



Assessor's Evaluation for the IQM Flagship Project



School: Polegate School
Oakleaf Drive
Polegate
East Sussex, BN26 6PT

Head/Principal: Claire Martin O'Donoghue

IQM Lead: Una Holbrook

Date of Review: 1st July 2020

Assessor: Pauline Roberts

IQM Cluster Programme

Cluster Group: Cosmos

Ambassador: Barry Carney

Date of Next Meeting: To be arranged

Next Cluster Group Meeting Focus: TBA

Sources of Evidence during IQM Review Day

Discussions with:

- Headteacher and IQM lead on:
- Achievements this year.
- COVID-19 and the work of the school, including the 'Skills to last a lifetime' programme.
- The Behaviour Strategy (Flagship Project).
- The work of the Teaching School.
- Plans for the reopening of the school.
- Plans for embedding the behaviour policy.

Additional Activities:

- Presentation on new behaviour strategy by IQM lead.
- Perusal of documentation, including the Training School programme, newsletters, the 'Skills to last a lifetime' booklet and the boys' writing project.



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Evaluation of Annual Progress towards the Flagship Project

The School's progress from the previous year were based on the project focus of: 'Embedding the principles of empowerment and therapeutic thinking to develop Polegate's behaviour policy'.

Behaviour at Polegate school was already of a very high standard across the board but the Headteacher and Inclusion Manager wished to develop a new framework to ensure the strategies used in managing behaviour and the overall approach to this met the needs of all children in the school, including those with SEND and those with more challenging behaviour. The project, which was based on sound research and current best practice, aimed at understanding and improving pupils' behaviour, has progressed very well in the past year with thorough training for all staff, including online webinars for support staff during the lockdown, which have proved to be very successful.

The IQM lead attended training on the 'Empowerment Approach' in the Summer Term of 2019. This was followed by training for all staff, including TAs, lunch supervisors and governors. A new behaviour policy was introduced from September 2019 and the school's rules were revised with 3 rules instead of 10 - 'Respect, Responsible, Ready to Learn'. A mantra of "Be curious not furious about behaviour" was established to highlight the overall approach. A change of language was introduced for use by all staff with, for example, new practices in morning greetings. The focus was on maintaining very high expectations with a positive approach and coaching sessions provided for children not meeting the behaviour expectations. This replaced the previous traffic light system with warnings and consequences that staff and pupils had been very accustomed to.

In January 2020 the Headteacher and Inclusion Manager attended 3 days of training on 'Therapeutic Thinking' to deepen their understanding of current theory and practice in this area and they then disseminated key aspects to all staff. Staff were given a 5 point response plan to support them when dealing with a child who is struggling - 'Calm yourself, accept, acknowledge and empathise, throw a lifeline, listen to understand and help them to come up with a solution'. Staff were also given an 'empowerment toolkit' to support the children. Monthly staff meetings have focused on the new policy and on-going relevant training has continued throughout the year and during lockdown. All stakeholders have been involved, including governors and parents, with coffee mornings to explain the strategy, which has been well received by all concerned, including pupils.

The work to develop the policy began in the summer term last year, which involved ensuring that everyone was on board with the aims of the policy. This included reminding staff about how the brain works, thinking about how staff greet children in the mornings, managing their feelings and maintaining very high expectations. Staff were asked to be calm and to support children with their behaviour while not accepting poor behaviour with the underpinning philosophy, "when children feel better, they behave better". Repair and coaching sessions were introduced for children who were not meeting expectations in terms of behaviour. These involve children working with their teacher following an incident to try to tease out the problem and to work out the steps needed to ensure it does not happen again.



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A lot of work has taken place with staff including lunch supervisors and other support staff to unpick behaviour and to work out how to change it, with the child very much involved in the process. As with all developments in this school the work has been undertaken in a very thorough way to ensure that all staff and children understand the new approach. Three sessions have been planned for staff on the 'Empowerment Approach' and two of these will now take place in the Autumn Term. Staff understand the idea that different children can be dealt with in different ways in order to support them to change their behaviour. There is no longer one rule for everyone and the embedding of this concept is crucial for the strategy to be successful. So far, the strategy has been very well received and the Inclusion Leader has been pleasantly surprised with the positive response. The webinars held during lockdown have been very helpful in ensuring that support staff fully understand the approach by hearing about similar work with the same values in a different context. The children's point of view has also been positive but clearly the long time spent out of school due to the lockdown has prevented the impact being fully realised. Some of the children found the coaching sessions very challenging, although the Inclusion Manager is confident that overtime, they will be able to see the reasons for this approach.

Agreed Actions for the Next Steps in the Flagship Project

The school will continue to implement and further develop this strategy in the coming year with ongoing staff training, including the training of new staff with a view to thoroughly embedding it in the work of the school. The training of NQTs has already begun through the Training School and this will continue in the coming year. The IQM Lead will review the new policy and make any necessary amendments following feedback from staff on therapeutic thinking. Whole school provision in support plans will incorporate therapeutic tool outcomes. The school will also develop an anxiety analysis, which will look at issues such as challenging times of the day for certain children and when they might need additional support in order to manage. The next step will be to devise and implement a survey on the impact of the new policy on children's behaviour and on the wellbeing of both staff and pupils. The behaviour strategy will also be reinforced with training on identification of areas of need and how to undertake successful coaching and repair sessions.

A toolkit for pupils will be introduced to provide support and coaching sessions will be monitored to ensure they are successful in improving behaviour and reducing incidents. Pupil voice will be undertaken to ensure the strategy is meeting their needs and that they are all clear on the reasons for it. Parents will also be very much involved and sessions will be provided for them so that there is as much consistency as possible from school to home. Throughout the year there will be ongoing training for staff, including additional sessions for new staff. By the end of the coming academic year it is hoped that all staff will feel confident and supported, that all pupils and parents will be on board and that behaviour will have improved.

In addition, 'Zones of regulation' will also be rolled out across KS2 with training provided for staff in relevant year groups. This will be followed by surveys of pupils, parents and staff to ensure this work will focus on the emotional needs of children in the light of COVID-19.



The Impact of the Cluster Group

The cluster meetings have been useful in enabling the sharing of good practice on issues of relevance to the school. Unfortunately, two sessions have had to be postponed this year due to COVID-19 but one session at Hove School in the Autumn Term was very useful as it focused on behaviour, attachment and parental engagement, all of which were relevant to Polegate, especially with their work on behaviour coinciding with this meeting. The school found it very useful to see the work of another school on this issue with similar approaches. The work the school was doing on transition was also interesting and as a result, the IQM lead purchased a number of relevant resources on this that she had been impressed by during the visit. Polegate had been due to host the Summer Term meeting with a focus on their new behaviour policy and hopefully, this will be able to take place in the coming year.

Overview

In addition to the excellent work on the behaviour strategy, a lot of excellent work has taken place since the last IQM Flagship review and this has once again been a very positive year for the school, with many achievements prior to lockdown, including an outstanding inspection by OFSTED in January. During and since lockdown the school has managed the many challenges it has faced with its positive 'can do' approach focused on the needs of the whole school community including children, families and staff. The school has been open throughout for whole days, with breakfast provided for vulnerable children and the children of key workers with great success and it has also managed to keep in touch with and provide lessons and activities for the whole school.

An example of the inclusive and sensitive approach to meeting the needs of children and families is the 'Skills to last a life time' booklet that was prepared for families during the lockdown to support parents and ensure they did not feel overwhelmed by the idea of having to play the role of teachers. Instead the booklet encourages parents and children to work together to develop 'timeless, transferable skills, the skills that do not rely on subject context or job – we just need them'. The booklet encourages parents to get their children learning some of the practical skills that they do not always get the time or the opportunity to focus on together. Children are encouraged to tick off the skills as they learn them and take photos of them undertaking the various activities. These include using a washing machine, ironing, planting seeds and recording their growth, wrapping presents, tying shoe laces, addressing and posting a letter, making a bed, changing and washing the sheets, sweeping and vacuuming the floors, sewing on a button, learn about life saving, cooking and using a map. Children are also encouraged with their parents to add other activities to the list that they can learn. This emphasis on practical skills helped parents to feel reassured that they didn't have to be teachers in the formal sense and it helped them to think of activities to do with their children, thus placing the emphasis on the emotional side of relationships at this difficult time. Parents really appreciated this support from the school and posted feedback on 'Twitter' and 'Seesaw'.

The school also provided online learning for children and they ensured that hard copies of lessons were delivered to pupils who did not have the technology required in their homes. Good use has been made of the 'Seesaw' tool with children able to upload



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photos and send messages to each other and their teachers. There have also been 'Zoom' meetings, a lot of information on e-safety and useful videos for children to access. Other support provided by the school has included useful information for families via the school newsletter with many phone numbers of support services highlighted, including resources to support wellbeing. Photos of children showing their work and doing their activities have also helped support families in doing things together but virtually. For example, 'Virtual sports' week' activities have taken place with children divided into teams, with parents supporting the different sports at home and taking photos and videos of the children to share with the school. In addition, the online bedtime stories' library that everyone can access has been built up by staff working remotely.

Unsurprisingly, the school has also managed the return to school for the targeted year groups in its very positive, well organised way. At the same time, children who remain at home from Years 2, 3, 4 and 5 are still provided with their learning and the school will be providing time in school for all children in these year groups this term to support transition to their new classes in September. A transition week for Year 6 pupils is also planned this term to ensure that these pupils are well prepared for secondary school in September. Parents will also be offered one-to-one meetings with new teachers and 'Teams' meetings are organised for the parents of new children. The school has made its plans for teaching the whole school in September with staggered starts, staggered lunches, full classes and thorough safety arrangements in place and is looking forward to welcoming everyone back to school. Daily briefings for staff will ensure consistency, confidence and support for all.

At Polegate teaching and support staff are valued for their skills and they are encouraged and supported in further developing these skills through on going CPD. There are now 7 Specialist leaders of education among the staff of the school, a mark of the wide-ranging expertise of staff in the school, who work through the Training School on a number of levels to provide high quality training and enable the sharing of good practice across its alliance schools. For example, it caters for staff in this school and in a number of other schools on subject work, teacher training, a SENCO network, an NQT mentors' programme as well as training, support and development of the NQTs themselves. The Training School also offers an NPQ training programme, access to teacher training advice, visits from potential teacher trainees and 'Get into teaching' courses. This year the programme has included courses on outdoor learning, Maths Mastery, Philosophy for Children, transition, skills in difficult conversations as well as courses on developing writing skills and safeguarding. Staff have also been very well supported throughout the COVID-19 period. Staff who needed to be shielded have been supported in this and the needs of all staff have been addressed and supported. In addition, good use has been made of time working from home by the provision of online training for staff, in particular for teaching assistants. They were given training related to the school's new behaviour approach. This included webinars on behaviour and therapeutic thinking, which has helped consolidate the understanding they have already gained on the new way of dealing with behaviour in the school. Training for TAS has also focused on Maths Mastery and food hygiene. In addition, there has also been a lot of training for EY staff, including the development of writing skills. The school has a number of new staff starting in September who have already been participating in training through the Training School and have been introduced to parents via the school



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website and will be able to meet the children and parents before the end of term. An example of the excellent support and training for staff is the recent celebration for a member of support staff attaining her degree, who will now be able to undertake her teacher training at the school.

The school has also had a focus on writing this year, following the successful developments in the school's reading programmes over the past few years. There has been a particular focus on the writing of boys with a specific focus initially on EYFS where research finds that boys already delay behind girls in their interest in writing. One aspect of this has been the introduction of writing mentors in Year 6 who work with Year 1 children on a fortnightly basis. This has been very helpful in raising the profile of boys' writing and has been very successful both with the Year 6 pupils, who have enjoyed supporting the younger children and also with the Year 1 children who have welcomed the support of the older pupils. In addition, to support this development, an external trainer has been welcomed to the school to lead workshops for Polegate and a group of schools in the area and also for parents. As part of this course, which is part of the work of the Teaching School, teachers were given a book of 100 ideas to motivate boys and to plan activities and lessons with their needs in mind. This also proved to be very successful and this work will continue in the coming year with an aim of producing a publication on this work for all Eastbourne schools.

This continues to be an exceptionally forward thinking, positive school with very high expectations of all alongside very high levels of support. It continues to be a reflective community where very interesting work takes place to meet the needs of all its pupils and the community it serves. On a wider level, the school trains new teachers, its own staff and a wide variety of staff from other schools in the area through its Teaching School programme, which has also gone from strength to strength this year. Any challenge such as those faced recently through COVID-19, is taken on in a clear, positive and coherent way. The school never stands still and is always striving to do better. Its motto, "Learning without limits" is a genuine description of the ethos of this school, which has inclusion at the heart of all its work. The inspirational leadership of the Headteacher along with the Inclusion Leader and senior team ensures that the work of the school continues to thrive with the needs of children always at its core.

The school is continually developing its excellent practice on inclusion and is sharing its practice with other schools through its Teaching School. I recommend that the school continues to hold Flagship status for a further 3 years and is reviewed in one year's time. I am very happy to support the school's action plan to continue its Flagship project as outlined in this report.

Assessor: Pauline Roberts

Findings confirmed by Inclusion Quality Mark (UK) Ltd:

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