



Assessor's Evaluation for the IQM CoE Award



School Name Forest Academy
Bury Road
Brandon
Suffolk
IP27 0FP

Head/Principal Ms April Grimes

IQM Lead Ms Claire Edmeades

Date of Review 9th September 2025

Assessor Ms Hazel J Simmons

IQM Cluster Programme

Cluster Group MADIE B

Ambassador Ms Helen Harris

Cluster Attendance

Term	Date	Attendance
Autumn 2023	18 th October 2023	No
Spring 2024	14 th February 2024	Yes
Summer 2024	12 th June 2024	No
Autumn 2024	13 th November 2024	Yes
Spring 2025	3 rd April 2025	No
Summer 2025	Diary clash	No

Evidence:

- IQM Self Evaluation report
- School Development Plan (SDP)
- Pupil Premium (PP) statement
- School website
- Learning walk
- Learning environment



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- Assessment data
- Ofsted inspection report

Meetings Held with:

- Headteacher
- Special Educational Needs Coordinator (SENCo) / IQM Co-ordinator
- Teachers
- Deputy Headteacher
- Pupils
- Parents
- Chair of Governors

The Impact of the Cluster Group (with details of the impact of last three meetings)

Whitehouse Primary in Ipswich provided the inspiration for the wheelchair project and indeed, the PE lead at Whitehouse generously shared PE programmes that Forest School have found very helpful.

The summer Cluster Meeting clashed directly with the Suffolk SENCo annual conference and thus was impossible to attend.

Very regretfully, Forest Academy were unable, for reasons of staffing and illness to attend the spring meeting.

A discussion took place around the importance of attending Cluster meetings, to both gain information but also, very importantly, to give and share ideas. It is suggested that Forest Academy host a meeting as soon as possible and commit to attending three meetings during this academic year.

Evaluation of Targets for last 12 Months

Target 1:

To explore and implement ways of increasing engagement in physical education and wider play for children with physical disabilities.

This project has been a resounding success and is providing inspiration for other schools in the county. Initially inspired by an idea gleaned from an IQM Cluster event, Forest Academy have expanded upon the concept and fully implemented a physical disability enabling and informing programme across the whole school.

The school worked with '*go-kids-go.org*' who provided advice and ran a course in the school for pupils alongside staff, teaching them how to use wheelchairs in dance, chase games and basketball. Pupils spoken with during this assessment were enthusiastic about the programme and what they had learnt.

Ingeniously, school leadership teamed up with a corporate team building company who organise wheelchair making events – the finished products they build are then donated to a charity (in this case, Forest Academy). As a result, the school now owns a quantity of sports wheelchairs for children and adults and has been able to embed wheelchair sports firmly into the curriculum, normalising the chairs as just another piece of sports equipment.

During this assessment, a netball lesson was in progress. One pupil who needed to use a wheelchair was playing alongside her peers, which included an able-bodied pupil also using a wheelchair. Furthermore, the PE teacher had elected to use a wheelchair for the lesson, normalising the equipment use and also enabling her to fully understand what strategies could be best deployed in the sport. The parent of two pupils who are wheelchair users was keen to say how thrilled she was by the initiative and how it had given her children so much more confidence, making them believe that sport was something they could do.

It is worth mentioning that the school are keen participants in the regional Panathon events, where pupils have the opportunity to compete alongside a variety of pupils with a range of needs, broadening their understanding of ,and respect for, others.

Next Steps:

- Explore the possibility of running wheelchair sports as an extra-curriculum club.
- Plan to host a wheelchair sports day for all the local schools within the Forest Heath Sports Partnership programme.
- Introduce Boccia into the PE and club provision.

Target 2:

Identify pupils at risk of emotional-based school avoidance (EBSA) and make provision for them will ensure minimal disruption to learning opportunities.

Forest School is aware that within the community it supports, there are significant societal and deprivation pressures that have a direct effect on the emotional well-being and confidence of pupils, in some cases leading to Emotionally Based School Avoidance (EBSA). It thus embarked on an enhanced programme aimed at improving attendance, with a focus on the underlying psychological reasons for non-attendance. The programme has been thorough and is reaping rewards, with attendance levels rising as a result.

Included in this initiative are family support and information sessions about EBSA. These were specifically designed to be non-judgemental and open. This later idea spawned the creation of a conference, funded by the local Town Council, with a variety of guest speakers and invitations were extended to other local schools. The school successfully recruited educational psychologists, Suffolk CC education services, Suffolk Young Minds (a charity that supports young people with mental health issues) to speak at the event, alongside Forest Academy's SENCo.

As a result of the acknowledged success of this conference, the school's SENCo was asked to present at Suffolk Community Inclusion Forum, arming county wide schools with the information that would enable them to replicate the event.

The SENCo described the highly bespoke initiatives the school has implemented to evidence their individualised approach to solving EBSA challenges. She described one particular pupil who they had identified was fearful of injuring himself in school. As a result, a site plan of the school was produced and the pupil helped to identify the areas he was most fearful of, colour coding them from fatal to low risk. They then worked with him to understand why these ratings were in his mind, worked on solutions and gave him information regarding the position of first aiders. Cleverly, they then turned his fear into an asset, commending him for his attention to health and safety matters and inviting him to work with the site manager on his regular site assessment walks. This served to eventually eradicate the pupil's anxiety and he now attends fully.

Alongside this awareness programme, there was an increased and strategic focus on identifying pupils with apparent significant barriers to attendance as well as identify pupils who may become non-attenders, putting in preventative plans. Everything concerning school attendance was evaluated, including minimising uniform discomfort and accessibility. The tools implemented include the provision of a Thrive based breakfast club, the introduction of a therapy dog (as well as other pets) enhanced communications about school success (using Tapestry) to the families of pupils at risk, and social stories. These efforts were evidenced during the assessment and parents and pupils alike who are benefitting from the initiative told the assessor how impactful they had found them and also praised the staff for their meticulous attention to, 'the small things' that has really help.

Next Steps:

- Continue the close monitoring and identification of potential attendance issues and continue the *'team-around-the-child'* approach to attendance matters, particularly involving families.

Target 3:

To develop oracy in children so that they may speak clearly, confidently, and appropriately in a range of situations (in line with the School Development Plan).

The school has acquired Language Link; an online package enabling schools to identify and support children with speech and language needs, and provides a standardised screening assessment along with prescribed, tiered levels of intervention support. All pupils in Reception are now screened using the programme, enabling school staff to introduce early interventions. The school benefits from access to Speech and Language professionals. In addition to the service provided by the Local Authority (LA) to support those with Education and Health Care Plan (EHCP) described needs, the local American Airbase (many children from the base attend Forest Academy) provide additional therapists and the school has their own qualified Speech and Language Therapy (SALT) on staff, working as a classroom teacher.

Staff have been provided with a range of training in oracy development. Vocabulary acquisition has also received heightened attention and subject leaders have added word banks to learning schemes and lists of key vocabulary to pre-teach. Widget dual coding was seen on displays and books across the school. Many pupils have been trained to use Reading Pens, which have proven to be a great help to pupils with delayed speech or indeed speech impediments. Talkpads with assisted technology are also deployed when identified as appropriate.

The Deputy Head, who is also the English lead, met with the assessor to explain the plethora of language development strategies being used, and that they have discovered vocabulary acquisition, plus helping pupils to understand how to use tone correctly, were the aspects of literacy that had the greatest impact on oracy in their school. Thus, language has been considered as a component of all aspects of school life, from encouraging positive argument and debate in classrooms through to using an oral restorative justice (explain, why, what, and how) approach in the playground.

While the Deputy Headteacher (DHT) has been keen to emphasise the importance of reading at home to parents, the school is sensitive to parents own English as an Additional Language (EAL) challenges or time pressures and have thus placed a Virtual Library on their website. This means that every book in the school's reading for pleasure (Forests Fantastic Reads) programme is available as an audio book on line.

Reading cafes have been provided for parents, equipping them with the skills to confidently promote reading at home. They found that involving pupils in these cafes increased parental attendance, which is now an impressive 80+%. The broad range of additional literacy and oracy initiatives observed during this assessment was impressive.



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The success of this comprehensive programme is evidenced in the school's impressively improved Phonics Screening Check, which last year was 94%.

Next Steps:

- The target is that all pupils will attain or exceed age related speaking and listening skills by the time they enter Year-6.
- Research and implement additional tools to identify complex speaking and listening needs and also Dyslexia: the ambition is to have the relevant screening qualification in-house and identify any dyslexic pupil as early as possible and become the Expert Centre for Dyslexia in the region.



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Agreed Targets for next 12 Months

Target 1

Champion and increase the provision for wheelchair sports for all, and run information sessions and actual extra-curricular / community events for all.

Comments

- The school has made a great start via Target 1 this past year and is now well placed and has the expertise to carry this forward.
- To include cooperation with other schools within the locality and also, provide information via the Suffolk Inclusivity Leader to other schools, in the form of invitations to view the activities at Forest Academy, videos on QR codes and public speaking opportunities.
- To work with Activities Unlimited (Suffolk SCC holiday club providers) so that they are able to offer wheelchair sports in their schedules.
- Consult with the CC Sports group regarding possibly incorporating wheelchair sports in their annual schedule of inter-school events.

Target 2

The number of pupils joining the school requiring support with severe learning needs is increasing and thus the development of knowledge and skill in this area, by working with specialist units locally, is a priority.

Comments

- This work has begun and the local specialised unit is on board to support Forest Academy and opportunities for co-teaching / shadowing have been put in place.
- In addition, the school is investing in a recognised Skills Builder Accelerator. This comprises a strategic and measurable approach to building essential core skills to provide a solid foundation and confidence for pupils to progress.
- The project will include upskilling staff, acquisition of resources, adapting learning plans to incorporate the skills ladders and creating reporting structures to illustrate impact.

Target 3

Introduce and integrate, *'Hamish and Milo'*, which is a comprehensive programme to support children with Social, Emotional & Mental Health (SEMH) needs, across the whole school. To include sessions for families so that they can also best support the wellbeing of their children.



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Comments

- The programme has been acquired (and funding from external sources achieved). Staff have been trained in readiness for the rollout.
- Pupil Premium funding is being used to support the project, along with a subsidy gained from the SCC to help with the initial investment. 'Hamish and Milo' will be led by staff member specifically trained to support other staff so that they are able to deliver the programme to whole classes as well as small groups of identified students when required. The aim is to provide pupils with the tools to be able to express their emotions and develop greater empathy towards others. Working in groups, as per the Hamish and Milo philosophy, pupils can see that they are not alone and could openly share feelings.
- In addition, 'Hamish and Milo' will be presented to parents and the school will supply resources that can be used at home, and links to sites where additional, parent focused, information can be found. Forest Academy hope that this programme will aid in the identification of presenting behaviours, underlying needs and inform signposting for EHCP, and Special Education Needs and Disabilities (SEND) reviews.



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Overview

Forest Academy is a vibrant and highly inclusive school, with lofty ambitions for pupils and staff. Set on the outskirts of the town and entirely wrapped by the forest, a calm and protective atmosphere is created. The school ethos is underpinned by their five Rs: *Ready to Learn; Resourceful; Reflective; Resilient; and Reciprocal*. Pupils are encouraged to maintain the school motto to, '*Persevere, Shine, Be Happy*', so that everyone can benefit from a joyful environment. Certainly, during this assessment, all pupils met were indeed '*shining*', keen to express their views to the assessor and thoroughly engaged in their school routine.

The generous grounds are well equipped, with separate spaces for each year group featuring educational activities and all-weather surfaces. There is also a large grass area and an all-weather multi sports court. During the assessment, pupils were observed propelling their own learning at play, demonstrating curiosity, collaboration and encouraging peer to peer interactions. As a result of the Headteacher's negotiations with the local council, an adjacent wooded area was acquired by the school and is home to a Forest School, accessed by every pupil. The school has invested in staff training so that every Key Stage leader has the appropriate Forest Learning qualification. The facility is well used by external agencies, at the invitation of the school: Activities Unlimited run subsidised holiday clubs and the school hosts their group for sessions during half-term holidays. In addition, Suffolk Young Carers regularly have a whole day for their sessions with young people.

It was very notable that pupils are very clear regarding behaviour expectations and routines for preparing to re-enter classrooms and navigating the corridors, all of which was seen to occur happily and patiently. During the assessment, the mantra, '*Be the Best*', voiced enthusiastically, could be heard, as pupils responded to teachers calls to action.

Display boards and external communications feature innovative QR codes that link to pupils' reading or explaining their work. These supplement the numerous published examples of pupil progress around the school but also, very importantly, give pupils whose ability is sometimes masked by poor handwriting skills the opportunity to demonstrate their knowledge and creativity and, additionally, parents who may find engaging with written documents time-consuming, an expedient means of sharing their child's achievements. Thus, every child is able to be represented via this multi-media approach.

The school retains its independent status supported by Suffolk CC, believing that this offers them their pupils the most advantageous provision. The senior leadership team, including the Headteacher and the SENCo have been in post for many years and have created a stable environment that is appreciated by parents. The staff's in-depth knowledge about each pupils' extended family enables them to offer support above and beyond simply education and all the parents met during this assessment praised the way they could turn to the school to seek help and advice, 'with anything'.

Pupils are given excellent support when they transition to senior school as a result of the school leadership's effort to create positive relationships and collaborations with



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the staff at those schools. In fact, several of the local senior school staff with responsibility for inclusivity or SEND were previously trained or employed by Forest Academy, and thus the links are very secure.

The number of pupils who hold EHCPs has grown significantly during the past year and now stands at 5.6%, which is higher than the national average. Furthermore, the number of pupils who require SEND support is 25% of all pupils, substantially above the national average, and there are 17 different home languages in the school.

A recent parent survey shows that the vast majority of parents feel that the school values both their views and those of their children and more than 95% feel involved in the way the school works to understand their child. Parents also stated that they are utterly involved in the school's decision making. Overwhelmingly, questions posed around SEND provision and inclusive practices received positive affirmation, and more than 90% of parents noted that staff have high expectations for all pupils. The survey results were echoed by parents met by the assessor.

At the beginning and end of the school day, families are warmly greeted in the school playgrounds, and the exchange of information between home and school is actively encouraged. Parents were keen to share their experiences of the school with the assessor. One commented that, *'they have put so much in place to help [my son] become independent. I can't fault this school or think of a single negative thing'*. The parent of children with mobility challenges spoke of the extensive adaptations the school had carried out to accommodate her daughter. She was particularly impressed by the way they carry out reconnaissance visits to all proposed trip venues to ensure everything is in place to meet their needs and guarantee their inclusion. Another parent shared how the school had identified her son's autism and secured the relevant diagnosis and support, so that now he was succeeding: *'starting him at this school is the best thing I ever did'*.

Parents whose first language is not English appreciated the translations they received from school but more vitally, how they could get support with any forms and similar and how the SENCo would even fill them out for them. A parent summed up the support they personally got from the school staff as, *'not at all judgemental and we can talk about absolutely anything. They are always so available'*. They also appreciate how children have safe people and places they can go to if anxiety is an issue and everyone at the meeting shared the noteworthy progress their child has made as a direct result of the school's personalised efforts.

The Co-Chair of Governors, also a parent, attributed much of the success of the school's cohesion with the whole community to, *'the excellent communication with parents, be that by the wide variety of workshops to the leaflets and open-door policy'*. She was impressed by the way the school extends a helping hand to complete Blue Badge applications for those parents in need, and to tenaciously obtain translations of EHCPs for non-English fluent parents.

Staff welfare is important at Forest Academy and supported by having a Governor dedicated to this topic, who carries out an annual, in-depth, staff survey. Similarly, staff are encouraged to take up opportunities to develop additional skills. In recent times,



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almost all teaching staff have completed a National Professional Qualification (NPQ) in an area they were interested in. The school leadership, acknowledging the workload involved in these studies, made extra study time available to staff so that they could complete assignments. Teaching Assistants (TAs) receive bespoke, paid, training sessions, which are designed to maximise their effectiveness in classrooms. The Governor spoke of the school leadership's belief that in order to offer fully inclusive and embedded strategies for key initiatives, all staff should be trained, and thus, for example, every member of staff has received THRIVE training thereby ensuring its efficacy: 'teachers at Forest Academy are relentless in helping children build resilience so that they can overcome their difficulties'.

Staff concurred that the training they received was excellent and their confidence in both the SENCo and the schools SEND support systems was high. They also appreciated how the leadership effectively shared the responsibility for working with external professionals to enhance the skills of the whole school and increasing job satisfaction.

Forest Academy are aware of the rising numbers of pupils with SEMH challenges entering the school. Their research to seek possible solutions led them to 'Hamish and Milo', a comprehensive emotions curriculum that includes intervention packages and comprehensive graduated resources. The school leadership worked with Suffolk LA to access funding from the Department for Education (Delivering Better Value in SEND scheme). 'Hamish and Milo' is a significant new initiative that will be rolled out across the school in the coming year.

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 3 years' time.

The school has stated that it wishes to continue as a Centre of Excellence and has submitted an Agreement to Participate which commits the school to annual reviews for the next 3 years (minimum) and attendance at termly IQM Cluster meetings with other IQM Centres of Excellence and Flagship Schools. As such the school meets the Centre of Excellence criteria and I am happy to confirm that Forest Academy continues to hold Centre of Excellence status at this time.

Assessor: Ms Hazel J Simmons

Findings confirmed by Inclusion Quality Mark (UK) Ltd:

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Joe McCann MBA NPQH

Director of Inclusion Quality Mark (UK) Ltd