consolidate knowledge with key children in a method she called 'Peppering throughout the day'.

Next Steps:

- Ensure that the IQM self-evaluation report for next time reflects the many different forms of inclusion which are embedded at St Joseph's – not just the excellent provision for additional needs and disabilities.
- Encourage staff to broaden their definition of inclusion so that all they do is celebrated.



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Element 2 - Leadership and Management and Accountability

It is clear from spending time in school that excellent relationships underpin the successful practice and warm, welcoming atmosphere at St Joseph's. Staff reported that Senior Leaders within the school and the Bishop Wilkinson Trust are approachable, available and make time to discuss any matters raised. A parent told me that a senior member of staff "...is brilliant. I can ring any time and they will have time to help me deal with whatever it is".

Leaders shared their vision for the school and were very clear that they have high expectations and aspirations for every pupil and staff member. The Lighthouse Hub has been created by passionate, visionary people who are clear that it plays a central role in school and is a place for staff to develop skills and techniques that will also benefit learners in mainstream classes.

Policies reflect the practice on the ground and recent training in Mental Health provision is being disseminated to all staff by the Designated Senior Mental Health Lead, Youth Mental Health First Aider and the Positive Futures Worker.

Safeguarding is embedded within the culture and staff spoke of feeling comfortable to raise questions and possibly more minor things, to seek reassurance and guidance as to whether to escalate their concerns. Pupils are clear that they feel safe in school and that staff look after them effectively. One child said, "I think they do a lot of these things to make it feel more like home... and it does".

One of the school's Governors told me, "I think staff feel safe and assured in what they're doing and that comes from good leadership. It provides them with the assurance that what they're doing is right and is what the school is about. That comes from training, seeing results and positive feedback from parents".

Workload is recognised as an important consideration and was mentioned several times during my visit. Effective strategies have been implemented, such as target tracking sheets on clipboards in classrooms, ready to hand when staff observe a child making progress, rather than relying for example on taking photographs, printing, adding captions and uploading or sticking into pupils' records. The Subject Lead for History and Geography commented on the streamlined nature of the new 'Opening Worlds' curriculum and the relatively small amount of preparation time needed, to put together a pacey, inclusive, exciting lesson.

Monitoring is regular and effective, with changes brought in where needed. SLT members conduct informal learning walks to see what 'ordinary provision' looks like and ensure that good practice is consistent – for example, the Regulation Station table at the back of each room would never be used for storage or as an extra desk, ensuring it is always available when needed.

Throughout my visit, staff spoke about their strong links with external agencies and professionals, including Trust staff, Local Authority (LA) teams, charitable organisations, a local Family Hub and social workers. These relationships are used well to maximise the benefit for pupils and staff at St Joseph's. During my visit, I spoke with several



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people who work across numerous settings and LAs and they were clear that this school is at the forefront of inclusive practice and a welcoming ethos. Good practice is shared in both directions so that St Joseph's benefits both from new ideas coming in and from external recognition as being a school with excellent provision in place.

The Chair of Governors and Link Governor for SEND were clear that they offer challenges to staff, saying, "The role of Governors is to probe behind the data in the Headteacher's report". For example, recently this happened in ensuring that provision was well tailored for children achieving above age-related expectations. A discussion with the Lead for Maths was one element of this and adaptations were made. The Chair said, "I can now go back to the Governors and reassure them that the school is mindful of the full range of needs".

The Governors spoke knowledgeably about the school's use of Pupil Premium funding, how this is spent and how the impact is monitored to ensure benefit for those children who are entitled to it. The SEND Link Governor said, "Everyone is supported and nurtured in this school... Everyone".

Governors also take seriously their commitment to staff wellbeing, ensuring that workload is as manageable as possible and that Continuing Professional Development (CPD) is well chosen and responsive to staff's learning needs. School staff are open to visits, which can be formal or informal and the Governors referred to it as 'taking the temperature' to build a picture over time.

Next Step:

- Consider the makeup of the Governing body and its reflection of the school's increasingly diverse community, if this is not already the case. Consider recruiting Parent Governors and local members of community groups as well as school and parish figures so they can bring lived experience of Mental Health difficulties, learning English as an Additional Language and living in poverty, alongside their professional knowledge and expertise.



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Element 3 - Curriculum – Structure, Pupil Engagement and Adaption

St Joseph's staff work hard to ensure that pupils' experience in school is the best it can possibly be and that this is true for every individual as well as key groups. They benefit from being part of a Trust and make the most of expertise in the wider staff body, as well as within the school itself.

External specialists have been consulted for the development of a new school curriculum, which is up and running in some subject areas with further roll-out planned for September 2024 and beyond. The subject planning across the school in History and Geography shows clear sequencing and progression and ensures that "no learning is left to chance". Content links across subjects so that humanities topics complement and enrich each other, supporting and supported by lessons in core subjects.

Observations in Maths and History lessons, followed by discussions with the respective teachers afterwards, allowed me to see for myself the high levels of engagement from pupils, the breadth and depth of their knowledge and the inclusive nature of the classroom experience. St Joseph's is a small school with mixed-age classes, so the Opening Worlds curriculum has been carefully adapted by school staff to fit the 'S plan' of progression through mixed Year 1 and 2, Year 3 and 4 and Year 5 and 6 classes. For Maths, the school has quite recently adopted the Power Maths approach, again with some work to tailor it for St Joseph's unique needs.

In the Year 1 and 2 Maths lesson, children were divided between input from the class teacher, independent practice, and support from the Teaching Assistant (TA). Year 1 children, on the carpet, were answering fast-paced questions in a 'flashback' to previous learning, supported by visual representation and differentiated questioning. Their understanding of tens and ones was clear and they moved between numerical and picture symbols and Numicon-style representations. Key vocabulary was used confidently, including a girl who said there was no need to count to 11 because with a ten and a one she could just subitise.

Meanwhile, Year 2 children were confidently working through other tasks related to place value and some had moved on to a multi-step word problem involving money. Their arithmetic was very secure and once they had unpicked the steps required to solve the problem, they were able to complete the calculations quickly. A second whiteboard at the back of the room was well used by the TA to support her group and allowed for two teaching sessions to happen at once, without either group disturbing the other.

Local, national and global dimensions are considered and included throughout the curriculum, which is linked with the No Outsiders scheme and dovetails with the Catholic church's global work. Staff and pupils are very aware of and involved in, the work of the Catholic Agency for Overseas Development (CAFOD) and a lesson in PSHE about refugees, on the day I visited school, prompted a child to ask very empathically, "Who's going to help them if they can't speak our language"?

The new curriculum is exciting, motivating, oracy-linked and very skills-focused. Pre-teaching was shown to be highly effective in the History lesson I observed, in allowing pupils not only to answer the teacher's questions but to tell a well-structured story



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which moved the lesson forward. Off-site consolidation and visitors into the school add vibrancy and allow learning to be anchored. Two teachers spoke to me about hearing children on a residential talking about the 'agriculture' they observed from the coach and children visiting Beamish reporting excitedly on the 'pastoral farming' they had noticed. All pupils are included and planned for when trips and visitors are arranged and parents spoke to me about how their children's needs were always considered.

Reading, writing and maths are clear focuses at St Joseph's and the new curriculum is steeped in quality literature. The Reading Lead across the school described their use of the Reading Spine books and making books available, 'That children can see themselves in.' Children take home a story to share once a week, which is not necessarily one they are expected to read themselves. This is in addition to the decoding practice for younger year groups. The aim is for all pupils to complete the Read Write Inc. scheme by the end of Key Stage 1, which is currently the case. There are measures in place for catch-up work should this be needed into Year 3 and beyond to support individual pupils.

TAs and Higher-Level Teaching Assistants (HLTAs) have been highly trained in teaching and assessing reading and they support assigned year groups at Early Bird clubs which happen four mornings per week before school and include a free breakfast. This innovative extension of the school day reflects the school's commitment that "attending a reading intervention would never prevent a child from accessing the art or history curriculum for example".

Pupils are proud of their School Council and feel that their voices are heard and listened to. They gave examples around sports equipment, with a trim trail installed and metal goalposts acquired to replace plastic ones which were too light and flimsy. They also talked about a 'safety map of the school' completed by colour coding where they felt more and less safe. "Cloakrooms were a hotspot for reds and oranges and so now more teachers go there – it feels better now, like it's massively improved".

Extra-curricular clubs are available at least four afternoons per week. Pupils told me that, "We did a survey – teachers noticed not many people go to clubs so now there are clubs nearly every day of the week - Lego, basketball, rugby for Years 3 to 6, secret club where it's a surprise activity..." The cost is a flat rate, whether delivered by school staff or external specialists, which makes all clubs accessible to all interested families. Children eligible for Pupil Premium funding are offered a free place and 33% regularly attend clubs, in comparison to 26% of other pupils.

Next Steps:

- Continue the introduction of the 'Opening Worlds' curriculum during the next academic year.
- Create a long-term plan of essential learning opportunities beyond the classroom for each year group with at least three experiences each year, such as a museum visit and an outing 'beyond the locality'.



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Element 4 - Teaching and Learning – Learning Environment, Planning Resources, Pedagogy

Across the school, displays in classrooms and corridors follow a consistent, neutral colour scheme of hessian backing with black borders and text. Within classrooms, the subject displays are broadly in the same position, as far as the curriculum and building layout allow. The effect in each room is to reduce the processing required and allow all pupils to access the key vocabulary and other resources that have been carefully and thoughtfully curated for display.

The consistency between classes also means that when pupils transition to other rooms, for example in their House groups or in September, they already know the layout of the new classroom. This helps them to feel safe, regulated and able to independently access resources. Each classroom also has a 'regulation station' table, again in a consistent position, which pupils are comfortable to use and understand the purpose of.

Classrooms are calm, purposeful spaces which are light and airy and feel very welcoming. The ten teaching principles of Opening Worlds have been embedded in all subjects and include storytelling, choral response and securing fluency and pace. The principle of 'don't ask one, ask five' ensures high levels of engagement and interaction from all pupils and gives opportunities for answers to be built upon by others, leading to a complete response which is then repeated by the whole group.

Technology is used effectively and judiciously to support learning and whiteboard presentations designed to be low in cognitive load are used along with film clips where appropriate. Laptops are available to pupils with identified needs in their support plans and whole-class access is ensured where beneficial. School budgets necessitate the limiting of whole class use, but its importance is understood.

Clear and effective planning, including for the deployment of support staff, ensures that learners achieve their identified outcomes across lessons, across academic years and their school careers. Support staff are carefully matched, for instance to particular year groups for the Early Bird reading club, depending on their particular skill set. Their feedback to class teachers is built into the school's way of working and their evaluations help to determine the next steps for pupils. CPD is an area of investment to ensure the ongoing development of staff, who are recognised as "the most valuable resource in school".

Resources and curriculum overviews are regularly audited, to ensure diverse representation both of authors and illustrators and of the pupils and staff in school. Weekly SEND Learning Walks are conducted to monitor the classroom environment and ensure that any changes are identified and implemented as early as possible. SEND provision within the mainstream school is comprehensive and varied, to accommodate learners who can thrive in those classrooms with the right additional support in place. All learning environments and materials reflect the school's inclusive ethos. Staff showed me examples of reading materials printed in navy on cream paper and many staff carry a lanyard with Alternative and Augmentative Communication (AAC) symbols, to support spoken or written language with learners across the school.



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The specialist Lighthouse Hub is additionally resourced, in terms of its newly built classrooms, higher staff ratios and specialist teaching and curriculum. It also holds a key role in staff development and is the starting point for the school's provision and ethos. The Executive Head said, "The Lighthouse Hub is the key – we start there. We want all staff to be able to transition between Lighthouse and Mainstream".

The provision arose from discussions with external agencies such as Behaviour and Emotional Wellbeing specialists, Speech and Language Therapists (SALT), OT and Educational Psychology (EP). This was carefully established, with input from an HMI inspector who posed helpful questions around the pathways into and out of the provision, assessment points and phased transitions with adult support.

Staff are clear that both professional and personal relationships across the team are strong, which fosters a positive culture of peer supervision, skill sharing and open discussion. One teacher told me, "as staff, we all have a say which is important. We get along, we have good conversations both professionally and personally. If I had an issue, I wouldn't be worried about mentioning it to [SLT]". Teachers newer to the profession are well supported and frequently drop into other classrooms in a focused and productive way, to improve their own practice. More established practitioners were also open with me about the support they have sought from colleagues for particular issues.

Teachers and support staff demonstrate a range of teaching approaches, including focused questioning, displays, interactive presentations, post-it notes for questions to be recorded, choral response, storytelling and written responses. Staff are extremely knowledgeable about the individual learners and groups within their classes and how the provision is adapted to meet their needs. They are articulate about how the new curriculum includes everyone and how purposeful the planning and assessment systems are. Staff also make good use of the Inclusion Manager's in-depth knowledge of pupils, families, needs and available resources and have regular reviews with her to ensure the provision is as good as possible.

Next Steps:

- St Joseph's is embarking on the Mastering Number programme with NCETM and awaiting confirmation for their Key Stage 2 application. They plan to add discrete fluency sessions in addition from September and have just completed the alignment of the progressions for mixed-age classes, for number facts.
- Ongoing rollout of Opening Worlds, it will be fascinating to see the impact of this once it is fully established.



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Element 5 - Assessment

Accurate assessment is recognised as being fundamental to the core work of a primary school and is well embedded at St Joseph's. Data captures happen twice a year, however summative assessment is ongoing throughout and between lessons, to tailor learning opportunities for each pupil. Assessment precedes each new topic in Maths and informs 'closing the gap' lessons which may be required for pre-requisite knowledge to be acquired. 'Assessment' is defined broadly and includes pupil surveys about their wellbeing and participation – this was how the engagement with extra-curricular activities mentioned earlier was picked up and improved.

Reading fluency is assessed termly for children in KS2, while phonics screens happen at least half-termly for younger pupils or those still progressing through Read Write Inc. The school uses the Language Screen app to establish a baseline for each pupil and support with any referrals to SALT services meeting the threshold. The plan is to introduce this as a standard assessment upon entry to the school.

Each half term also sees a Times Tables heatmap produced to show areas of strength and weakness via Times Tables Rock Stars. Progress meetings are held termly for all pupils and reports are made to parents regarding attainment, progress and effort. There are additional meetings for children on the SEND register and there is an open-door policy for parents to speak to staff. The parents and grandparents I spoke to on the assessment day confirmed that the school keeps them up to date, explains changes or new material and that staff are always available for further discussions. One staff member phrased the approach as, "We're walking alongside parents". A parent commented, "No question is ever a silly question - I don't feel silly asking anything".

The staff I observed worked constantly to check and support learners' understanding, address misconceptions and reinforce learning of correct information. Mistakes or challenges were framed as opportunities to learn – for the pupil in question and for their peers – encouraging a growth mindset culture and a feeling of safety conducive to taking good risks. Learning outcomes are viewed as 'steps' which may not correlate exactly with individual lessons and medium-term planning takes account of this.

The school combines the Opening World principles of choral response and 'I do, we do, you do' with the Catholic social teaching and Personal Development (PD) curriculum, encouraging all learners to support each other through partner and group work, peer learning and a growth mindset towards errors or misunderstandings. Character traits are noticed and celebrated, including the Gospel values such as kindness and courage. Parents told me that a celebration assembly had been trialled in school and after hearing positive feedback, "Staff took on board that it was well received and it has been repeated and built-in".

Next Step:

- Improve pupils' knowledge and understanding of their own learning targets by introducing termly one-to-one meetings between each pupil and their teacher, following staff training in the Autumn and the creation of a tracking document.



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Element 6 - Behaviour, Attitudes to Learning and Personal Development

The environment at St Joseph's is exceptional, in terms both of its physical attributes and the atmosphere cultivated by all members of its community. The classrooms, corridors and communal areas are calm and well-curated. All learners are accommodated and provided for thoughtfully and responsively. The 'St Joseph's Way' Behaviour Curriculum is prominently displayed and frequently referred to by staff, supporting pupils to reach the high standards and expectations of school, with the aim of these attributes becoming "habits that positively shape how they feel about themselves and how other people perceive them".

The behaviour curriculum is taught explicitly, especially early in the academic year and all pupils are supported to follow it. School staff recognise that some learners need additional support with this and 'sensitivity is applied at all times' to apply the expectations in a way which is appropriate and inclusive. For example, staff recognise that a requirement for eye contact may not be reasonable for some pupils and adaptations are made accordingly. It was suggested by staff that other children are tolerant of these adaptations being made for their peers, however, one pupil went further, saying, "Tolerance is a bit of a harsh word – we don't put up with anyone in this school, we appreciate them".

The pupils' behaviour during the Assessment visit was exemplary and this included during lessons, dinner time and outdoor play. In lessons, every pupil was engaged in learning, either independently or with support from a key adult. Children spoke to each other kindly and respectfully, even when disagreeing or reframing a comment. They defined inclusion by saying, "It's where you let everybody come into the school family. Anyone can come here – no matter who they are". Someone else said, "We don't hate. If we fall out, we work it out and hug it out".

They appreciate the support given by school routines, rules and staff, "The ladder system is good because it gives us a chance to apologise. You get two warnings, you can use the regulation station, then you would miss break, to have a chance to think. Not many people get further than that – it gets sorted". Another pupil commented, "They let us say what we think and give us the opportunity to calm down and make peace for ourselves. I'm pretty sure they're trying to make school feel like home". They talked about the 'Dark Den' sensory room, also designed on the minimalist calming principles of the wider school and explained when this might be beneficial for pupils.

Historically, persistent absenteeism has been very high and is currently slightly above the national average but has decreased very significantly. Staff ascribe this success to improved monitoring and links with other professionals in the local authority education and Social Care teams. The SLT is very clear that the exclusion of pupils goes against their ethos of inclusion and adaptation and has systems in place for early intervention when safeguarding or behaviour concerns arise. They have not excluded anyone at all during the last two years and are committed to adapting their practice so that children who need additional or adjusted provision can remain part of the St Joseph's community.

Pupils spoke to me about their 'Walk and Talk' sessions through the school sports partnership with a former Invictus Games triathlete who has led sessions focused on physical and mental health, resilience, team building, problem-solving and improving self-



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esteem and confidence. The pupils shared lots of details with me about Alex Dewar, his story and the lessons they had taken from the sessions for themselves. They also said they have started playing cricket on the playground at unstructured times, as they find it more inclusive and less prone to injuries than football. One pupil explained that it can be tricky to make football enjoyable when there is a mixture of ability, “but cricket is much better, it’s calmer and everyone can have a go if they want”.

Older pupils hold a range of prestigious roles that support the school community, including Wellbeing Ambassadors, Equalities Ambassadors, Year 6 buddies for Reception pupils and Mini Vinnies (young members of the St Vincent de Paul Society). Unusually, younger KS2 pupils have also been appointed to ‘shadow’ some of these roles so that when the Year 6 cohort moves on to Secondary school, there is legacy and succession planning in place.

Pupils spoke fluently and passionately to me about inclusion and respect. Among many comments, they said, “I would say this school is very inclusive, the staff will meet your needs”. “Inclusive means it’s ready for everyone. You be you”. The Equalities Ambassadors each have a protected characteristic from the Equality Act to focus on and the pupils told me they feel comfortable to think about and discuss their own identity in all its dimensions including sexuality, gender identity, race and ethnicity. One pupil said, “It doesn’t matter what your race or gender are, you’re appreciated for who you are”. Another commented, “Isn’t that a bit obvious? Don’t all primary schools encourage children not to discriminate?” demonstrating that the approach is second nature to pupils at St Joseph’s.

They are particularly proud of the ownership they have of the Wellbeing Wednesday lunchtime club, where mindful colouring and gratitude diaries were suggested by Wellbeing Ambassadors and made available to other pupils. The children who spoke to me were proud of offering this peer support and clear that in turn they feel well supported by staff members and know who to go to if they need further help or advice.

This element is a real area of strength and St Joseph’s staff work tirelessly to ensure their pupils have the best opportunities for personal development.

Next Step:

- Consider as discussed during the assessment visit a very small tweak in the language used around classroom regulation stations, with a shift from ‘fidget toys’ to ‘sensory tools’ for the items made available that support with regulation or concentration. With the perception shift, pupils may engage with them differently.



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Element 7 - Parents, Carers and Guardians

The school makes good use of both informal and more formal opportunities to build and maintain strong relationships with parents, carers and guardians of its pupils. A good number of parents and grandparents came into school to speak to me as part of the assessment day and had lots of constructive comments to make as well as praise and appreciation for St Joseph's.

The inclusion policy is clear and comprehensive and will be available via the updated website in due course. Other policies including SEND and Equalities are easy to find and similarly clear, up to date and detailed. Inclusion is clearly defined and there is a section dedicated to 'getting it right for every child' as well as identification of key groups of pupils and how they are supported by school practice. The policy sets out clearly the different types of support available, what these mean and who will deliver them.

Platforms including Arbor and Class Dojo are used thoughtfully and not as a blanket method of communication but tailored to individual needs and as supplements to in-person or phone conversations. Class Dojo incorporates a translation tool that has been useful for parents who speak English as an Additional Language (EAL). Pupil progress updates are regular and parents reported feeling aware of their children's school successes and areas for development. One parent told me, "I know my son isn't the only one here with additional needs – but I feel as if he is because they work so hard and try everything".

Parents and caregivers can also arrange additional meetings with SLT members or class teachers at other times and the school has a separate SEND email address for parents to communicate with the Inclusion Manager directly. Another parent commented, "Everyone's welcome here and there's a great offer for SEND. The staff are just as caring about all children. It doesn't feel like a school, it feels like a community".

There is a real sense of family members being part of the team and welcome in school. A parent who is not Catholic told me, "I said to staff that I wouldn't know what was going on. They said, don't worry, we'll guide you and they have. I've been welcomed in and it's lovely being taught [elements of worship] by the really little kids!"

Parents report that their feedback to the school is acted on, for example around attendance at celebration events. They are clear that staff make themselves available, in person or by email and phone and respond quickly to questions or requests for help. One parent said she had benefited from support with paperwork around a school placement and said 'I wouldn't be where I am without the staff here. When I needed help, it was available".

The group of parents who spoke to me certainly feel confident in the school and its Leaders and trust them. One said, "The kids respect the teachers but it's because the teachers respect the children. They make the effort to know parents as well". Another described school as their 'safe space' over multiple generations of the family attending and a third said, "There's so much work done here – and it's done quietly".

Parents are very welcome in school and they feel it. They talked about 'stay and play' sessions in Early Years classes and workshops for learners further up the school.



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They were not aware of the curriculum change to Opening Worlds but felt confident that the school would update them when needed. The school holds regular coffee mornings and other events, such as 'tea and toast breakfasts' alongside giving parents information on wellbeing, as part of Children's Mental Health Week. Other themed weeks in school involve invitations to parents and carers, such as the Reading Café that was set up during World Book Week.

Being a Catholic school there are also frequent opportunities for family members to join pupils in worship, in school and when pupils visit church. There is a prayer station in school which is used in response to events locally and further afield and parents are welcome to come in and are keen to do so. The Governors I spoke to are clear that other faith groups are welcomed and celebrated and festivals such as Eid al-Fitr are marked in school.

St Joseph's has no official Parent Teacher Association (PTA) however there are many willing volunteers to help with their regular Christmas and Summer Fairs, cinema nights and other fundraisers. Funding is ploughed back into the school to subsidise educational visits so that there is equity of access to learning experiences. One parent said, "It's good that the money goes back into school, so we can help our own community as well as the things we do for people overseas or at Sanctuary 21".

Family support is a key strength of the school and I met the Positive Futures Worker during the Assessment visit. There is support on offer with educational and social needs, access to clothing and food banks, parenting help and someone available during weekends and school holidays. The SLT spoke passionately to me about links with local Family Hub provision and other voluntary groups. Families at the school are both "in receipt of a lot of support... and the most generous in terms of what they give back". Parents can self-refer directly to the Positive Futures Worker, which allows some pressure to be lifted from the Inclusion Manager and allows parents to build a direct relationship.

Next Step:

- Consider implementing alternative methods of communication for non-parent recipients (for example a grandparent or other guardian) as electronic messages can be missed when they are not a parent and they don't receive paper copies. They are keen to be up to date with events and information.



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Element 8 - Links with Local, Wider and Global Community

St Joseph's makes good use of community resources in the local area, such as Durham City Library, other schools within and beyond the Trust, the Durham University Islamic Society, and voluntary groups including Sanctuary 21 (a Salvation Army project to support homeless and vulnerable people, in Durham city centre), theatres and venues for educational visits. Staff from the nearby Family Hub come into school each half term and publicise events, such as family fun days and a Dads' group.

Enrichment activities are built-in and further work is in hand for long-term planning of the essential off-site learning experiences for pupils throughout their primary school career. Year 6 visit the Houses of Parliament, Year 4 have a residential to the Youth (Emmaus) Village run by the Youth Ministry Team of the Diocese of Hexham and Newcastle and regular visits and visitors include theatre trips for the whole school, poet or author visits, library and faith centre links and visits to Sanctuary 21. Local clubs have been accessed by pupils, including Lego and Trampolining and careful thought and adaptation has been involved to help their attendance be a success.

The school is very outward-looking, as well as closely aware of its own pupils and staff and has good links across the Multi-Academy Trust. The Trust SENDCo spoke to me during the Assessment visit about how St Joseph's makes good use of her knowledge and experience and how she can contribute ideas and a wide awareness of resources available in a slightly larger local area. Subject Leaders collaborate in clusters within the academy Trust and external training providers are brought in for specialist input around safeguarding, behaviour and other topics to ensure consistency and continuity for staff and pupils across the Trust.

Relationships are key and staff are very strong in building and maintaining them, which among many other examples has meant that local resources for SALT support and training have been available to staff and pupils in a shorter timescale than may otherwise have been the case.

Teaching staff have engaged in professional development with peers in other schools to develop subject-specific skills and are committed to long, robust transition processes to benefit learners coming into St Joseph's and those moving on at the end of Year 6. Children in Years 5 and 6 have lessons with visiting teachers from the secondary schools, as well as making visits to their new schools and the process is begun as early as possible, especially for more vulnerable learners.

Global links for CPD are also used, through CAFOD and the Catholic Social Teaching programmes and a Mini Vinnie twinning scheme.

St Joseph's staff visit children in nursery provision, as well as speaking to their key workers and any external agencies. With small cohorts, they do not offer a staggered start in September, believing it is clearer for the children to adapt once to their new routine. 'Softer starts' to each day are offered for parents to stay a little while. This "allows them to form the relational links and makes space for conversations" as the Inclusion Manager put it.



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The school uses its Catholic links well, with CAFOD fundraising and visits from the Capuchin Brothers, who spoke to pupils about missionary work in Kenya and their role as a prison chaplain more locally, as part of the Catholic Social Teaching programme. Pupils are involved in fundraising initiatives which are deeply rooted in the understanding of local and global issues.

Around Christmas, the school organised a collection of toiletries and money for sleeping bags, for Sanctuary 21 service users, a project sparked by a pupil seeing someone homeless and bringing their concerns to the attention of their parents and teachers. Afterwards, a visit was arranged so the children could see the building and gain a good understanding of how their efforts had helped. The link volunteer who helped run the project said, "They asked really thoughtful questions and realised that the clothes we collected would not need to be large sizes. They were surprised at how many younger women access our services. They've been in the building, they know where the money's been spent, they've met the people [volunteers] and received a thank you card. Feeling empowered to take action and make a difference has a positive impact, rather than the impact of just watching the news".

St Vincent de Paul representatives often visit the school to support the Mini Vinnies programme and the children I spoke to were very proud to be part of this, saying, "It's OK to be worried about something – it means you care – but it's even better when you can do something to help". Manageable initiatives have been very effective, such as collecting 5p pieces which totalled £166, allowing Sanctuary 21 to provide 332 meals. The Parish Priest and Sanctuary 21 volunteer said, "What they're doing now is going to plant lots of seeds for them in the future – hopefully when they leave, they will still be so fired up they will make a difference".

Careful planning of off-site opportunities helps to broaden learners' horizons and creative thinking is used to bring real value and enrichment to pupils' life experiences, knowledge of the world around them and connection to the local area and wider communities. For example, a recent visit to West Boldon was the first encounter with cows and sheep for some of the children.

The community in Gilesgate values the school very highly and sees it as central to the area, as evidenced in the comments made to me by the parent group. The staff is skilled at approaching external professionals, community members and local organisations, who have been featured throughout this report. They contribute valuably to school life and fully support and extend the participation of pupils in their local and wider community.

This was an element that was not self-evaluated as highly as other areas, however during the assessment visit it became apparent that a lot of very good practice is in place and perhaps so well embedded as to be unremarkable to the staff in school.

Next Steps:

- Continue plans to increase children's global citizenship awareness through more explicit links with CAFOD.
- Develop longer-term plans to include parents and parish links in the 2024-25 academic year.