



## Assessor's Evaluation for the IQM Flagship Project



<b>School</b>	St Joseph's Catholic Primary School Woodford Lane Winsford Cheshire CW7 2JS
<b>Head/Principal</b>	Mrs Martine Gum
<b>IQM Lead</b>	Ms Claire Bennett and Mrs Amy Butterfield
<b>Date of Review</b>	23 <sup>rd</sup> June 2025
<b>Assessor</b>	Ms Alison Williams

### IQM Cluster Programme

Cluster Group	Northwessians
Ambassador	Mrs Siona Robson
Next Meeting	TBC

Meeting Focus

### Cluster Attendance

Term	Date	Attendance
Autumn 2023	12-04-2023	No
Spring 2024	03-11-2024	No
Summer 2024	07-04-2024	Yes
Autumn 2024	11-13-2024	No
Spring 2025	02-06-2025	No
Summer 2025	06-23-2025	No – due to IQM assessment review

### The Impact of the Cluster Group

Over the past academic year, the school has experienced considerable staffing changes and periods of staff absence, including within the senior leadership team. These disruptions have inevitably impacted the school's capacity to engage fully with cluster meetings and collaborative opportunities within the IQM framework. While the school has remained committed to inclusive practice, these operational challenges have limited their ability to participate in cluster activities to the extent they would have preferred. This issue was discussed in depth during the IQM review, and school leaders were open and reflective about the barriers they have faced. They acknowledged the value of cluster engagement, not only as a means of sharing best practice but also as a vital component of the IQM ethos, which promotes collaboration, mutual support, and continuous improvement across schools. The leadership team expressed a clear understanding of the importance of re-establishing their presence within the cluster



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and demonstrated a renewed commitment to doing so moving forward. It is worth noting that the termly cluster meeting coincided with the date of the IQM review itself, which unfortunately prevented the school from attending on that occasion. However, in a proactive and positive gesture, the school has offered to host a future cluster meeting in the new year. This offer reflects their willingness to re-engage with the wider IQM community and contribute meaningfully to shared learning.

During the proposed meeting, the school intends to showcase its bespoke interventions, BURT, WILMA, and ERNE, which have been developed to support the social and emotional wellbeing of pupils. These programmes exemplify the school's inclusive ethos and its commitment to nurturing the whole child.

### **Evidence**

- Flagship Review action plan.
- Meetings with IQM leads.
- Discussion with school leaders.
- Meetings with Teachers and TAs.
- Tour of the school.
- Scrutiny of the school website.

### **Additional Activities**

- Learning walk around the school.
- Discussion with ELSA trained staff.
- Discussion around social, emotional needs of children, in particular for who have received suspensions over the year.
- ERNE presentation.

### **Evaluation of Annual Progress towards the Flagship Project**

***'Research child development theories and literature studies to animal therapy' in order to understand if the use of animals in school has a positive impact on children's mental health and well-being?***

As part of the school's commitment to supporting the emotional wellbeing and mental health of its pupils, a significant initiative was undertaken through funding provided by the Virtual School. This initiative involved a collaborative research project with Chester University, designed and delivered by the school's experienced pastoral lead. The project aimed to explore and implement innovative strategies to support children experiencing high levels of anxiety and emotional-based school avoidance (EBSA), particularly those who found it challenging to attend school regularly or engage positively with the school environment.

The initial phase of the project focused on a targeted group of six pupils, ranging from Year 2 to Year 6, who had been identified as exhibiting persistent signs of anxiety and reluctance to attend school, particularly during morning transitions. These pupils were selected based on observed behaviours and concerns raised by both teaching staff and parents, highlighting the need for a structured and sensitive intervention.



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The intervention programme was carefully structured and evidence-informed, incorporating a range of tools and methodologies to assess and support the children's emotional needs. At the outset, baseline assessments were conducted using a combination of the ELSA (Emotional Literacy Support Assistant) checklist, teacher questionnaires, and parent feedback forms. These tools provided a comprehensive picture of each child's emotional state, school-related anxieties, and social interaction patterns. The assessments were designed to be accessible and inclusive, particularly for children with Autism Spectrum Conditions (ASC), ensuring that all participants could engage meaningfully with the process.

A distinctive and innovative feature of the programme was the integration of the school's guinea pigs into the therapeutic process. The use of animals in educational and therapeutic settings has been shown to have a calming and engaging effect on children, particularly those with additional emotional or sensory needs. In this project, the guinea pigs served as a central element of the intervention, providing a non-judgemental and comforting presence that helped to reduce anxiety and foster a sense of responsibility and empathy among the pupils. Throughout the programme, a variety of activities were delivered to support emotional regulation, social skills, and self-awareness. These included the use of emotion fans to help children identify and articulate their feelings, mindfulness exercises to promote calmness and focus, and the creation of "strengths shields" to build self-esteem and resilience. Friendship-building activities were also incorporated to enhance peer relationships and reduce feelings of isolation. All activities were carefully adapted to meet the individual needs of the children, with particular attention given to sensory sensitivities and communication preferences.

The intervention was delivered over a sustained period, allowing for consistent support and the development of trusting relationships between the children and the pastoral lead. At the conclusion of the programme, exit assessments were conducted using the same tools as the baseline phase, enabling the school to measure progress and evaluate the impact of the intervention.

The outcomes of the project were highly encouraging. Of the six children who participated:

- Four demonstrated improved attendance, indicating a reduction in school-related anxiety and a greater willingness to engage with the school day.
- Four reported that they now liked coming into school, reflecting a positive shift in their emotional response to the school environment.
- Five expressed that they felt happier in the mornings and more prepared to attend school, suggesting that the intervention had successfully addressed some of the key barriers to attendance.
- All six children reported that they had enjoyed the programme, highlighting the value of the activities and the therapeutic use of the guinea pigs in creating a safe and supportive space.

These outcomes not only demonstrate the effectiveness of the intervention in addressing emotional-based school avoidance but also highlighted the importance of creative and inclusive approaches to mental health support in schools. The project has provided valuable insights into how animal-assisted interventions, when combined with structured emotional literacy work, can significantly enhance pupil wellbeing and engagement.

The school is now exploring opportunities to expand the programme to support a wider cohort of pupils and is considering further collaboration with Chester University to disseminate findings and share best practice. The pastoral lead has also expressed a commitment to



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embedding the principles of the project into the school's broader pastoral strategy, ensuring that the benefits of this work are sustained and extended across the school community. This initiative exemplifies the school's proactive and research-informed approach to inclusion, demonstrating a deep understanding of the complex needs of its pupils and a strong commitment to fostering a nurturing and emotionally supportive learning environment.

### Agreed Actions for the Next Steps in the Flagship Project

As part of their ongoing commitment to inclusive practice and emotional wellbeing, the school aims to further develop and embed the Emotional Regulation Nurture Environment (ERNE) into their whole-school provision. ERNE, a specially adapted caravan funded in partnership with the Virtual School, has already demonstrated significant impact in supporting children who struggle with the traditional classroom environment.

To build on this success, leaders will implement a strategic action plan that outlines clear objectives, measurable outcomes, and sustainable practices.

A key priority will be the development of bespoke morning regulation programmes for children who experience anxiety or emotional distress when entering school. These programmes will be tailored to individual needs and will include structured activities within ERNE to support emotional readiness for learning. The impact of these interventions will be monitored through pupil voice, attendance data, and emotional wellbeing assessments.

Due to high demand, with over 30 pupils accessing ELSA support this year, and to promote consistency with emotional support, the school is introducing a clear and structured graduated response framework. This framework will outline the referral pathway for accessing ELSA provision, beginning with class-based interventions and escalating, where necessary, to the Mental Health Practitioner team and then to ELSA support. It will also provide practical, classroom-level strategies for staff to implement early on. To support this, targeted CPD sessions will be delivered, equipping staff with the knowledge and confidence to identify and respond to emotional needs effectively. In addition, the school will work collaboratively with the Winsford Education Partnership to share best practice and promote the ERNE model across local schools. This will include hosting visits, presenting at partnership meetings, and contributing to IQM cluster discussions. By sharing our journey and outcomes, we aim to inspire other settings to explore innovative approaches to nurture and emotional regulation.



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### Overview

It was a pleasure to revisit St Joseph's Primary School and witness first-hand the school's unwavering commitment to supporting the needs of its pupils with a huge emphasis on the social and emotional wellbeing of its pupils. The enthusiasm and dedication of the staff were palpable, particularly in relation to the newly established ERNE, which has quickly become a cornerstone of the school's inclusive practice.

Since its refurbishment and official opening in May, ERNE has already had a significant impact, particularly in supporting pupils experiencing anxiety or emotional distress upon arrival. ERNE now plays a central role in the school's Emotionally Based School Non-Attendance (EBSNA) strategy.

The space, which includes a kitchen area within the caravan, offers children the opportunity to prepare simple snacks such as sandwiches, crackers, and fruit kebabs. These activities have fostered relationship-building and created a sense of safety and belonging. ERNE also serves as a relaxed and engaging setting for ELSA interventions, where children feel secure and open to emotional literacy work. It has also played a key role in supporting Year 6 pupils during SATs through relaxation sessions and has been instrumental in transition work, helping children adjust to new environments and routines. The positive impact is evident in pupil feedback, with one child sharing, "We made a relaxation key ring before SATs—it was the best," and another remarking, "It's so relaxing, it doesn't feel like school."

The addition of messy sensory play, previously limited by space constraints, is becoming a regular feature at ERNE's picnic table. Activities such as playdough making and tactile exploration support sensory regulation and creativity. ERNE also functions as a vital "brain break" space, offering a quiet retreat for children who become overwhelmed. One child described it as, "It reminds me of being on my holidays—I get the same relaxed feeling."

The school's trauma-informed, restorative approach is underpinned by its status as a UN Rights Respecting School, with a strong focus on the Zones of Regulation. Leaders shared the extensive measures taken to support children with emotional dysregulation. Initiatives such as BURT and WILMA are embedded in daily practice, with some pupils volunteering as buddies to support their peers during play and lunchtimes. Staff report that more children are now able to self-regulate effectively.

Conversations throughout the visit highlighted the school's focus on supporting children with complex social and emotional needs. The number of pupils supported by the Virtual School and those with EHCPs has grown significantly, from eight to twenty-four, demonstrating the school's commitment to early identification and inclusive culture.

The school goes above and beyond in its provision, for example, including offering a 2:1 support ratio for a high-needs pupil who began at the school without any formal support and now has an EHCP and is awaiting placement in a specialist setting. Another pupil, who joined in Year 1 with high needs, has also secured an EHCP. The school's support extends to families, ensuring a holistic approach.

Through the school's dedicated resource provision, pupils with additional needs are thoughtfully and effectively included in mainstream school life wherever possible. This inclusive approach ensures that all children, regardless of their individual challenges, are given opportunities to participate meaningfully in the wider school community. Tailored timetables are a key feature of this provision, allowing staff to adapt the school day to meet each pupil's specific needs. For instance, one child who previously struggled with attendance has shown remarkable progress, increasing their daily attendance from just one hour to four hours. This



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improvement reflects the school's commitment to flexibility, patience, and understanding. Staff work closely with families and external professionals to ensure that each child's plan is regularly reviewed and adjusted as needed. The result is a nurturing environment where pupils feel supported, valued, and empowered to succeed both academically and socially, fostering a strong sense of belonging and personal growth.

During the learning walk across the school a calm, consistent, and engaging atmosphere was observed in every classroom. The learning environments were well-organised and thoughtfully designed to support focus and participation. All children were actively engaged in their lessons, demonstrating enthusiasm and a clear understanding of expectations. Technology is also used effectively to enhance learning experiences. Pupils diagnosed with dyslexia benefit from having access to a 1:1 device, which supports their reading and writing through specialised software and tools. This integration of technology not only scaffolds learning but also promotes independence.

Metacognition is embedded across the school. Even in EYFS, children are encouraged to reflect on their thinking using visual aids such as monkey and crocodile puppets to represent different parts of the brain. The 'rainbow' system encourages children to try new activities and build resilience through selecting activities with coloured sticks that help to try out new tasks and activities.

In addition, the school places strong emphasis on early intervention, particularly in literacy. Phonics sessions are delivered systematically, and additional reading support is provided to ensure no child falls behind. These sessions are tailored to individual learning needs, helping to build confidence and foundational skills, and in EYFS, provision includes targeted programmes such as Attention to Autism, Welcom, and NELI, addressing growing communication and interaction needs.

Transition is a key focus for the school, beginning early with SLT meeting staff in EYFS and KS1 sharing information about the children and tailoring suitable programmes of support for children and their families. This is particularly important as the school has three nursery intakes per year. They will go over and above to support transition through story time, playtime visits, classroom visits, transition booklets, shared lunches, and parent workshops. Year 6 pupils have benefitted from early engagement with secondary schools, with some children receiving additional transition sessions during the summer holidays where needed.

The school's active PFA has experienced remarkable growth over the past two years, becoming an integral part of the school community. Their enthusiastic involvement has significantly boosted fundraising efforts, enabling a variety of enriching initiatives. These include hosting a school circus, securing Tesco community funding, installing decorative and functional planters, providing bikes for EYFS, and organising celebratory events for Year 6 pupils following their SATs. Their contributions have greatly enhanced the school experience for all pupils.

The school also benefits greatly from strong collaboration across the wider trust, fostering a culture of shared expertise and continuous improvement. Regular cluster meetings are held for key staff leads in areas such as behaviour, SEND, and RE, allowing for the exchange of best practices and consistent approaches across schools.

Leaders also prioritise staff wellbeing, with several thoughtful initiatives in place. These include allowing teachers to complete their PPA time at home, the popular "early dart" scheme where two staff members leave early on Fridays, uplifting "Cup of Joy" moments, and twilight sessions focused on wellbeing and personal development. These efforts contribute to a positive, supportive working environment and demonstrate the commitment for everyone to feel a valued member of the school community.



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I am of the opinion that the school continues to fully meet the standard required by the Inclusion Quality Mark's Inclusive School Award to maintain its status as a Flagship School. I recommend that the school retains its Flagship Status and is reviewed again in 12 months. The next review will look closely at how the school has interacted with its Inclusion Cluster and promoted continuing outreach. Evidence of Cluster working will underpin the capacity for the school to maintain Flagship status.

**Assessor: Ms Alison Williams**

**Findings confirmed by Inclusion Quality Mark (UK) Ltd:**

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "J. McCann".

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**Joe McCann MBA NPQH**

**Director of Inclusion Quality Mark (UK) Ltd**