



Assessor's Evaluation for the IQM Flagship Project



School Exning Primary School
Oxford Street
Exning
Suffolk
CB8 7EW

Head/Principal Ms Emma Hardy

IQM Lead Ms Ruth Clifford-Turner

Date of Review 30th June 2026

Assessor Ms Hazel J Simmons

IQM Cluster Programme

Cluster Group MADIE B

Ambassador Ms Alison Merrills

Next Meeting TBC

Cluster Attendance

Term	Date	Attendance
Autumn 2025	5 th Dec 2025	Yes
Spring 2026	4 th Mar 2026	Yes
Summer 2026	10 th Jun 2026	Yes

The Impact of the Cluster Group

Meldreth Manor – 5th Dec 2026

The meeting at Meldreth Manor explored personalised learning, feeding protocols, and specialist approaches to curriculum and assessment. Although some aspects of the visit were not directly relevant to their own school, they found it valuable to learn how provision could be highly personalised while still ensuring that all students remained included within their cohorts and classes.

They also found the visit useful in supporting the development of a trust-wide assessment system. In addition, the experience helped inform their work with SEND schools in relation to curriculum design and development.



Assessor's Evaluation for the IQM Flagship Project



Woodhall Primary School – 4th Mar 2026

They visited Woodhall Primary School to tour the specialist unit provision and learn more about the wellness curriculum, Thrive, Hamish & Milo, rights-based practice, oracy, and Solution Circles. They found it helpful to hear other schools' views on how to deliver the Families Together sessions linked to Hamish & Milo.

Following the visit, they began delivering adapted sessions to parents and received positive feedback. Families showed interest in joining these sessions, and they have started to extend this offer further.

They also found the Solution Circles valuable because they provided an opportunity to discuss pupils' needs anonymously with other professionals. Good practice was shared between colleagues, and the discussions offered fresh strategies for supporting pupils.

The Bridge School – 10th Jun 2026

The visit included a presentation by the local authority speech and language therapy team, which focused on modelling without expectation and using core boards alongside visual representations based on Widgit.

They found the presentation on Zones of Regulation less appropriate for their setting because they have adopted a therapeutic approach. As a result, they are more inclined to acknowledge that any emotion is acceptable rather than viewing it as something that needs to be moved away from. They found the Elklan training interesting, although they felt that this training would not be suitable for adoption in their context.

Evidence

- IQM Self-Assessment / Flagship project Development Plan
- School Website
- New Behaviour Policy
- Pupil Premium statement
- Student outcome data
- Student destinations information
- Meeting with students
- Discussions with parents
- Discussions with Headteacher
- Discussions with members of the Trust SLT and Governors
- Discussions with Therapeutic and Intervention Staff
- Discussion with SENDCos
- Discussion with member of the LA SEND team
- Discussions with the SEND Unit (Hive) Leader
- Meeting with pupils



Assessor's Evaluation for the IQM Flagship Project



Evaluation of Annual Progress towards the Flagship Project

Over the past year, the school has made excellent progress in developing a more relational, therapeutic approach to behaviour and emotional wellbeing. Throughout the project, leaders have placed a strong emphasis on listening carefully to the views of parents, pupils and staff, ensuring that the development of the school's approach has been informed by the experiences and needs of the whole school community.

Parents played a central role in shaping this work. Meetings, including those facilitated by a leader from the LA's Special Education Services team, provided valuable opportunities to outline the project's aims and gather constructive feedback. Responses were highly positive, with further consultation taking place through the Parent Forum and the whole-school parent survey. This collaborative approach has ensured that the evolving policy reflects the priorities of both families and the wider school community. Staff engagement has been equally comprehensive. Teaching and support staff worked together during the Autumn and Spring terms to review existing practice and contribute to the redrafting of the behaviour policy. Senior leaders subsequently collaborated with The LA Special Education team to review the policy in greater depth, drawing upon staff feedback to create a more inclusive and effective framework. Additional guidance from the Eastern Education Group safeguarding team, together with Therapeutic Thinking and Trauma-Informed professional development, has further strengthened the policy, ensuring that it reflects current best practice in supporting pupils' emotional wellbeing and positive relationships.

Whilst evaluating the most effective approaches for identifying and supporting pupils' social and emotional needs, the school concluded that, rather than the Thrive programme they have originally planned, the combination of Therapeutic Thinking, Trauma-Informed and Hamish and Milo programmes provide a more cohesive and sustainable model. As a result, the school has decided to replace Thrive with Therapeutic Thinking wellbeing profiling, which will be deployed during transition activities to identify the needs of whole cohorts and enable targeted support to be planned at the outset of each year.

Partnership with parents has continued to strengthen through the introduction of the Hamish and Milo, 'Families Together' programme. Following training, the programme has been modified with a mind to tailoring it to suit the school's specific context, so that it comprises specific units from the programme, such as, 'exploding me', which are offered to all parents via the school's class Dojo system. Another modification is that, rather than deliver each session as one that combines parents and pupils from the start, the school is presenting, just to parents initially, a workshop/ information-based session. Following this, another 2-hour session is delivered for parents to attend with their children. This methodology seems to be working well for the school's context, and they have had 10 or more families opting into the programme. The leader of 'Families Together', explained that an unforeseen advantage of offering the programme to all parents has been that they have identified families with a need that they were previously unaware of. Furthermore, the school believes that this approach is engaging more parents, as they don't feel that they have to commit to all 10 units, but rather can attend those for which they have a specific interest or need. Building on this positive engagement, the 'Calm Me' module will be offered next. The school intends to continue



Assessor's Evaluation for the IQM Flagship Project



expanding the parent programmes throughout the next year while carefully monitoring feedback to ensure they remain responsive to families' needs.

The successful Hamish and Milo pupil programme continues to be highly regarded within the school. Succession planning (staff) is already underway to maintain the long-term sustainability of this initiative as staffing changes occur; three additional staff are currently undergoing training. Pupils are selected for inclusion onto a 10-week programme by considering one or more factors including, progress towards individual education plan targets, where low esteem has been identified, or when parents seek help directly. A member of the trained Hamish and Milo team is actually starting a mental health degree in 2026 to increase her skills to be able to support children's well-being. Whilst studying, she will dedicate two days a week to continue supporting individual children in the school, on a highly personalised case by case basis, which is an additional asset the school has gained for its work to support families.

Pupil voice, parent feedback and quantitative evidence are routinely gathered to inform future developments. Considerable care has been taken to ensure that all pupils are able to contribute, with adapted pupil voice approaches enabling non-verbal pupils to participate fully with appropriate support. Evidence collected through behaviour data, safeguarding reports and stakeholder feedback, demonstrates encouraging progress, including a reduction in behavioural consequences and increasingly positive experiences for pupils. Furthermore, staff commented that they see the impact of the school's Hamish and Milo sessions in the improved confidence pupils demonstrate in respect of expressing their emotions and also acknowledging the feelings of others. Pre and post every Hamish and Milo programme pupils complete well-being profiles, which are then analysed, and clearly illustrate an increase in confidence and overall happiness.

Professional development has underpinned every aspect of the overall success of the project. Members of staff have completed specialist training in Therapeutic Thinking, Thrive and Trauma-Informed practice, significantly enhancing the school's expertise and shared understanding. This investment in staff development has strengthened the school's capacity to provide consistently nurturing, relational support, for pupils across all aspects of school life.



Assessor's Evaluation for the IQM Flagship Project



Agreed Actions for the Next Steps in the Flagship Project

Looking ahead, the school is well positioned to build upon this strong foundation. The revised behaviour policy will be presented to governors for formal approval before being shared with staff and parents, followed by a planned review during March 2027. This new policy breaks down aspects of specific responsibility for staff, parents, leaders and pupils, defining behaviour as, 'anything that individuals say or do', and clearly states that appropriate behaviours, and what they look like and sound like, should be explicitly taught, role-modelled and demonstrated. It has a clear top-line view of the three categories of behaviours: Valued behaviours; Detrimental behaviours and Dangerous behaviours. The concept is to create emphasis around acknowledging valued behaviours and reframing detrimental behaviours in terms of the valued opposite that are to be encouraged and ensuring that behaviour is embedded throughout the curriculum.

Building upon the strong progress already achieved, the school has developed a clear and ambitious strategy to further embed its relational approach to behaviour and emotional wellbeing. The next phase of the project focuses on strengthening inclusive practice by ensuring that every aspect of school life reflects a therapeutic, trauma-informed ethos that promotes positive relationships, and supports the emotional wellbeing of all pupils.

A key priority is the full implementation of the newly developed Relationships Policy. Leaders will continue to monitor its effectiveness and refine the policy in response to pupil behaviour, wellbeing outcomes and the quality of relationships across the school. By placing connection, understanding and restorative practice at the centre of their approach, the school aims to foster an environment in which pupils feel safe, valued and supported. Relational language, restorative conversations and Therapeutic Thinking principles will become increasingly embedded within everyday practice, ensuring consistency for both pupils and staff.

Actions will include implementation of the Therapeutic Thinking model across all year groups, in classrooms. Staff will further develop their use of pro-social language, emotion coaching and personalised regulation plans, while placing greater emphasis on understanding behaviour as a form of communication rather than simply responding to its presentation. This will include creating scripts containing pro-social language and visual prompts. It is anticipated that some pupils may require one-to-one coaching to help them embrace the concept and thus adult-led sessions around active listening and turn taking are planned. Reflection, repair and the identification of unmet needs will remain central to the school's approach, enabling pupils to develop positive behaviours through supportive relationships rather than punitive responses.

The advancement of Trauma-Informed Schools practice will continue to be a significant area of development. Ongoing training will deepen understanding of adverse childhood experiences and the impact of trauma on learning and development, helping to strengthen a whole-school culture based on compassion, emotional regulation and co-regulation.

Recognising the importance of working closely with families, the school will continue to expand opportunities for parents to engage in supporting their children's emotional



Assessor's Evaluation for the IQM Flagship Project



wellbeing, including signposting families towards appropriate external services where further support may be beneficial, reinforcing the partnership between home and school.

Further specialist expertise will also be utilised to enhance staff confidence in supporting emotional regulation. An external expert has been commissioned to provide additional training focused on emotional regulation and declarative language for both teaching and support staff. This work will include observation within The Hive, collaboration with specialist staff and the development of visual resources and practical strategies that can be implemented across classrooms to strengthen support for pupils with social, emotional and behavioural needs.

The school also recognises the importance of maintaining consistency as new colleagues join the organisation. Comprehensive induction procedures will therefore ensure that all new teaching and support staff develop a secure understanding of the school's therapeutic ethos, behaviour policy and relational approaches from the outset. Induction materials, personalised coaching from Therapeutic Thinking tutors and Trauma-Informed practitioners, together with ongoing monitoring by senior leaders, will help ensure that the school's inclusive culture remains firmly embedded across every aspect of school life.

Collectively, these carefully planned developments demonstrate the school's unwavering commitment to creating an inclusive, nurturing and emotionally supportive environment. Through strong leadership, high-quality professional development and close collaboration with families, they are exceptionally well placed to continue enhancing the wellbeing, inclusion and success of every pupil.



Assessor's Evaluation for the IQM Flagship Project



Overview

Eastern Education Group brings together schools and colleges from across the region with a shared commitment to providing high-quality learning and development opportunities, from the earliest years through to adult education. Its provision spans the statutory primary curriculum, vocational qualifications, degrees and professional development. The Leadership Group includes experienced professionals from across the education sector, including headteachers from all phases, leaders with local authority and SEND Trust experience, plus higher education specialists. Together, they provide a strong network of mutual support and expert central services, while respecting the distinctive identity, culture and community of each school. This balance enables Exning Primary to retain a high degree of autonomy and respond effectively to the needs of its local community.

The school recognises that 59% of pupils identified as disadvantaged also have special educational needs or disabilities. As a result, these pupils receive intensive, carefully targeted support to help close gaps and ensure they can thrive alongside their peers. In recent years, the school has placed significant emphasis on developing and embedding dialogic teaching and learning across the curriculum. To strengthen this work, leaders draw on oral language intervention resources linked to the Education Endowment Foundation. The Language Link programme is also well established and supports pupils, particularly disadvantaged pupils with comparatively low spoken language skills, to improve listening, narrative and vocabulary development.

A local authority leader who has worked with Exning for many years, described the school as, 'a beacon of inclusive practice'. She particularly highlighted the modern and progressive approach the school has developed in teaching and learning, personal development and well-being, describing this as, in her experience, a significant achievement in a rural village setting. From her perspective within the local authority special educational needs team, the school, 'takes on board everything and is always enthusiastic'.

This inclusive ethos is evident in Exning's contribution beyond the school itself. The school is a key contributor to the county's Inclusion Week and participates actively in multi-school events, including the first multi-school Olympics held last year, which included wheelchair basketball and boccia. The local authority leader also praised Exning's influence within the wider Trust and expressed admiration for the Group's philosophy of creating accessible pathways into work from nursery through to adult education, including through a University of Professional Development, which offers 'affordable degree pathways. In summary, she concluded that Exning, 'includes parents and pupils as meaningful improvement partners, and that the school is not seeking to make neurodivergent children neurotypical. Instead, it advocates for their needs and celebrates the strengths of neurodivergence'.

Exning Primary has a clear and proactive approach to identifying and reducing barriers to learning. Regular reviews consider pupils' language development, including vocabulary acquisition and the ability to use language effectively, alongside emotional well-being and cultural capital. This careful analysis helps the school understand where



Assessor's Evaluation for the IQM Flagship Project



pupils may need additional support to access new learning, develop confidence and participate fully in school life.

Pupil Premium funding is also used thoughtfully to remove practical barriers and widen access to enrichment. This includes funding transport so that eligible pupils can participate fully in inter-school competitions, trips and clubs. Funding is also used to cover the full cost of residential visits, provide wraparound care places, including holiday club provision, and support access to ICT.

Pupil leadership and responsibility are central to the school's approach to developing confidence, a sense of personal contribution and belonging. This year, the school introduced a 'roles and responsibilities' tracker to capture information about pupil leadership opportunities across the whole school. Every child's role or responsibility is recorded, and all Year 6 pupils were seen to have engaged in one or more positions of responsibility, ranging from school council membership and library monitoring to sports ambassador roles, house captaincy and peer mediation. Only two pupils had not taken on a specific role during the year, and this was by personal choice. The school has extended this careful monitoring to include the participation of Pupil Premium pupils in clubs, events and responsibilities. The comprehensive SEND register also records pupils' access to enrichment activities and after-school clubs. In addition, leaders have introduced a focus on young carers, recognising that this group may be more likely to miss opportunities after school because of additional responsibilities at home. Where barriers are identified, the school is able to intervene sensitively through supportive conversations and practical encouragement.

Through this work, the school ensures that pupils experience the value of responsibility, the pride associated with contributing to the community, and the rewards of helping others. Exning Primary believes these opportunities prepare pupils well for their next stage of education, particularly as they move into larger secondary settings. Pupils spoken to describe their responsibilities with enthusiasm and were able to explain clearly how their contributions had helped others.

The school provided many celebrations and cultural activities throughout the year. In 2026, Exning Primary will celebrate the 150th anniversary of the school's opening. Pupils have thoroughly enjoyed creating artwork representing different decades in the school's history, and an immersive Victorian day brought the past to life through workshops exploring what learning would have been like in the Victorian era. Some pupils made and served gruel to their peers, while everyone dressed in Victorian costume for the day. The local community and village have also come together to share memories, photographs and artefacts linked to the school. These will support the creation of a pop-up museum, open to all, in September 2026.

Partnership work further enriches pupils' experiences. An alliance with West Suffolk College has resulted in art students creating a new mosaic for the school playground, work experience placements are provided for students from the local secondary school, while a local composer will visit the school to help pupils write their own school song. A new school logo has also been developed following consultation with parents and pupils, blending the iconography of the original Victorian building with modern graphics.



Assessor's Evaluation for the IQM Flagship Project



The Hive SEND unit is recognised by the local authority and by parents as highly successful. The Hive now provides for up to 17 KS-1 pupils, following an increase of five places this year. The leader of the Hive has worked diligently and successfully to secure appropriate placements for pupils progressing to Key Stage 2 specialist settings, and all pupils now have confirmed next steps. She has been meticulous in seeking improvement ideas from other provisions, both within and beyond the county, and has introduced effective approaches where appropriate. She is now using her expertise and experience to support other schools in the Trust as they develop similar SEND units.

A breakfast club has also been introduced in the Hive, providing a positive opportunity for children attending the unit to spend time with their mainstream peers. This reflects the school's wider philosophy for pupils enrolled in the Hive. Uniquely, every child also has a named classroom within the mainstream school to which they belong. Pupils are encouraged to attend lessons with their mainstream peers whenever they are ready and able to do so, and there is always a place for them. To support this, leaders ensure close collaboration between Hive staff and mainstream classroom staff, so that everyone understands pupils' needs and the adaptations that will help them succeed.

Training provided by the Hive team has also strengthened inclusive practice across mainstream classrooms. Teachers value the practical strategies shared, including training around Attention Autism, which has reinforced the idea that all children benefit from explicitly learning how to focus and prepare themselves to absorb information. Even when attending mainstream lessons is not yet possible, every Hive pupil participates in regular church services and school trips. Integration is therefore maximised, always available and carefully paced to protect each pupil's well-being.

The school's work to ensure that every teacher is a confident teacher of SEND was evident in the staff survey completed during a recent deep dive into SEND provision. The vast majority of staff stated that they felt able to identify and support pupils with SEND in their own classrooms and were confident in adapting curriculum resources for SEND learners. The school also supports staff by providing SEND release time, enabling them to contribute thoughtfully to Education, Health and Care Plans and high-needs funding evidence, while maintaining a healthy work-life balance. Staff reported that this has been very beneficial.

Alongside staff feedback, the school surveys pupils with SEND to gather their views across a range of areas. Most pupils agreed that the work provided in class was appropriately matched to their needs, and virtually all stated that they receive help in the classroom when it is needed. All pupils who completed the survey stated emphatically that they are included in everything the school offers, including clubs and trips. Pupils also reported that they feel included during playtime and lunchtime and know which adults can help them if they experience any difficulty.

The survey data also shows that the majority of SEND needs in the school relate to communication and interaction. By asking pupils which interventions they find most helpful, leaders gained valuable insight into provision preferences and needs. Pupils also suggested tools that could support them further. This enabled the school to triangulate pupil responses with staff feedback and then review, confirm or revise provision where appropriate.



Assessor's Evaluation for the IQM Flagship Project



To ensure the school has a strong range of strategies for supporting pupils with complex needs, TeamTeach training has also been introduced this year. The programme equips staff with a toolkit of holistic strategies for de-escalation and crisis intervention, including verbal and non-verbal approaches to supporting pupils who may be distressed or displaying challenging behaviour. Several members of staff have achieved certification, including authorisation to train additional colleagues within the school.

Exning Primary staff continue to provide valued expertise across the wider Trust and to the local authority. In recent months, another primary school has joined the Trust, and Exning staff have supported colleagues in several ways. They have helped staff introduce Peer Mediation, which is firmly established at Exning and recognised by Trust leaders as a successful initiative that will be rolled out across all their schools. Exning staff have also assisted another Trust primary school in setting up and opening a local authority-supported SEND unit, including support with initial referral consultations before opening.

The school's wider contribution is also evident through regional and Trust-level work. One member of staff is a leader within the East of England technical hub and contributes to advisory meetings focused on improving the use of ICT in schools across the region. As part of this work, Exning opens its own facilities for other schools to visit, receive training and gain advice on developing their technical provision. Within the Trust, Exning leaders are also members of the established Quality Team, which meets weekly to explore ideas for educational improvement and share best practice.

Parents who met with the IQM assessor were emphatically positive about their experiences of the school. One parent said he could not, 'sing their praises enough', and described the school's work as, 'positively transformative', for his child, explaining that staff had helped her regulate and feel safe. He added, 'We could never have envisaged her being so settled and included.' He described the school's approach as entirely child-centred, underpinned by encouragement and flexibility. Another parent said that, 'the patience, care and commitment is incredible', and that, at the start of their child's educational journey, they, 'would never have imagined', such successful outcomes.

A parent who has seen four of her children progress through the school explained that the support extends beyond expert advice and education. She valued, 'the smile when you walk through the gate in the mornings', and said staff, 'listened, made me laugh and consoled me when that was required'. She described how the school had supported the whole family. One of her children, who has an Education, Health and Care Plan and learning difficulties, is also a world champion in his chosen sport. The parent expressed gratitude for the adjustments made to enable him to pursue this achievement and for the way the school celebrates his success, helping him understand that achievement is not limited to written assessments. She also praised the school's support with a referral for another child after staff identified that she was masking her special needs. The school made thoughtful adaptations, including adjusting the time she leaves the classroom at the end of the day. The parent concluded, 'the school is incredible and we feel so blessed to be associated with it. Everyone works so hard. They really know you and your children and it's personal.'



Assessor's Evaluation for the IQM Flagship Project



Another parent said the school had enabled her to thrive in her own parenting because, 'the school supports the whole family', resulting in an 'incredible difference', for her child. She described the school as completely flexible and, 'accepting her just the way she is', creating an individualised curriculum that has helped her child become, 'truly so happy to be here'. Governors were similarly positive. One governor, who also serves across the wider Trust, described Exning Primary as, 'incredibly inclusive'. She explained that during a recent deep dive into special education, the standout feature at Exning was that, 'you can't see which children are getting help, adapted teaching is so well embedded that it is not noticeable', which is clearly beneficial for pupils. Trust leaders also commented that Exning is, 'always looking to improve and willing to do so'.

Looking ahead, Exning Primary is excited to be involved in the Trust's first Festival of Learning, which will take place in the next academic year. The school will provide several speakers who will share expertise across different areas, and every member of Trust staff will attend. This reflects Exning's outward-facing culture, its commitment to collaboration and its continued determination to contribute positively to inclusive practice across the wider education community.

I am therefore firmly 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 therefore recommend that the school retains its Flagship Status and is reviewed again in 12 months. The next review will look closely at how the school has interacted with its Inclusion Cluster and promoted continuing outreach. Evidence of cluster working will underpin the capacity for the school to maintain its Flagship status.

Assessor: Ms Hazel J Simmons

Findings confirmed by Inclusion Quality Mark (UK) Ltd:

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