



Assessor's Evaluation for the IQM Flagship Project



School Riverside Primary School and Nursery
St Edmund's Way
Rainham
Kent
ME8 8ET

Head/Principal Mrs Helen Robson

IQM Lead Ms Zoe Huggett

Date of Review 19th June 2026

Assessor Matt Smith

IQM Cluster Programme

Cluster Group 24 Carat

Ambassador Dr Kenny Frederick

Next Meeting 8th July 2026

Cluster Attendance

Term	Date	Attendance
Summer 2024	26 th June 2024	Yes
Autumn 2024	14 th October 2024	Yes
Spring 2025	13 th March 2025	Yes
Summer 2025	5 th June 2025	Yes
Autumn 2025	14 th October 2025	Yes
Spring 2026	12 th March 2026	Yes

The Impact of the Cluster Group

Parkside Primary – Pastoral and Learning Support

- Inspired by practice seen at Parkside, the school has developed the role of its MELSA-trained HLTA, who now provides targeted support to a range of children across Key Stage 2.
- Each morning she works with a small group on English and Maths, giving these pupils consistent, tailored input at the start of the day when they are most receptive.
- The school's soft start provision has continued to grow and is now led by a newly appointed wellbeing coach. This calm, supportive start to the day is used by around 15 children daily and has become an established part of the pastoral offer.



Assessor's Evaluation for the IQM Flagship Project



- The wellbeing coach has completed her ELSA training and now delivers a range of interventions across the school, supporting emotional regulation, resilience and readiness to learn.
- Riverside has continued to embed the Jigsaw programme across the curriculum. The RSHE policy has been reviewed and updated to reflect current expectations, and planning linked to Jigsaw is being revised in line with the latest version of the scheme.

Wainscott Primary and St Nicholas CofE Primary – Strategic Thinking Around Alternative Provision

- Both schools offer well-developed approaches to supporting pupils with additional needs, including Nurture and ASD Specialist Resourced Provision, and Riverside has used these observations to inform the ongoing development of its own Nest provision.
- What the school saw at these settings is helping to shape its vision for a future, purpose-built SRP environment, giving leaders a clear sense of the physical space, resources and ethos they wish to create.
- Practical ideas gathered during these visits, particularly around recording individual planning, targets and provision for pupils with higher needs, are being incorporated into the school's systems, strengthening how it tracks and evidences support for its most vulnerable learners.
- Taken together, this programme of IQM visits reflects Riverside Primary's commitment to continuous improvement and its determination to learn from the best practice of others in order to deliver the highest quality provision for all its children.

Evidence

- School Website
- OFSTED Report
- Inclusion related documentation – training docs
- Individual target records
- Individualised assessment records
- PCAR records – comments from parents

Additional Activities

- Learning walks
- Tour of OPAL/Lunchtime and meeting with OPAL lead
- Meeting with Headteacher, AHT/Inclusion Manager and Asst SENCO.
- Meeting with two members of the Local Academy Committee



Assessor's Evaluation for the IQM Flagship Project



Evaluation of Annual Progress towards the Flagship Project

Develop OPAL across the whole school and achieve Platinum OPAL status.

The development of OPAL (Outdoor Play and Learning) across the whole school has been a genuinely transformative project for Riverside Primary, and it stands out as a defining feature of the school's inclusive provision. What makes this work particularly significant is its universal reach, OPAL has benefited every child in the school, not only those with additional needs, while at the same time ensuring that pupils with high needs are fully included in playtimes that are meaningful, engaging and developmentally rich.

At the heart of the school's approach is a deeply held belief that play is foundational to learning. Staff have seen first-hand how the opportunities OPAL provides for risk-taking and problem-solving have fed directly back into the classroom, enriching pupils' learning across the curriculum. In an age of increasing screen time, the school has been determined to bring children back to outdoor play, and the breadth of activities now available has driven a marked increase in engagement on the playground. The pupils go out in all weathers, as long as children have the right clothing, play continues regardless of the rain, because access to the outdoors is seen as essential rather than optional. To ensure this is equitable, the school provides wet-weather equipment, including boots and waterproofs, for those pupils who need them, removing any barrier to participation.

The impact on behaviour and wellbeing has been striking. Behaviour incidents involving conflict at lunchtime have reduced dramatically, and teachers report that the time previously spent helping pupils to regulate after lunch has fallen significantly. Leaders note with some amusement that the biggest challenge is now reminding children to eat their lunch because they are so eager to get outside and play! They have also developed real independence through their play, taking responsibility for tidying up, reporting broken equipment and collecting lunch blankets/mats to sit on. The approach actively teaches resilience and embeds play skills across all ages, with children trusted and encouraged to take measured risks. OPAL assemblies, held regularly throughout the term, introduce new areas and activities, reinforce rules and expectations, and teach pupils how to manage their own benefit-risk assessments. Pupils have responded extremely well to the rules around equipment and are explicitly taught how to use it safely.

The school was awarded Platinum OPAL status in March 2026, a significant achievement that reflects the maturity and ambition of its provision. A huge variety of OPAL activities now runs every day, utilising the entire school grounds. The OPAL Play team continues to meet regularly to develop practice in leading play, and a team of pupil Play Rangers now offers peer support, giving children genuine ownership of the programme.

An OPAL learning walk during the visit demonstrated just how accessible the approach at Riverside is, everyone is included, there are opportunities for all to get involved, and every child is able to find something they enjoy. This increased accessibility of the outside space is described by leaders as hugely significant for pupils' development.



Assessor's Evaluation for the IQM Flagship Project



Parental engagement has been a further strength. The school held an OPAL afternoon for Foundation Stage and Key Stage 1 parents, enabling them to see the activities in action and to play alongside their children. Feedback from these 'stay and play' sessions has been overwhelmingly positive with example feedback comments on the school's social media platforms such as 'The children are so lucky to have access to fun activities - the outdoor space you have created is truly wonderful' and 'Well done to Mrs Robson for your leadership and to all staff for achieving this and bringing this to life for our children.'

The school's expertise is now also benefiting the wider community, with Riverside able to offer support to other local schools that are introducing OPAL.

The passion of the OPAL lead shone through clearly throughout the visit, and the enthusiasm of the whole staff team is obvious as seen with the Teaching Assistants who were out on the field having the best time with the water hose and playing alongside the children! As the OPAL lead and the inclusion lead both reflected, the programme "has been a total game changer for our pupils." The Headteacher captured the underlying philosophy simply, observing that 'OPAL allows our children to be children.'

Develop the Nest provision for supporting the highest needs children in KS1.

The development of the Nest provision has been a key strand of Riverside Primary's inclusion work, providing a carefully designed and nurturing environment for the school's highest needs children primarily in Key Stage 1. The provision has grown in both scale and sophistication over the year, and it now sits at the centre of the school's offer for pupils who require a fundamentally different approach in order to thrive. This year the Nest is running with a larger number of children than before, with eleven accessing it consistently and others using it for part of the day, reflecting both the growing confidence in the model and the flexibility with which it can meet a range of needs.

The curriculum within the Nest is heavily inspired by Early Years practice and is generally topic-based, built around a key text. The PKS (Pre Key Stage) standards are used to direct the journey of learning, but pupils' own interests remain a central consideration, and the learning environment is deliberately child-led, with adults scaffolding learning in the moment. This open-ended approach actively encourages exploration. Individual targets ensure that learning activities are purposeful and provide clear opportunities for progression, and these targets reflect a holistic understanding of progress. As the Assistant SENCO explained, 'social, emotional, engagement and social skills are regarded as just as important as academic success.' Targets for individual pupils are broken down into small, achievable steps and displayed within the environment itself, and pupils' progress through their curriculum is tracked through assessment folders, with small, holistic steps of progress celebrated. During a learning walk, the teacher proudly celebrated a child who had worked through a visual schedule to complete his maths learning and was then able to receive his reward, a small but telling illustration of the provision's ethos in action.

The Nest environment has been thoughtfully designed to support engagement and regulation. It is low arousal, with activities chosen specifically to spark children's



Assessor's Evaluation for the IQM Flagship Project



interests, and pupils are worked with on a flexible basis to deliver discrete teaching of skills. The physical space itself has been significantly improved over the year, with new flooring and safety measures installed, and the school is currently testing various types of seating and furniture to identify what works best for the pupils.

The impact of the Nest on pupils has been considerable. Children have developed their social interaction skills, and three children have been able to return to their mainstream classroom, a significant outcome that demonstrates the provision's success in building the skills and confidence pupils need to access wider school life. Two children in the Nest have passed the phonics check, and across the group the relationships pupils have built with their peers, alongside their use of language, have developed noticeably. Engagement with parents has also strengthened, families have attended several Stay and Play sessions, and increased use of Tapestry and Dojo means that parents are better informed and more closely involved in their children's learning.

Develop intervention spaces.

The development of intervention spaces across Riverside Primary provides clear evidence of a school that has thought creatively and purposefully about how its physical environment can be used to support inclusion. Rather than treating intervention as something that happens at the margins, the school has made deliberate, imaginative use of every available space, and learning walks during the visit revealed how every nook and cranny is now used as an alternative space to deliver targeted support. This resourceful approach reflects a genuine commitment to ensuring that pupils who need something different can access it in an environment designed to help them succeed.

The school's MELSA provision complements the Nest directly and was seen to strong effect during the visit. The Nest HLTA has completed MELSA training with the Educational Psychology team and now runs a MELSA group each morning with KS2 children. This group is targeted at pupils who can access a mainstream environment but whose learning needs to be significantly adapted; these pupils remain part of the mainstream classroom but access dedicated support for targeted maths and English. The MELSA element brings a specialist lens to thinking about what transactional supports are needed to help learning stick for that groups of pupils, while also supporting emotional regulation and providing adapted opportunities to sustain engagement. The impact of this provision was evident on a learning walk, where a MELSA group of KS2 pupils were observed receiving targeted maths support, using physical resources to break down concepts with adult support and frequent opportunities to rehearse skills in small, manageable chunks. Now and next visual supports helped keep pupils engaged, while the calmer, smaller environment kept children regulated and enabled more targeted teaching; skilful questioning moved learning forward, and because the space was intentionally small, peer talk could be encouraged and misconceptions identified and addressed quickly. Elsewhere, a teaching assistant was observed taking a group from across Years 5 and 6 for focused language development work, and a room dedicated to sensory circuits and regulation demonstrated the emphasis the school places on regulation strategies as a foundation for learning.



Assessor's Evaluation for the IQM Flagship Project



The impact of MELSA on pupils' self-esteem has been particularly striking. Because the children learn together as a group, they have become genuinely supportive of one another; this was seen clearly when a SEND tennis group visited and the children worked together, encouraging each other warmly as they learned to play. The benefits have been evident at two annual reviews, where one parent fed back that their child now talks about learning at home far more and has grown in confidence because they no longer see themselves as different. Progress in pupils' books also shows evidence of the effectiveness of the provision, one child who could recognise only five sounds in the previous year can now recognise twenty and blend simple words. Having begun mid-year, the school is excited about the curriculum developments planned for this group going forward.

Thoughtful use of space extends across the whole site. The Year 3 small storage room has been converted into a PPA room, freeing the previous PPA room to become a workspace for the Wellbeing Team, which now includes the new HSSW, while the former HSSW office has become a meeting room that can also be used for interventions. The Conservatory space is now used daily for both Read Write Inc and MELSA, as well as for other interventions as needed. Each of these changes reflects a school willing to rethink how its accommodation is used in order to prioritise targeted support for its pupils. The school has also designated a dedicated space for its school counsellor, who comes in two days a week to deliver sessions to targeted pupils, ensuring that emotional and mental health support has a consistent and appropriate home within the school.



Assessor's Evaluation for the IQM Flagship Project



Agreed Actions for the Next Steps in the Flagship Project

To continue to develop additional OPAL spaces and promote OPAL throughout the school and wider community.

The school intends to develop additional OPAL spaces, including establishing a dedicated outdoor eating area and creating a new assault course, with pupils meaningfully involved in the planning and creation of the latter to ensure they retain genuine ownership of their play environment. Building on the success of previous sessions, the school plans to hold an OPAL afternoon for Key Stage 2 parents and to repeat OPAL afternoons for all families throughout the next academic year, alongside embedding OPAL information within its new starter pack and parent information evening so that expectations, including those around appropriate clothing, are clearly communicated from the outset. To strengthen communication further, the school will establish an OPAL newsletter to be sent out three times a year. Underpinning this work, leaders will continue to monitor the usage of different areas and gather pupil voice regarding the activities on offer and the next steps for the provision, ensuring that future developments remain firmly led by the children's own interests. Finally, reflecting the school's growing role as a source of expertise, Riverside intends to offer open sessions for external visitors, including other schools interested in adopting the OPAL approach, sharing its practice and supporting inclusive play beyond its own gates.

To continue to develop spaces within the school for supporting high-needs pupils – The Nest and other intervention spaces.

A central priority is developing the curriculum to respond to the changing breadth of need and age range within its provision, ensuring it remains fit for purpose in developing pupils' independence and skills in a progressive way. This includes clearly defining the curriculum offer for different groups, encompassing the environment, learning structure, provision and transactional supports each group requires. The school intends to continue developing the Nest environment, including its outdoor area and the possible addition of a portable sensory pod, alongside enhancements such as wall vinyl and new furniture. Amendments will be made to the curriculum, assessments and daily routines and activities in response to changes in the Nest cohort, with particular attention to supporting some pupils' transition into Key Stage 2. Finally, the school plans to work with the Local Authority to plan major works that will ultimately create a fully self-contained space for high-needs provision, securing the long-term future of this important area of its work.



Assessor's Evaluation for the IQM Flagship Project



Overview

The evidence gathered across this review visit demonstrates a school in which inclusion is not a discrete initiative but a deeply embedded culture, lived out in the daily practice of staff, the attitudes of pupils, the engagement of parents and the vision of leaders and governors alike. The school's continued work across the eight elements of the Inclusion Quality Mark is characterised by ambition, adaptability and an unwavering belief in the value of every individual child.

Riverside Primary is a two-form entry primary school with a nursery, which is now full and has grown rapidly from its previous status as a one-form entry school, with 470 pupils currently on roll. The cohort reflects a community of significant complexity and diversity, 36% of pupils are in receipt of Pupil Premium funding, 14% have English as an Additional Language within a growing and culturally diverse cohort representing a wide variety of cultures, and the school supports a high proportion of pupils with additional needs. There are currently 35 EHCPs, representing around 8% of pupils, with a further three agreed for issue but not yet in place, and the school's Specially Resourced Provision, funded for 15 places, is operating at 20. New offers of local housing have had a marked impact on demand for places, and the school has, in the words of leaders, become something of a "magnet," having developed a strong reputation for providing genuinely inclusive education. This changing and increasingly complex cohort has required the school to be highly adaptable, and the SRP (Specialist Resource Provision) and Nest provision has evolved hugely in recognition that some pupils do not thrive in a typical mainstream classroom and benefit from a more individualised offer that is not confined only to pupils within the SRP. Having previously operated a fully integrated model, the school has thoughtfully moved towards separate spaces with structured opportunities to integrate, and has clearly identified what a tailor-made, purpose-built SEND provision on site would look like, ensuring it can continue to respond to the level of language need and wider inclusion experiences of its pupils.

At the heart of the school's success is a profoundly embedded culture of inclusion, with adaptive practice happening naturally and often without staff consciously realising it. The school has always prided itself on understanding and accepting everyone, and this culture is felt most powerfully in the attitudes of the pupils themselves. As the Headteacher reflected, "our children are accepting of everybody and that's what makes us special," illustrating the point with the example of a child with blindness whose Year 2 peers understand her needs so instinctively that they invite her to their birthday parties and add Braille to their party invitations, an empathy that, in the Headteacher's words, "goes beyond the classroom." Children are entirely used to seeing alternative and specialist equipment, which is simply accepted as a normal part of school life, and pupil voice has directly shaped the school's values, with the children themselves wanting something to be made clear about empathy and understanding one another.

This inclusive culture was evident on learning walks, where the lived reality of the school's ethos could be seen in classroom after classroom. In Year 2, a pupil with a visual impairment had a Braille machine at a workstation, but was by no means limited to it, she was encouraged to be in the environment and with her peers, with the workstation serving as a safe space to return to if needed, and pupils were encouraged



Assessor's Evaluation for the IQM Flagship Project



to access the resources they needed to support their learning. Communication visuals were used in the same classroom to help pupils understand expectations and what was coming next. One child approached me and was desperate to explain how his chew toy "helps my brain feel better when my body is angry," describing the other ways he is encouraged to regulate, including sitting in the calm corner with a book or being given sensory input by an adult. In almost every classroom, adaptations were being made for pupils identified as needing a different curriculum offer, whether funded through the SRP or identified by staff as requiring further support; one example was a pupil with a visual impairment provided with specially adapted equipment to mirror the teacher's interactive screen, additional adult support and adaptive seating to address physical needs. Pupils who required additional support often had specialist resources or known regulation items kept close by throughout the lesson, all accepted without question by staff and peers, with these pupils encouraged to engage in their own way rather than being excluded. In some classes, resources to aid short-term memory recall and reduce cognitive overwhelm, such as number lines, word banks and knowledge organisers, were seen in use. The school's expectation of a total communication approach was evident throughout, underpinned by the Bexley toolkit's quality-first teaching expectations, and the common language of the Zones of Regulation was embedded across the school and heard from both pupils and adults, with specific tools and strategies used to bring children "back to green." Throughout the visit pupil behaviour was calm and focused, with the majority of pupils ready and engaged. The school's forward thinking around pupils' next steps was also visible, demonstrated through sessions run by the NELFT emotional wellbeing practitioner supporting pupils' transition to secondary school and the resources provided for this.

The impact of this inclusive practice on pupils' outcomes and experiences is evident across both academic and personal measures. The school invests heavily in early reading and writing, particularly for its Pupil Premium cohort whose often lower starting points require more intensive and frequent intervention, supported by a dedicated intervention TA, and phonics results are now the highest they have been for four years, with combined attainment broadly in line with national expectations when aggregated. For pupils working below age-related expectations, progress is measured through pre-key-stage standards broken into smaller steps, with DfE SEND assessment materials used for those working at an engagement model level, ensuring incremental progress is captured. Pupil progress meetings allow in-depth, individualised discussion of pupils working below expectations, where detailed knowledge of the child informs how "good" progress is judged, and individual targets are set jointly by the teacher and SENCO. Progression in pupils' books was clear, with the book look during the visit showing huge development in colourful semantics sentence building, from illegible marks on a page to writing independent simple sentences that could be read. Crucially, however, the school is clear that its most meaningful outcomes are not always those that appear in summative data. As the Headteacher powerfully put it, "it's about knowing our children, that's how we know that progress is being made," celebrating a child who came in calmly when the whistle blew, which "doesn't show up in summative data but it's massive," and another who was able to leave school to go swimming for the first time, a milestone that "would never have happened a year ago" and is exactly "the stuff worth celebrating." Parental feedback strongly reinforces this impact, with comments from PCAR records describing a child who is "well understood and well cared for by his adults," another whose "academic abilities have progressed drastically"



Assessor's Evaluation for the IQM Flagship Project



and whose sensory and regulation needs are clearly being met at school, and a family who "couldn't wish for a more inclusive environment," valuing that the school does not "just have an academic focus but [cares] for the other things of life which are important." Several parents specifically praised successful transitions from the Nest into mainstream classrooms and the way the school listens to both them and their children.

This impact is underpinned by rigorous, evidence-informed systems and a broad, purposeful curriculum. Individual pupil profiles for pupils requiring additional support ensure any member of staff working with a child can support them effectively, reports to parents are tailored to celebrate progress towards individual targets, and Tapestry is used within the Nest to share learning and observations so families can see small steps of progress. Tools such as the Bexley toolkit and the Rosenshein principles provide a consistent, evidence-informed basis for quality first teaching and adaptation. Termly book looks and monitoring activities inform supportive, collaborative feedback to teachers that encourages dialogue about pedagogy and ensures progression is about depth of understanding rather than simply linear coverage, while monitoring and auditing schedules give leaders a clear annual picture of where inclusive practice is strong and where further support is needed, directly informing CPD. Pupil voice is used to test how embedded these processes are, and every available space is used to deliver tailored learning, including dedicated rooms for sensory circuits and targeted intervention. The curriculum itself reaches well beyond the classroom: a life skills curriculum has been developed in response to changing need, focused on equipping pupils with the skills required for their next step, and disadvantaged pupils benefit from rich enrichment including STEM projects such as young eco-engineers, work with the Rochester Bridge Company and an astro dome, finance education with the Yorkshire Building Society, fire and road safety visits, and the Police Cadets scheme. Families are supported holistically by a home school support worker and wellbeing coach whose work increases early parental engagement and extends well beyond academic need, from food bank support to housing applications, while a Speech and Language Therapist works with the school one day a fortnight to upskill staff and deliver intervention. A partnership with the Home-Start charity supports early communication for nursery and reception pupils, and the NELFT emotional wellbeing practitioner supports pupils' transitions to secondary school. The school is consistently forward-thinking, always adapting its spaces to best suit the needs of its changing cohorts.

Finally, the strength and authenticity of the school's inclusive ethos is fully recognised and championed at governance level. Conversations with Local Academy Committee members confirmed that "what Helen says the school does, the school does," with the Headteacher setting the tone and leading by example, supported by robust monitoring processes that mean, as one member noted, "the information that we get as governors is accurate and secure." Responsibilities are shared across the academy committee, which meets four times a year, with each meeting underpinned by a comprehensive headteacher report, supplemented by two or three paired monitoring visits for each member with specific focuses that are fed back through reports and discussion with the appropriate senior leader, and an annual academy committee day on which all members come in to see things for themselves, talk to the children and triangulate evidence, giving what one member described as a "very transparent" and clear picture of the school. Governors were clear that, as one member put it, "inclusion is not a separate agenda item, it covers everything," informing attendance, behaviour and SEND alike.



Assessor's Evaluation for the IQM Flagship Project



They spoke warmly of the school's commitment to OPAL, noting that the Headteacher "will wax lyrical in any given meeting about OPAL and its impact," and that "there is a real benefit to OPAL and the impact is huge," making tangible the school's belief that "every individual deserves the chance to learn based on who they are and how they learn best"; on one LAC visit, OPAL was the thing pupils most often identified as their favourite and as what makes them feel included. Members were insistent that the school is "really proud of inclusion" and values each pupil as an individual, being "as proud of the small step towards independence one child might take as they [are] with a child who achieves academic success." The fact that the SLT "know every child by name" was felt to "tell you all you need to know about the ethos and culture of the school," and all knowledge gathered by leaders is fed back into the improvement plan by a team that is consistently proactive and forward-thinking. Perhaps most tellingly, one Academy Council member reflected that they were most proud that "there is never a ceiling for pupils' achievements" and that everybody, including the academy council, "is included as part of the Riverside family."

In summary, Riverside Primary is a school in which inclusion is woven into every aspect of its work, from the design of its provision and the rigour of its assessment systems to the breadth of its curriculum and the warmth of its relationships with families. The school has responded with remarkable adaptability to a rapidly growing and increasingly complex cohort, and the impact of this work is unmistakable in the progress, confidence and sense of belonging of its pupils, whether that progress is measured in phonics outcomes or in a child who can finally come in calmly at the sound of the whistle. Leadership at every level, from the Headteacher to the Local Academy Committee, shares a genuine, deeply held commitment to valuing each child as an individual, and the culture of acceptance among the pupils themselves is perhaps the truest measure of the school's success. There is no ceiling on what any child might achieve, and every member of the community is welcomed as part of the "Riverside family."

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: Matt Smith

Findings confirmed by Inclusion Quality Mark (UK) Ltd:

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