



## Assessor's Evaluation for the IQM Flagship Project



**School:** Newfield School  
Old Bank Lane  
Blackburn  
BB1 2PW

**Head/Principal:** Rachel Kay

**IQM Lead:** Jenny Riley

**Date of Review:** 29<sup>th</sup> June 2026

**Assessor:** Cole Andrew

### **IQM Cluster Programme**

**Cluster Group:** IQM CIN NW Group B SEND Forum

**Ambassador:** Siona Robson, Sarah Linari; Fiona Robinson

### **Cluster Attendance**

<b>Term</b>	<b>Date</b>	<b>Attendance</b>
<b>Autumn 2024</b>	12th November 2024	No
<b>Spring 2025</b>	4 <sup>th</sup> February 2025	Yes
<b>Summer 2025</b>	23 <sup>rd</sup> June 2025	Yes
<b>Autumn 2025</b>	21 <sup>st</sup> November 2025	No
<b>Spring 2026</b>	5 <sup>th</sup> February 2026	N/A
<b>Summer 2026</b>	8 <sup>th</sup> June 2026	Yes



## Assessor's Evaluation for the IQM Flagship Project



### **The Impact of the Cluster Group**

Newfield School has maintained active involvement in the IQM cluster programme, with a wide range of leaders engaging with agenda specific interests. The school's engagement with regional and online meetings, including sessions focused on special school practice, trauma-informed approaches, wellbeing, student leadership, assessment, rights-respecting practice, music, technology and SEND. Leaders and staff have used these opportunities to reflect on their own provision and to look outwards at practice in other settings.

Leaders described how cluster input has supported reflection around wellbeing, pupil leadership, communication, music, and preparation for adulthood. The school is also beginning to contribute more actively to the wider inclusion community, including through the sharing of its work in music and SEND practice.

Newfield has become a strong local source of expertise. The review process established how their role in the cluster would link to the next steps project work for the coming year; namely, the school should develop its role as a lead setting for communication strategies, Augmentative and Alternative Communication (AAC), early developmental learning and pre-phonics stages for mainstream schools supporting pupils with SEND.

I would recommend that, as a Flagship School, Newfield take a more proactive role in leading aspects of their cluster CPD and sharing of practice in order to demonstrate impact across a wider range of settings.

### **Evidence**

- IQM Flagship Evaluation and Action Plan 2025–2026.
- School website and published information.
- Review timetable and documentation.
- Tour of school with pupils, including learning environments and outdoor provision.
- Discussions with the Headteacher, senior leaders, IQM Lead and staff responsible for curriculum, Post-16, family wellbeing, therapeutic approaches, MOVE, music, and community links.
- Meetings with parents and Family Wellbeing Coordinators.
- Final leadership discussion regarding the next Flagship project focus.
- Review of awards, accreditations, and wider evidence, including Rights Respecting work, MOVE, trauma-informed work and communication development.

### **Additional Activities**

- The review included a pupil-led tour of school, including specialist spaces and outdoor learning areas, and meetings with staff and parents.
- Learning walks enabled the review to explore the school's vision, curriculum, therapeutic provision, community links, family support, Post-16 provision, cluster engagement, and future project planning.
- Leadership discussion correlating Ofsted inclusion criteria in the context of the school's IQM SEF



## Assessor's Evaluation for the IQM Flagship Project



### Evaluation of Annual Progress towards the Flagship Project

Newfield School's current Flagship project, "Promoting positivity about disability – building capacity," remains relevant to the context of the school's work within the local community. The evaluation submitted by leaders was accurate, reflective and with clear evidence of impact. The project has rightly focused on community connection, independence, communication, family partnership, therapeutic practice, staff development, and the need to build capacity as the school expands.

A defining strength of Newfield is that inclusion is lived through daily practice. Leaders and staff repeatedly returned to the shared principle of never doing anything for a child that they can, could or should do for themselves. This was not presented as a slogan but as a professional expectation which shapes provision. Staff were able to explain how pupils are supported towards independence through small, carefully planned steps, beginning with early developmental experiences and extending into Post-16 enterprise, work experience, and community access.

The school's work on preparation for adulthood is particularly strong. Practical evidence included Post-16 work at OJ's charity shop, where pupils undertake real-life tasks such as sorting donations, tidying, greeting customers and serving at the counter. Pupils also access local shops, cafés, allotment work, enterprise activities, market stalls, and residential visits. These experiences develop communication, tolerance of unfamiliar environments, mobility, turn-taking, money awareness, social interaction, and confidence. They also increase the visibility of disabled young people within the local community, which is central to the school's Flagship project.

Staff gave several powerful examples of impact. One pupil who had previously required significant mobility support was described as taking part in a high ropes activity during a residential visit. Pupil A demonstrated how he has grown in confidence and responsibility, navigating the school, supporting younger pupils, taking part in wheelchair dancing and practising community independence with appropriate adult support. These examples show that leaders set high expectations and that staff are skilled in balancing safety with ambition.

Parents clearly validated the school's self-evaluation. They described the school as safe, welcoming, and trustworthy. Several parents spoke about children who had previously struggled in mainstream or other settings but now enjoy coming to school, communicate more effectively and show greater independence at home and in the community. One parent described the impact of school support during a period of significant behavioural difficulty, including multi-agency working and the vital reassurance provided by the Family Wellbeing Coordinator. Another described the difference made by school communication, explaining that parents feel part of the process rather than being left to discover changes afterwards.

Communication and developing resilience are evident in many case samples of current and former students. This remains an important area for the next phase of development. The school has developed approaches such as Makaton, Visual Communication Aids, and the "Newfield 50 words" project. Parents described significant communication gains, including pupils who were previously pre-verbal beginning to speak or use these



## Assessor's Evaluation for the IQM Flagship Project



communication systems. The next stage would be to maximise the empowerment for pupils to achieve expressive and receptive communication with the least possible adult prompting before they move on into adult life. This means ensuring that AAC, visual supports, communication boards and technology are not simply available, but actively used to promote spontaneous, purposeful, and independent communication across the day, during transitions, at home and in the community (such as residential trips). This connects well with the renewed vision and values, namely, Newfield's wider independence ethos.

The school's trauma-informed and therapeutic approach is also highly effective. Staff used a shared language of regulation, co-regulation, trusted relationships, curiosity, and behaviour as communication. Provision such as The Den, regulation support, Thrive, sensory integration approaches and emotional literacy support contribute to pupils feeling safe enough to learn. Parents confirmed that this relational approach has helped reduce anxiety, support behaviour, and strengthen family trust.

Curriculum and environment are well matched to pupils' needs. The Explorers provision, outdoor learning areas, sensory pathways, MOVE programme and specialist spaces demonstrate careful thinking about physical, sensory, communication and cognitive development. Examples included outdoor areas designed to support balance, climbing, crawling, wheelchair access, and physical challenge. Leaders and staff recognised that the next step is to ensure all adults understand not only what activities pupils are doing, but why they are doing them. For example, staff should be able to articulate the pedagogical purpose of sensory integration, vestibular and proprioceptive input, MOVE activities, visual supports, and structured communication opportunities.

The school is well placed now to evolve its IQM projects from broad inclusive capacity building to an even sharper focus on specialist SEND and adaptive teaching pedagogies, in particular, focused on cognition and learning, communication and interaction, social, emotional, and mental health, and physical and sensory development. This is an appropriate and ambitious next step. The school already has strong practice, but leaders rightly identified the need to make this practice more explicit, consistent, and research-informed, particularly as new staff join and the school expands (with plans for a 60-place provision for pupils with autism and/or associated communication interaction difficulties).



## Assessor's Evaluation for the IQM Flagship Project



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

Overarching project focus as worded by the school: "Development of provision, in terms of resourcing, and activities/support out of school time."

The assessor agrees that the Flagship project is an appropriate stage of development, but with a refined focus on specialist pedagogy, communication independence, and outward-facing leadership. Leaders are clear that expansion must not dilute Newfield's inclusive culture. The next phase should therefore build capacity by strengthening staff expertise, clarifying expected practice, and developing the school's role as a local centre of excellence for communication and early developmental learning. I suggest, therefore, that the project includes the following specific milestones.

#### **Refine and embed defined specialist evidence-based pedagogies across the four dimensions of SEND need.**

This should include a clear articulation of the approaches staff are expected to use for cognition and learning, communication and interaction, social and emotional regulation, and physical and sensory development. This will help ensure that practice is not dependent on individual intuition but is consistently understood across staff teams, roles, and responsibilities. It will also support appraisal, induction, coaching, and professional development.

#### **Develop pupils' expressive and receptive communication with clear prompt-reduction/aiming to achieve minimal adult prompting.**

This should include a whole-school focus on reducing prompt dependency, increasing wait time, modelling communication, ensuring AAC systems are available in all relevant contexts and making best use of technology. Practical next steps could include communication audits in classrooms and community settings, observation of how often pupils initiate communication independently, and coaching for staff on when to step back, when to model and when / how to prompt.

#### **Make best use of technology and AAC systems.**

Leaders discussed the potential of iPads, communication devices, visual systems, and emerging technology to prepare pupils for real-life communication beyond school. This is especially important for older pupils who may need socially acceptable, age-appropriate communication tools in community settings. The school is well placed to explore how familiar technologies, including smartphones or tablet-based systems, can support pupils to communicate choices, needs and preferences in shops, cafés, transport, and adult provision.

#### **Enhance further Newfield's role as a Flagship lead in communication strategies and Continuing Professional Development.**

The school has the expertise and credibility to support mainstream schools where pupils are working at pre-phonics stages of development or where communication and interaction needs are not yet well understood. A structured outreach offer could include



## Assessor's Evaluation for the IQM Flagship Project



training on communication readiness, pre-symbolic and early symbolic communication, Assisted Language Input, Makaton, AAC, visual supports, attention and listening, sensory regulation, music as a communication tool and inclusive classroom environments.

### **Strengthen action research and professional learning.**

Leaders have explored and should pursue the value of staff engaging in small-scale classroom research linked to their own pupils and pathways. This should be supported by a clear published framework so that research is manageable, evidence-informed, and directly linked to pupil outcomes. Enquiry questions might include how AAC can increase spontaneous communication, how visual supports improve receptive understanding, how sensory regulation affects engagement, or how music supports early communication and attention.

### **Formalise and enhance the alumni and destination tracking.**

The school has strong informal knowledge of former pupils and families often remain connected. A more systematic approach would allow leaders to evaluate the long-term impact of communication, independence, and community access work. This could also inform curriculum design and strengthen the school's evidence base as a Flagship setting.



## Assessor's Evaluation for the IQM Flagship Project



### Overview

*"At Newfield, we bring the outside in and take the inside out; preparing our pupils not just to belong in school, but to thrive in the world beyond it." (Leaders)*

*"Here, there is no such thing as 'can't'—only 'not yet.' Together, staff, families and pupils find ways to make the impossible possible." (Staff)*

*"In this school, inclusion is not an initiative, it is a lived experience, where every interaction is designed to build independence, dignity, and possibility for life beyond the classroom. They seek to 'make the seemingly impossible, possible!'" (Assessor)*

Newfield School continues to demonstrate a highly effective inclusive culture that is evident in every aspect of school life. Inclusion is not treated as a discrete initiative or set of strategies; rather, it is a lived experience shaped by clear leadership vision and shared values that are communicated consistently across the whole school community, including pupils themselves, staff, parents, and the local community representatives. From the initial welcome and throughout the review day, there was a strong sense that the school operates as a cohesive community where pupils, families and staff feel valued, respected, and empowered. One parent captured this succinctly, describing the school as "a place where we feel safe and understood, not just our children but us as families too." This sense of belonging reflects a sustained commitment to inclusive leadership and ethos.

Leadership at all levels is both purposeful and reflective. Senior leaders articulate a clear moral purpose centred on preparing pupils for life beyond school, with a strong focus on independence, communication, and emotional wellbeing. This vision is understood and enacted by staff, who speak confidently about their roles in supporting pupils to achieve meaningful outcomes. Leaders are not complacent; rather, they demonstrate a willingness to challenge existing practice and refine provision further. During the final discussion, leaders openly acknowledged that "we are on a journey, we know what we are strong at, but we are also clear about where we need to go next." This self-awareness and openness to development are key indicators of effective inclusive leadership.

Teaching and learning at Newfield are shaped by a highly personalised approach that recognises the diverse and complex needs of pupils. The curriculum is designed to be developmentally appropriate while maintaining high expectations for all learners. Many staff demonstrated an understanding that learning must be adapted to the individual, not the other way around, albeit staff recruitment and the necessary training may still benefit from some refinement to ensure consistency around core expectations of a universal offer. This was evident in discussions where staff reflected on the need to move away from "teaching what we are comfortable with" towards teaching in evidence-based adaptive ways that meet the needs and increasingly complex and diverse cohort of learners (in line with the national trends for all schools). The emerging focus on strengthening pedagogical understanding across the four areas of SEND need represents a significant and well-considered next step. This resonates with leaders plans for further embedding principles of effective inclusive teaching and demonstrates a move towards a more explicit, research-informed approach.



## Assessor's Evaluation for the IQM Flagship Project



Assessment practices are purposeful and link well with pupils' developmental starting points. There is a clear emphasis on understanding individual learning needs and tracking progress in a way that is meaningful for pupils with complex SEND. Leaders demonstrate a strong awareness that progress must be understood in context, with careful consideration given to barriers such as medical needs, attendance patterns, and communication challenges. Rather than viewing these as limitations, the school uses them as a basis for tailored intervention and support. This approach ensures that assessment is not simply a measure of attainment, but a tool for understanding and improving learning outcomes.

The school environment is a significant strength and reflects thoughtful, responsive design. Learning spaces are carefully adapted to support sensory regulation, communication, and physical development. Outdoor provision, sensory areas, and therapeutic spaces are all intentionally designed to meet a wide range of needs, enabling pupils to engage in learning in ways that are meaningful and accessible. Staff spoke confidently about how these environments support pupils' readiness to learn, with one member of staff explaining, "It's not just about what we do, it's about creating the right conditions for learning to happen." This demonstrates a sophisticated understanding of the relationship between environment, engagement, and learning.

Pupil voice is evident throughout the school and is closely linked to the development of independence and self-advocacy. Pupils were proud to share their experiences of school, highlighting activities such as community visits, residential opportunities, and enterprise initiatives. Staff described how pupils are encouraged to make choices, express preferences, and develop confidence in their own abilities, including the basic human right to say 'no.' However, the school is now rightly moving towards a deeper focus on communication independence, ensuring that pupils are able not only to express choices but to initiate communication with minimal adult prompting.

This reflects a strong commitment to empowering pupils as active participants in their learning and lives. I would also encourage staff to explore the fine balance between pupil self-advocacy in saying 'no' with the trauma informed consideration of 'curiosity.' This may help pupils with meta-emotion and deeper their own self-awareness of the hidden emotions leading to some anxieties around tasks, whilst respecting their self-advocacy rights. For example, being curious as to why a pupil does not want to go the supermarket trip and putting supportive measures in place to empower them to understand what may help them overcome. This would align well with the Thrive principles that leaders seek to establish as whole school ethos and practice.

Parent engagement is a particular strength of the school and is characterised by trust, openness, and strong communication. Parents spoke very positively about their experiences, highlighting the school's responsiveness and willingness to work collaboratively. One parent commented, "This school listens to us, they don't just tell us what's happening, they include us." The role of the Family Wellbeing Coordinators is central to this success, providing ongoing support, facilitating communication, and helping families navigate complex SEND systems. This strong partnership between home and school has a measurable impact on pupil outcomes and wellbeing.



## Assessor's Evaluation for the IQM Flagship Project



The school's engagement with the wider community is equally strong. Newfield actively seeks to "bring the outside in and take the inside out," creating meaningful opportunities for pupils to engage with the world beyond school. Community-based learning, work experience, and partnerships with local organisations enable pupils to develop practical skills and build confidence in real-life contexts. At the same time, the school plays an important role in increasing community understanding of disability, challenging perceptions, and promoting inclusion. This reciprocal relationship reflects a mature and outward-looking approach to inclusion and provides evidence of impact of the school's most recent Flagship project with IQM.

Personal development is at the heart of the school's provision and is clearly linked to preparation for adulthood. Pupils benefit from a wide range of experiences that extend beyond the classroom, including work experience, enterprise activities, and residential visits. These opportunities are carefully planned to develop independence, resilience, and social skills. Staff spoke about the importance of "making learning real," ensuring that pupils can apply their skills in meaningful contexts. This approach is highly effective in supporting pupils to develop the knowledge, skills and confidence needed for adult life. Overall, Newfield School demonstrates strong inclusive practice. Leadership is clear and reflective, teaching is adaptive and responsive, environments are enabling, and relationships are central to success. The school's next phase of development, with its focus on specialist pedagogy and communication independence, is both timely and ambitious. It builds on a solid foundation of inclusive practice and positions the school to further strengthen its role as a leader in the field.

The school continues to move from strength to strength in terms of its superb inclusive practice and I am firmly of the opinion that the school fully meets the standard required by the Inclusion Quality Mark 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: Cole Andrew**

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

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**Joe McCann MBA NPQH**

**Chief Executive Officer of Inclusion Quality Mark (UK) Ltd**