



Report on IQM Inclusive School Award



School Name: Stanton Vale School

School Address: Thoresby Road
Long Eaton
Nottingham
NG10 3NP

Head/Principal Emma Kehoe

IQM Lead Rachel Beckett

Assessment Date 11th March 2026

Assessor Mr Richard Kitching

Sources of Evidence:

- Inclusion Quality Mark (IQM) Self Evaluation documentation
- Ofsted Report (February 2025)
- School Website
- Esteem Multi-Academy Trust Website
- Lesson Drop Ins
- Whole School Tour

Meetings Held with:

- Executive Headteacher, Interim Head of School/IQM Lead, Interim Deputy Headteacher and other Senior Leaders
- Behaviour Lead
- Parent Governor (Link Governor for Inclusion)
- Esteem Multi-Academy Trust Representative
- Pupils from different age groups in the school
- Parents and Carers of Pupils that attend Stanton Vale School
- MOVE (Mobility Opportunities Via Education) Programme Lead
- Drama Therapist
- Teachers and Support Staff



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Overall Evaluation

Stanton Vale School is truly heartwarming, compassionate place of learning. The exceptional staff that serve the school community have made, and continue to make, a profoundly positive difference to the lives of the pupils that attend the school as well as the pupils' families. From the moment I arrived, I sensed the caring, joyful atmosphere that is strongly embedded in the environment and ethos of this wonderful school community.

Serving a diverse range of pupils with complex needs from the ages of 2 to 19, the Stanton Vale School community is united by its highly inclusive ethos and overwhelming sense of belonging. Difference is celebrated here and each and every member of the school community is valued for being who they are. Despite the wealth of challenges and barriers to learning that the pupils face, staff demonstrate an unwavering drive to ensure that every pupil that attends fulfils their potential and thrives. High expectations are evident everywhere, seamlessly blending with a genuine sense of joy, care and compassion.

The ethos of the school is set by the Executive Headteacher and her remarkable Senior Leadership Team. They model high standards of integrity, personal warmth and professionalism in everything they do. They value their staff and support them to deliver an exceptional learning experience for the pupils, bespoke to individual needs but united through a sense of community and collaboration.

Staff love working here. They feel inspired by the pupils that they teach and care for day in and day out. They work with incredible commitment, patience and determination but also with, as one staff member described, 'a sense of fun.' They value the excellent support they receive from the Senior Leadership Team, the consideration for their own wellbeing as well as the vast range of opportunities they receive to enhance their own professional knowledge and expertise. They are a formidable staff team, transforming lives on a daily basis for the better.

Relationships within all aspects of this community are rooted in respect, trust and compassion. This encompasses relationships between pupils, relationships between staff members and relationships between staff and parents. The group of parents that I spoke to on the review day were overwhelmingly positive about the school and the high quality of care and support that their children received at Stanton Vale. Many of the parents that I spoke to highlight the challenges they had experienced from the education system prior to their child joining Stanton Vale and the lack of faith and trust that had developed because of their previous experiences. However, they described in depth the transformational process of seeing their children start and then begin to thrive at Stanton Vale and how their trust was restored. One parent stated, 'From the very first moment it was like someone putting an arm around me.'

Throughout the assessment it was a joy to see the children and young people engaging in their learning in a variety of situations in lessons delivered with passion and purpose by the highly skilled staff. Older pupils had visited the local shop and were reflecting on learning based around the Chinese New Year. I saw a younger group of pupils, all with



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complex needs, thoroughly engrossed in a lesson on electricity. Elsewhere, I met a pupil with profound physical needs, smiling with pride having recently been appointed as a Reading Mentor for younger children. In all the classes I visited, and the interventions I observed, pupils were clearly enjoying every moment of their bespoke learning experience. I was struck by the wealth of adaptive resources and specialised equipment that were available for pupils and staff to access. However, I was mostly struck by the incredible passion, patience and joy from the staff as they supported their pupils to learn.

Governors and Trust representatives recognise the excellent provision that is in place at Stanton Vale. They provide extensive support and appropriate challenge to ensure that high expectations remain in place and staff continue to be ambitious for the community they serve.

The Trust has provided a myriad of support opportunities for leaders and staff at all levels, sharing the best practice between their network of schools to enable maximum benefit for all. From a strategic viewpoint, Trustees and Members provide added expertise and challenge, with many bringing to their roles a wealth of experience from distinguished careers in education as well as in other sectors.

Pupils love attending their school. They told me about the range of learning opportunities that they enjoy being involved in. Swimming was a particular favourite, alongside cooking and trampolining and 'bat and ball'. It was an absolute privilege to visit Stanton Vale School and observe and hear about the highly inclusive provision that is in place and the life changing opportunities it provides for the pupils and their families. It was a special experience that will stay with me for a long time. Without hesitation, I believe the Stanton Vale School is fully deserving of the Inclusion Quality Mark Award. I recommend that the school be awarded the Mark and be reassessed in three years.

Recommendation for COE: Yes

I am of the opinion that the school fully meets the standard required by the Inclusion Quality Mark's Inclusive School Award. I recommend that the school be awarded the Inclusive School Award and be reassessed in 3 years' time. I also recommend that the school should consider applying for Centre of Excellence status subject to the inclusion within its plans of the appropriate areas for development and the completion of the Centre of Excellence documentation. If the school chooses to pursue this status and it were to be awarded the school would be subject to annual review from this point forwards.

Assessor: Richard Kitching

Findings confirmed by Inclusion Quality Mark (UK) Ltd:

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Joe McCann MBA NPQH
Chief Executive Officer
Inclusion Quality Mark (UK) Ltd



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Element 1 - The Inclusion Values of the School

Inclusion is 'lived and breathed' at Stanton Vale school. The core values (Working Together, Respect, Aspiration, and Potential) guide the school community in everything they do. They are more than just words on a page; they are intrinsic to the day-to-day experience of the school community and were clear throughout the assessment.

Every member of the school community is valued, cared for and supported and this extends beyond the official times of the school day. Parents and Carers spoke at length about the extensive support they had received as families and the proactive and the timely way school staff identify help and access to wider family support services when needed.

Throughout my tour of Stanton Vale, the level of trust and care for pupils, all with varying levels of highly complex needs, was exceptional. It is a happy and welcoming place to spend time in and the smiles and laughter I heard during my visit were genuine. Staff are proud of the positive roles they play in the lives of the pupils they teach and care for. One staff member exclaimed, "We genuinely love coming to work and seeing the small steps in achievement that our pupils make every day."

Policies and practices reflect the inclusive values of the school. Pupils benefit from a highly individualised and bespoke curriculum that not only meets their needs but challenges them to fulfil their potential and thrive. A strategic approach is taken to ensure that the skills and expertise of appropriate internal and external professionals are maximised to result in the greatest impact being achieved. For example, during the assessment day I spoke to the drama therapist who described the various approaches that she deployed to allow a creative space for pupils, many of whom are non-verbal, to 'meet them in their world' and form a profound connection.

The school's physical spaces are accessible and accommodating with well-equipped classrooms, sensory rooms, and outdoor areas that cater for the diverse needs of the pupils. Classrooms are vibrant, engaging, and tailored to support different learning styles, fostering a sense of comfort and security for the pupils. It is a safe and secure environment that also enables creativity and exploration.

I spoke to a range of stakeholders during the assessment day and the predominant feeling that emerged was that this school community fostered a deep and meaningful sense of belonging for every member. As one governor stated, it was like a 'home from home.'

Next Steps:

- To further build on existing excellent practice to achieve the Autism Accreditation and introduce and embed the Curiosity Programme in the Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS).



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Element 2 - Leadership and Management and Accountability

The Senior Leadership Team have established and embedded a wonderful community at Stanton Vale School. They articulate and model the inclusive values and high expectations that all other staff follow. They are unwavering in their commitment to ensure the very best provision is in place for their pupils to thrive, and to effectively overcome any barriers or challenges that they may be presented with.

The staff I spoke to throughout the assessment day all articulated how much they highly valued the support they received from the senior leaders in the school. This support ranged from the extensive training opportunities they are provided with, to the care and support shown for their own wellbeing. One member of staff exclaimed, “your opinion is always heard.” This was echoed by others with statements such as “they [the Senior Leadership Team] are very responsive and they put training and support in straight away.”

Some of the staff I spoke to were neurodiverse themselves and they described the thoughtful adjustments that leaders put in place to ensure they thrived as staff members in the school community.

Safeguarding is led with the utmost rigour, and a strong safeguarding culture is in place at Stanton Vale. The Designated Safeguarding Lead and the Deputy Designated Safeguarding Leads ensure there is a clear and transparent process to report and record any potential safeguarding concerns. All staff receive up to date and continuous safeguarding training. Induction processes for new staff are thorough. Signing in procedures for visitors are comprehensive and ensure they are clear about concern reporting procedures and well as procedures in the event of an unplanned building evacuation (this was clearly explained to me on my arrival on the assessment day). A notable feature that was apparent on the assessment day was the extremely diligent attitude taken by all staff towards managing risk both within the setting itself and for when taking pupils on out of school visits. For example, two members of staff were seen on the assessment day reviewing and updating individual risk assessments for all pupils in relation to swimming lessons.

The excellent leadership of Stanton Vale is evident at both an operational level as well as a strategic level. The school is part of a forward-thinking Multi-Academy Trust that prides itself on its excellent provision and high aspirations for the pupils that attend the various special schools that it has responsibility for. The Trust offers excellent cross-school training opportunities for all staff and facilitates excellent support network groups for leaders at all levels. They take the wellbeing of their staff seriously and are proactive in ensuring that reasonable adjustments are in place for neurodiverse staff or staff with other additional needs across the wider Trust. This approach is encapsulated at Stanton Vale. The Governor representative that I spoke to during the assessment day demonstrated an excellent understanding of the many strengths of the school as well as the areas that they are developing further. She was passionate in her determination to ensure that staff continue to strive for excellence for all pupils and clearly demonstrated how she offered support as well as appropriate challenge for school leaders.



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Next Steps:

Building on the excellent leadership that is already in place, the following are some of the areas that the school has identified that it wishes to improve further:

- To continue to refine inclusive teaching strategies and differentiated learning approaches.
- Expand accessibility resources and assistive technologies for pupils with complex needs.
- Develop pupil voice initiatives to ensure students actively contribute to school decisions.



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Element 3 - Curriculum – Structure, Pupil Engagement and Adaption

At Stanton Vale staff have designed a thoughtful and engaging curriculum that enables pupils to flourish both academically as well as socially and emotionally. The school's inclusive values of 'Working Together, Respect, Aspiration and Potential' are woven skillfully into the curriculum design and are prevalent across all the Pathways.

The Pathways curriculum structure (Discover, Support, Explore, Nurture and Aspire), allows staff to tailor the curriculum to meet the learning needs of the pupils that attend the school. The Pathways approach is deliberately fluid in its design ensuring that pupils are not constrained by rigid parameters on their pathway and staff can adapt teaching and learning strategies as appropriate.

During the assessment day, a notable feature of the curriculum that leaders and staff at all levels highlighted was that the curriculum aimed to ensure that pupils were prepared as well as possible for life outside of the security of the school boundary. This may mean preparing for time at home in some cases (where parents might not have access to the specialist equipment and resources available in school) or it could mean preparing for being able to foster a sense of independence in the outside world. This was notable on the assessment visit when I heard about how a class of older pupils had visited a shop during the week and, alongside staff members, attended a pub for a meal a few weeks previously. Elsewhere in the setting, a purpose made 'flat' was situated in the school grounds with its own kitchen. It was explained to me how everyday life skills such as boiling a kettle and making a cup of tea were never taken for granted in school and staff did everything they could to help develop those skills for the pupils, especially as they prepared for their transition to their next stage in life.

In a different context, I heard about the MOVE (Mobility Opportunities Via Education) programme that is a key part of the curriculum provision for the pupils with physical disabilities that attend. A member of staff described the aims and impact of this programme to me in detail, and I heard about how for some children being able to move independently over a small distance would have a profound effect on their ability to access life opportunities and necessities.

At the heart of the Stanton Vale curriculum are hands-on, multi-sensory activities that spark curiosity and ignite a love for learning. Whether it's exploring the farm, playing with an orchestra, or embarking on Duke of Edinburgh adventures, the pupils at Stanton Vale engage in meaningful, real-world experiences that deepen their understanding and foster a sense of wonder. During the assessment the pupils were keen to communicate to me the curriculum experiences that they enjoyed the most; this included cooking pizzas, playing 'bat and ball', swimming and trampolining.

Next Steps:

- To continue to build on existing excellent practice including refining progression maps for all five learning routes as each cohort develops annually, embedding responsive planning and to strengthen Preparation for Adulthood threads.



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Element 4 - Teaching and Learning – Learning Environment, Planning Resources, Pedagogy

The learning environment at Stanton Vale School is highly inclusive and adapted to suit the vast range of complex needs of the pupils that the school caters for. In the lessons, teachers make excellent use of the resources that are available to them and skilfully deliver the learning content to the pupils within the class. They are adeptly supported by highly able teaching assistants.

All staff benefit from a comprehensive training offer. Staff commented on how they felt extremely supported by the leaders in the school to ensure they have the knowledge and skills they need in order to provide the pupils with the best learning experience. Teachers operate within a carefully planned curriculum design. However, they are trusted as professionals, and they feel confident at being able to adapt their learning and 'try different approaches out' to maximise the learning opportunities for their pupils.

With a large proportion of the pupils that attend the school being autistic, the environment and curriculum delivery is adapted appropriately to ensure it follows the best guidance in line with autism teaching recommendations. Corridors and classrooms are uncluttered and neutral in their colour tone in order to minimize cognitive overload for neurodiverse pupils. Additionally, corridors are wide and spacious to allow for ease of accessibility for pupils with physical disabilities who require wheelchairs or mobility aids.

Staff make excellent use of the technology available to them to enable pupils to fulfil their curriculum potential. During the visit I met a pupil with physical disabilities who had recently been appointed as a 'reading mentor' in the school; he was using assisted technology to help him read. It was a joy to see the smile on his face as well as the staff member that was supporting him as I heard about his reading progress.

The learning environment at Stanton Vale is intentionally designed to foster a sense of safety, belonging and respect. Individuality is celebrated and differences are embraced as staff encourage collaboration, teamwork and the development of self-confidence and independence. Challenges are viewed as opportunities and all achievements, no matter how small, are recognised and celebrated.

Next Steps:

- To prioritise targeted support for oracy across all subjects, recognising the foundational role of language in developing reading and writing skills.



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Element 5 - Assessment

At Stanton Vale School, staff are deeply committed to ensuring that every pupil receives a tailored learning experience that meets their unique needs and supports their progress. Robust assessment processes and personalised interventions are at the heart of the inclusive approach, empowering the pupils to thrive and reach their full potential.

Each pupil at Stanton Vale School follows a carefully designed curriculum, determined by their individual learning needs and abilities. Through comprehensive baseline assessments and ongoing monitoring, staff use prior attainment data to identify specific gaps in learning and plan targeted learning opportunities to address them. Individualised Learning Plans (ILPs) for pupils are the cornerstone of this process, outlining each pupil's unique learning goals, support strategies and progress milestones. These plans are reviewed and updated termly in collaboration with pupils, families and a multidisciplinary team of educators and therapists.

Staff have embedded a robust and systematic approach to tracking pupil progress, ensuring every learner's development is closely monitored and effectively supported. Assessment tracking methodology centres around the use of Earwig, an advanced tracking system designed to capture very small steps of progress, enabling precise measurement of individual pupil achievements. Earwig allows staff to record nuanced progress data, reflecting the unique learning journeys of the pupils, many of whom require highly personalised educational approaches. This granular tracking ensures no achievement is overlooked, providing a comprehensive picture of each pupil's development over time.

Parents and Carers are fully involved and informed about the assessment of their children through regular in-person meetings as well as regular online updates through the Earwig platform. As a result, parents and carers benefit from seeing 'live updates' of the progress their children are making and they work in collaboration with staff to discuss and identify next steps to ensure there is a holistic approach to assessment. Staff maintain detailed developmental records of each pupil's progress, and these are shared regularly with parents and carers. Achievements are celebrated at every opportunity.

During the assessment it was apparent that relationships between staff and pupils were excellent and this was exemplified in many forms including the live interaction within the lessons I saw. Staff skilfully explained concepts, clarified misconceptions and questioned pupils to further challenge learning where they were able to. This was apparent during whole class input (such as the lesson on electricity that I saw) as well as in the many one to one interactions that I saw throughout the day. The depth of understanding that the staff have for their pupils is exceptional and this extends to their understanding and relationships with the pupil's families and external professionals that also work with the pupils. This collaborative team approach ensures that both summative and formative assessment play a powerful and impactful role in achieving progress for each individual pupil both academically as well as socially and emotionally.



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Next Steps:

- To further enhance pupil ownership of learning by developing accessible self-assessment tools across all Pathways and Avenues (using visual and symbol-supported methods).
- To further develop staff expertise by using peer observation to improve consistency in identifying misconceptions.



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Element 6 - Behaviour, Attitudes to Learning and Personal Development

During the assessment day it was clear to see that Stanton Vale School is a calm, nurturing and supportive environment where difference and diversity are celebrated within a highly inclusive ethos. Pupils were respectful of each other as well as staff and they were joyfully engaging in their learning.

Utilising the key drivers of Communication, Independence and Development, staff work extremely hard to provide a highly personalised and enriching educational experience that develops pupils' character and guides them to make positive choices that will impact their future journey into adulthood. Challenges are viewed as opportunities and collaboration and teamwork are encouraged, nurturing a strong sense of community and belonging.

As part of the assessment, I spoke with the Behaviour Lead who articulated clearly the underpinning rationale around behaviour management and expectations in the school and how robust systems and strategies were in place to support pupils with complex needs. Staff are united in their belief that pupil behaviour, including when this presents as challenging at times, is a form of communication and they persevere to ensure the right support and strategies are in place address the needs that are being communicated. Leaders clearly stated that they always aim to "work *with* our pupils." All staff are trained in the Team Teach approach and receive regular updated training and guidance on how to support pupil behaviour. Maintaining a positive stance and outlook and celebrating achievements is key to the success at Stanton Vale.

Throughout the school, 'Zones of Regulation' prompts and resources are displayed in the learning environment, and these serve as a valuable aid to help support pupils to regulate and manage emotions. During the assessment day I observed an intervention taking place in a bespoke sensory room where a pupil was being skilfully supported by a member of staff to regulate using the equipment that was available.

There is a comprehensive Relationships Health Education (RHE) programme and Personal Social and Health Education (PSHE) in place that is integrated into the curriculum provision at Stanton Vale. This has a highly positive impact in helping pupils to prepare for later life and the approach is supported through an honest and transparent collaborative partnership with parents and carers.

Next Steps:

- To enhance the work experience programme by establishing strategic partnerships with local businesses and community organisations.



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Element 7 - Parents, Carers and Guardians

I spoke to a large group of Parents and Carers of pupils of Stanton Vale during the assessment day and they were all unanimous in their praise for the school and the profoundly positive impact it had had on the lives of their children. Many of the parents I spoke to described it as a 'life changing experience for the better' and they know that their child or children are in 'the right place for them'.

Several of the parents I spoke to commented on the initial 'fight' they had been in to get the right support for their children in other settings or within the wider educational system. There had been a general feeling of distrust in the education system and a feeling of a lack of support from some other settings that their children had previously attended in relation to meeting their needs. However, almost immediately after their children started at Stanton Vale, their faith and trust had been restored as a result of the phenomenal efforts of the staff that work at the school.

One parent described it as 'it was like they put an arm around you and welcomed you in.' Another parent said she knew that Stanton Vale was the right place for her child from the initial visit when she saw 'the happiness of the pupils that attended there and also the happiness of the staff that were working with them and supporting them'.

Parents and Carers were overwhelmingly positive about the incredible communication they received from school staff. There was always communication at the start and end of the day and any request or query they had was acted on promptly with no unnecessary and unnerving delay. They really valued the communication they received on the online web platform Class Dojo, particularly the vast range of photos that were shared of their children learning. For those pupils that were predominantly non-verbal, this was particularly powerful as it gave an insight into the school day that parents would otherwise struggle to hear about from their own children.

Parents and Carers were also extremely positive about the wider support that the school staff offered to them as families. This included helping to 'signpost' them to appropriate family support services and helping them with referral processes. 'They're more than just a school', stated a parent in this respect.

Staff organise regular "Coffee mornings" that bring families together in a relaxed and welcoming environment. These events not only allow for informal conversations and the sharing of experiences but also serve as a platform for parents and carers to provide valuable feedback and input to the school leadership team. This is in addition to regular face-to-face meetings and termly progress meetings where parents are actively invited to work in collaboration with the school to discuss progress and agree next steps for their children.

Next Steps:

- To further develop the informal Parent and Carer coffee mornings for the parents and carers of pupils that are in the 'Discover' provision pathway. This would give further opportunity for parents and carers to socialise, share ideas and build a network within the Stanton Vale family.



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Element 8 - Links with Local, Wider and Global Community

Stanton Vale School actively identifies and collaborates with diverse community partners including local cultural organisations, sports clubs, health services and specialist educational providers. These partnerships enrich the broad Personal Development offer, ensuring pupils access a wide variety of experiences tailored to their individual needs and interests. During the assessment day it was lovely to hear the pupils communicating their enjoyment of these experiences to me. For example, I heard about cricket sessions delivered by Derbyshire Cricket Club. One pupil happily stated “I like bat and ball” when reflecting on this.

Extra-curricular visits and activities are rich and varied. Some highlights include visits to venues such as the Sea Life Centre and Matlock Farm Park which enrich pupils’ understanding of the natural world and support cross-curricular learning in science and environmental studies. Music is a big part of the school and staff work in close partnership with external providers to enable pupils to have access to fantastic and rewarding musical experiences including performing with the Halle Orchestra and participating in the Open Orchestra. The school also works in strategic partnership with the Derbyshire Music Hub which adds a further dimension to the musical provision that the school can provide.

The school makes excellent use of various partnerships and opportunities within the local community, particularly in relation to effectively developing life skills. For example, pupils will regularly go out on walks in the local area. These walks support regulation, road safety awareness and an understanding of the local environment. They are integral to the school’s curriculum, promoting independence and confidence in navigating the community safely. Stanton Vale School maintains strong, active collaborations with all relevant local colleges through the annual ‘My Futures Event’. This event is designed to broaden pupils’ horizons by providing direct access to further education options, enabling informed decision making about their next steps post-16. Through this partnership, pupils gain personalised guidance and insight into a range of courses and vocational pathways, supporting inclusive transitions and aspirations.

The school also works in active collaboration with the Esteem Multi-Academy Trust (MAT) EPIC (Esteem Professional Institute of Collaboration) Hub. Through the EPIC Hub, Stanton Vale School engages in Continuous Professional Development (CPD) and support networks specifically tailored for SEND schools and Alternative Provisions (AP) settings. This partnership enables staff to share best practises, collaboratively develop inclusive strategies, and access specialist expertise, ensuring that inclusive provision is both innovative and evidence based.

Next Steps:

- To strengthen authentic global community engagement beyond classroom-based learning including creating structured partnerships with international schools, global charities or cultural exchange.
- As part of the discussions on the assessment day, I also asked the school leaders to consider how they can further develop partnerships with local mainstream schools to share the excellent practice and showcase the wonderful inclusive, collaborative ethos they have in place at Stanton Vale School.