Assessor's Evaluation for the IQM CoE Award

School Name	Educate U West Sussex Ltd Revenue Chambers 58C Chapel Road Worthing BN11 1BG
Head/Principal	Ms Sarah Paoletti
IQM Lead	Ms Georgina Spoor
Date of Review	15th June 2026
Assessor	Ms Kat Booker

IQM Cluster Programme

Cluster Group	IDEA
Ambassador	Mr Ian Potter
Next Meeting	22/11/26 Exeter
Meeting Focus	TBC

Cluster Attendance

Term	Date	Attendance
Autumn 2025	1st December 2025	No
Spring 2026	11th February 2026	Yes
Summer 2026	9th June 2026	No

The Impact of the Cluster Group (with details of the impact of last three meetings)

Educate U continues to engage positively with the IQM Cluster Programme and, during this review period, hosted a South Cluster meeting. This provided colleagues from a range of settings with the opportunity to learn more about the school's therapeutic, trauma-informed approach, including the work of Therapy House, multidisciplinary working, personalised pathways, and the integration of therapeutic thinking throughout the school day. Leaders valued the opportunity to exchange ideas, discuss inclusive practice, and showcase aspects of the school's work since achieving Centre of Excellence status.

Discussion during the review explored the school's wider involvement in the Cluster Programme. Whilst leaders remain committed to participation, the geographical spread of the current cluster presents practical challenges. The school was surprised to be grouped with settings across such a large area, including Exeter and the Isle of Wight, particularly given the number of IQM schools located much closer to Educate U. It was agreed that there may be value in reviewing cluster arrangements as the network continues to grow, creating greater opportunities for collaboration between geographically closer schools.

The discussion also highlighted the distinctive contribution Educate U can make as a specialist setting. Whilst many cluster discussions naturally focus on challenges facing mainstream schools, Educate U has developed considerable expertise in areas such as therapeutic integration, transition support, multidisciplinary working, and parental engagement, all of which could provide valuable learning for other schools.

Rather than focusing solely on attendance, discussions centred on how the school could maximise both its contribution to and benefit from cluster involvement. Possibilities included greater use of virtual participation, themed presentations or showcases, and strengthening links with schools whose contexts are more closely aligned with Educate U's own. Particular interest was shown in widening participation beyond senior leaders, enabling SEN tutors and other specialist staff to attend events as part of their professional development. Leaders felt this would increase the school's engagement with the network whilst further developing expertise and leadership capacity across the staff team.

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Evidence

- School tour and class visits
- School Council minutes
- Website
- Curriculum audit: ASC-friendly environment & practice
- Parental Inclusion Group outline

Meetings held with:

- Leadership Team and SENCO
- Therapy House Team
- Friday Club organizers
- Mental Health Lead
- Parents and carers
- Teachers and TAs
- SALT assistant
- Music/digital media teacher

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Evaluation of Targets for the last 12 Months

Target 1: Amplify voice, experience, and outcomes of high-needs pupils (focus on autistic and SEMH learners)

Evidence of this target was visible in several aspects of school life, from the work of the Student Council to the increasingly personalised sensory provision observed during the tour, which leaders have sought to create more structured opportunities for autistic and SEMH learners to influence both their individual experiences and wider aspects of school life. The introduction of the Student Council has provided a formal mechanism for gathering and acting on views. Examples shared during the review included changes to hot meal provision following pupil requests for greater choice and involvement in decision-making, demonstrating that learners are increasingly able to see tangible outcomes arising from their contributions. Rather than being viewed as a stand-alone initiative, pupil voice appears to be becoming an increasingly routine part of school improvement and decision-making.

Further evidence of this was seen through the school's use of termly sensory audits. Leaders described how feedback gathered from pupils is used to review classroom environments, regulation spaces, and sensory provision, helping to ensure that support remains responsive to changing needs. During the school tour, a range of personalised sensory supports were observed, including individual sensory boxes informed by assessment information and tailored to specific needs. Staff described how provision is regularly reviewed and adapted in response to pupil experiences, creating opportunities for children and young people to influence the approaches intended to support their learning and regulation.

Alongside these developments, leaders have continued to strengthen opportunities for learners to access pathways aligned to their individual interests and aspirations. Discussions highlighted the successful recruitment of specialist tutors in subjects including History, Business Studies, and Spanish, extending curriculum opportunities beyond those typically available within a small specialist setting. Leaders also reflected on future possibilities, including the potential development of a Science pathway supported by dedicated facilities. These developments demonstrate an increasing willingness to adapt provision in response to the interests, ambitions and aspirations identified by learners themselves.

Next Step:

Continue to strengthen opportunities for children and young people to influence wider aspects of school development, ensuring that pupil voice informs not only individual provision but also future planning, curriculum development, and enrichment opportunities. Consider how the outcomes of pupil feedback can be communicated more explicitly so that learners can clearly see the impact of their contributions.

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Target 2: Improve parental engagement through targeted family partnership work

Discussions with leaders highlighted the importance placed on ensuring that parents and carers feel connected to both the school and one another. It was explained that, whilst Educate U has always benefited from close relationships with families, this target has created more structured opportunities for parents to come together, share experiences and access support. During conversations, leaders reflected on the value of creating spaces where parents can meet others facing similar challenges, building relationships that extend beyond individual interactions with staff. Particular reference was made to how these opportunities have strengthened families' sense of connection to the school community.

Evidence presented during the review demonstrated how this approach has been supported through a programme of workshops covering topics such as emotional regulation, positive communication, online safety, managing worries, healthy relationships and supporting children through periods of family change. Consideration has also been given to accessibility, with sessions offered both in person and through Teams to enable participation from families who may live further away or find attendance more difficult. Leaders described how attendance, engagement and referral information is used to identify families who may benefit from additional encouragement or alternative routes into support.

Conversations with staff provided further evidence of the increasingly joined-up approach being developed with families. One member of staff described how recommendations arising from speech and language assessments are translated into practical guidance for both home and school, enabling parents and staff to work towards shared outcomes using consistent approaches. Ongoing communication with families was described as a routine aspect of practice, with discussions repeatedly returning to the importance of ensuring that "everyone is on the same page". It was evident that information and expertise are routinely shared across home and school, helping to create greater consistency for children and young people.

Next Step:

Build on the success of current parent engagement opportunities by exploring ways to increase participation amongst families who remain less connected to school-based support. This may include further consultation with parents regarding preferred formats, timings and themes for future workshops and events.

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Target 3: Develop whole-school inclusive pedagogy and CPD programme

Throughout the review, there was consistent evidence that professional learning is becoming embedded across the organisation rather than existing as a series of standalone training events. Discussions with staff highlighted a structured programme of development delivered through INSET, staff meetings, Smartlog and role-specific training opportunities. One member of staff described a rigorous induction process involving therapeutic language, PACE, restraint training, and meetings with the therapy team, explaining that new staff are provided with dedicated time away from the classroom to develop their understanding of the school's approach before taking on full responsibilities. This was described as an important foundation for ensuring consistency across the provision.

The impact of this training was evident in the confidence with which staff discussed a wide range of needs and presentations. During conversations, staff referred to specialist training in areas such as PDA and Foetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder, reflecting on how this had helped them move beyond diagnostic labels and better understand what individual needs look like in practice. One member of staff commented that such training had been particularly valuable in helping staff understand how to respond when children present with multiple overlapping needs. Rather than relying on generic approaches, discussions suggested that staff are increasingly able to draw upon a wider range of strategies and perspectives when supporting learners.

Several staff identified Tuesday's Child as one of the most valuable aspects of their professional learning. Staff described how these sessions provide opportunities to develop a deeper understanding of children beyond their immediate role, ensuring that information about strengths, barriers and successful strategies is shared more widely across the organisation. During discussions, it became apparent that these sessions are contributing to a more consistent understanding of individual learners and strengthening the collective responsibility staff feel for all children and young people attending the school.

Perhaps the strongest evidence of impact came through the language used by staff throughout the day. Regardless of role, conversations repeatedly returned to understanding behaviour in context, recognising individual needs and adapting approaches accordingly. Staff spoke naturally about therapeutic thinking, child-centred practice, and the importance of relationships. One member of the therapeutic team reflected that training is provided continually and that the language underpinning the school's approach is now "embodied throughout the whole school". The consistency with which these themes emerged across different meetings suggested that professional learning is increasingly influencing both thinking and practice across the setting.

Next Step:

Continue to develop opportunities for staff to contribute to and lead professional learning, building upon existing strengths in reflective practice and external collaboration. This will help ensure that expertise continues to grow from within the organisation whilst supporting the school's wider influence as an IQM Centre of Excellence.

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Target 4: Strengthen inclusive leadership and governance

During the review period, leaders have demonstrated a clear commitment to strengthening inclusive leadership through increased external challenge, professional collaboration, and the development of strategic partnerships. Discussions highlighted the contribution of an inclusion-focused School Improvement Partner, who has provided support, challenge and professional reflection as the school continues its journey towards becoming an outstanding provision. Leaders described this feedback as being particularly valuable in helping them review current practice and consider future priorities. Rather than relying solely on internal evaluation processes, the school has actively sought external perspectives to inform strategic development and maintain a strong focus on inclusion.

A significant aspect of this work has centred on the development of partnerships beyond the school. During discussions, leaders described how the Futures Lead has established links with local colleges and community organisations to expand work experience opportunities and strengthen post-16 pathways for learners. It was explained that this work has included exploring the support available within a range of educational settings and comparing approaches to SEND provision to develop a clearer understanding of the opportunities available to pupils beyond Educate U. Leaders were able to provide several examples of how these partnerships are influencing future planning and strengthening leaders' knowledge of local post-16 and employment-related pathways.

The review also highlighted the school's growing engagement in professional dialogue beyond its own setting. Leaders reflected positively on partnership work with LVS and other specialist provisions, describing opportunities to share practice, benchmark approaches and consider how provision compares with that offered in other settings supporting children and young people with SEND. The school's role in hosting an IQM Cluster meeting further strengthened this work. Discussions during the event included consideration of inclusion within mainstream and specialist settings, the potential implications of national SEND developments and opportunities for schools to showcase approaches that have proved successful within their own contexts. Leaders spoke positively about the value of these discussions in promoting professional reflection, sharing ideas, and maintaining awareness of emerging developments and effective practice across the wider SEND landscape.

Next Step:

Continue to strengthen governance arrangements so that external challenge, partnership working, and strategic decision-making are translated into clearly evidenced governance-level actions and measurable improvement outcomes. As leadership networks continue to expand, consideration should be given to how governance processes can more explicitly evaluate the impact of these developments on provision, opportunities and outcomes for children and young people. The school may also wish to explore opportunities for closer collaboration with specialist settings whose context and cohort are closely aligned to its own, such as Farney Close School, to deepen professional dialogue, benchmark specialist practice and further strengthen leadership capacity across both organisations.

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Agreed Targets for the next 12 Months

Target 1: To further strengthen and systematically plan personal development opportunities for all children and young people, ensuring equitable access and evidencing their impact on participation, independence, aspirations, and future readiness.

Comments

The school identified personal development as a key priority for the next phase of its improvement journey. Throughout the review, there was extensive evidence of children and young people accessing a broad range of opportunities tailored to their interests, strengths, and individual needs. Examples included Forest School, equine therapy, community-based learning, work-related experiences, Blaze Awards, external clubs and a range of therapeutic and enrichment opportunities. Discussions with staff, parents and leaders suggested that these experiences are often instrumental in helping children and young people develop confidence, independence, self-belief, and a stronger sense of belonging.

During the feedback discussion, it was agreed that the target could be strengthened further by moving beyond a focus on the provision of opportunities alone and placing greater emphasis on the difference these opportunities make to children and young people over time. As a result, the revised wording places a stronger emphasis on evaluating impact, particularly in relation to participation, independence, aspirations, and preparation for adulthood. This refinement reflects the school's growing ambition to demonstrate not only that opportunities are available, but also how they contribute to longer-term outcomes for children and young people.

Target 2: Demonstrate how external challenge, strategic partnerships and professional collaboration have influenced leadership decisions, strengthened provision, and expanded opportunities for children and young people.

Comments

A notable strength of Educate U is the willingness of leaders to seek out opportunities for professional challenge, collaboration, and reflection. This was evident throughout the review, both in discussions about the contribution of the School Improvement Partner and in conversations regarding partnerships with colleges, community organisations, and other specialist settings. Leaders were able to describe examples of how these relationships have broadened thinking, provided additional challenge, and created opportunities to compare approaches with other organisations.

The school's proposed target focuses appropriately on strengthening inclusive leadership and governance through strategic quality assurance. During the feedback meeting, the discussion centred on how the success of this work might be evidenced over time. Whilst there was clear evidence of engagement with external partners and professional networks, it was agreed that the target could be strengthened by placing greater emphasis on the outcomes arising from these relationships. Consideration was therefore given to how future evaluation might demonstrate the influence that external

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challenge, collaboration, and partnership working have on leadership decisions, school development, and opportunities available to children and young people.

The revised wording reflects this shift in emphasis. Rather than focusing solely on the mechanisms used to strengthen leadership, it encourages the school to evidence the difference these activities make to provision, strategic decision-making, and ongoing school improvement.

Target 3: Further develop and evaluate the impact of the school's therapeutic approach on attendance, engagement, emotional regulation, and readiness to learn.

Comments

The school's proposed target focused on improving attendance. Whilst this remains an important priority, discussions throughout the review suggested that attendance is increasingly viewed as one part of a wider picture rather than a standalone measure of success. Staff spoke consistently about the importance of relationships, emotional safety, regulation, and engagement in creating the conditions that allow children and young people to attend successfully and access learning.

One of the most interesting discussions during the visit centred on the school's developing use of Motional data. The therapeutic team described how this information is helping them build a richer understanding of children's experiences and identify patterns that may otherwise go unnoticed. This prompted useful discussion about the potential to consider attendance alongside other indicators, such as emotional wellbeing, engagement, and readiness to learn, in order to better understand both need and progress.

The revised target emerged from this conversation. Rather than focusing solely on attendance figures, it broadens the lens to consider the contribution that the school's therapeutic approach makes to attendance, engagement, emotional regulation, and readiness to learn. This feels more closely aligned to the school's ethos and provides a stronger opportunity to demonstrate the impact of its therapeutic model over time.

Target 4: Develop and embed a whole-school environmental standards framework to ensure greater consistency, predictability, and accessibility across all learning environments for autistic children and young people.

The school's proposed target reflects a continued commitment to creating environments that meet the needs of autistic children and young people. During the tour, a range of thoughtful adaptations were observed, including sensory supports, visual structures, and personalised regulation resources. It was evident that staff place significant importance on reducing barriers to learning and responding to individual needs.

As the school continues to grow and develop, discussion turned to the importance of ensuring that these strengths are underpinned by a clear and consistent environmental offer. Whilst many effective approaches were evident, consideration was given to how a more explicit framework might support greater consistency across learning spaces

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whilst retaining sufficient flexibility to meet the needs of different cohorts and individuals. Such an approach could help ensure that expectations regarding sensory support, communication aids, environmental organisation, and regulation spaces are clearly defined and understood across the organisation.

The revised target reflects this shift in emphasis. Rather than focusing solely on individual classroom adaptations, it encourages the development of a whole-school environmental standards framework that promotes consistency, predictability, and accessibility across all learning environments. This will provide a stronger basis for quality assurance, support transitions between spaces and help ensure that the school's autism-informed practice continues to develop coherently and sustainably as the provision evolves.

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Overview

Educate U is an independent specialist provision serving children and young people from across West Sussex and the surrounding area. Many learners travel considerable distances each day to attend, arriving by taxi from a wide range of communities and educational backgrounds. The school currently operates across several sites in the centre of Worthing and has developed a distinctive model that makes effective use of its location. The school's location enables local shops, leisure facilities, the library, museum, and other community resources to become natural extensions of the curriculum, helping children and young people develop confidence, independence, and real-world skills in authentic contexts. As the school continues to expand, there remains a strong commitment to ensuring that provision retains the highly personalised and relational approach that has become synonymous with the school.

Throughout the review, I was struck by the consistency of the messages being shared by leaders, therapists, staff, and parents. Although conversations ranged from curriculum design and Forest School to therapeutic support, family engagement and preparation for adulthood, the same themes surfaced repeatedly. Conversations repeatedly returned to belonging and relationships. Staff, therapists, leaders and parents all spoke about helping children feel safe, understood, and valued. Most importantly, they spoke about creating the conditions in which children and young people can begin to believe in themselves again.

"We have kids that have never had a friend, and they suddenly have a friend, and they know what friendship is, and what a healthy relationship is." - Therapy Team

Central to this approach is the Educate U Child Journey. Rather than focusing solely on presenting needs, the journey begins with understanding the child's story. Referral information, developmental history, parental voice, emotional data, observations, and child voice are used to build a picture of the individual before decisions are made about support. Staff spoke thoughtfully about the importance of a "good hello" and the reality that many children arrive having experienced disruption, anxiety, school avoidance, or a profound sense of not fitting within previous educational environments. Tuesday's Child discussions bring together therapeutic and educational staff to consider children holistically, whilst Motional data, observations and family feedback are increasingly being used to understand progress in a richer and more nuanced way. At every stage of the visit, understanding lived experience appeared to come before decision-making about provision.

The work of Therapy House provides perhaps the clearest example of how this philosophy translates into practice. What impressed most was not the existence of a multidisciplinary team, but the extent to which therapeutic thinking has become embedded across the wider organisation. Therapy does not sit alongside education; rather, it helps to shape it. One member of the therapeutic team described this approach as being "embodied throughout the whole school", a phrase that felt particularly apt during the review. Therapists work alongside therapeutic assistants who ensure support remains responsive between specialist visits, whilst recommendations are translated into classroom strategies, family support, and individual interventions. A memorable example involved an occupational therapy programme focused initially on developing hair brushing skills.

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Following discussion with the family, this was extended to include support with putting hair up independently, demonstrating the school's commitment to linking therapeutic targets to meaningful everyday outcomes.

"Communication at Educate U is brilliant…It doesn't feel like three separate sites…whether you're on in the same building or not, you are constantly able to communicate." Therapy Team

Parents provided some of the strongest evidence of how this approach works in practice. One parent described how concerns raised during the morning drop-off regarding their daughter's worries about being adopted were shared with staff and acted upon immediately, resulting in conversations with the child and adaptations to future PSHE learning. Another spoke about the collaborative support surrounding preparations for a Brownie camp, with school staff, therapists, Brownie leaders, and family members working together to help the child manage anxieties and build confidence. A recurring theme within the parent discussion was the feeling of being part of a team. One commented that it felt as though they had a team around their child that "covers all the bases", whilst another reflected that they no longer felt as though they were standing on the outside looking in. Several parents spoke movingly about the support they themselves had received, highlighting the school's recognition that helping children often begins with supporting the adults around them.

The impact of this approach was visible throughout the provision. Whilst many schools speak about personalisation, at Educate U, it appeared to influence everything from curriculum design and therapeutic support to classroom organisation and future planning. During the tour, classrooms reflected the children who learned within them. Individual display boards celebrated achievements, interests, and important moments in children's lives. In one room, a student's workspace had evolved into what could only be described as their own small universe, complete with personal photographs, awards and carefully chosen resources. These spaces felt owned by the young people who used them and contributed to the strong sense of identity and belonging evident throughout the school.

The same level of personalisation could be seen within learning itself. Staff spoke confidently about adapting pathways in response to need, interest, and aspiration. In one classroom, a discussion that had begun around the World Cup had evolved into an exploration of runway statistics at Gatwick, Heathrow, and airports around the world because staff had recognised and built upon a student's emerging fascination. Elsewhere, students accessed swimming, equine therapy, Forest School, specialist tuition, and accreditation pathways designed to meet their individual strengths and future aspirations. Notably, these opportunities were not presented as rewards or add-ons. Rather, they formed part of a carefully considered approach to engagement, confidence building, and preparation for adulthood.

Forest School exemplified this philosophy particularly well. One memorable discussion centred on a group of older students working together to construct a new wooden shed. Staff described how a quieter student, who would previously have remained on the periphery of activities, became increasingly involved, carrying materials, asking questions, and beginning to explore future interests linked to outdoor work and craft. It

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was a powerful example of how the school creates opportunities for children to develop confidence, discover interests and experience a genuine sense of belonging.

Perhaps the most powerful evidence of the school's impact came through the stories shared by parents, staff, and children themselves. Parents described children who now return home calm and regulated rather than exhausted by the effort of simply getting through the school day. They spoke about adults who follow through on promises, take worries seriously and help children feel understood. The Brownie camp example illustrated the school's ability to help children access experiences that might previously have felt out of reach. Similar themes emerged in discussions about transitions, preparation for adulthood and the expanding futures provision. Time and again, conversations returned to children beginning to believe in themselves again, often after periods of significant challenge, anxiety, or disconnection from education.

Despite the considerable strengths evident throughout the provision, leaders showed a refreshing willingness to question, refine and further strengthen their practice. Discussions around Motional data, attendance, engagement, and academic progress demonstrated a determination to understand not only what works, but why. Expansion plans are matched by a clear commitment to retaining the highly personalised approach that defines the provision, whilst leaders recognise the value of collaboration, external challenge, and continued learning.

What stays with you after visiting Educate U is the way in which everything connects. The Child Journey, Therapy House, Tuesday's Child, family support, personalised pathways, and futures provision are not experienced as separate projects competing for attention. Rather, they work together to create a provision in which children and young people are known well, supported thoughtfully, and encouraged to develop confidence in themselves and their futures. Educate U continues to exemplify the values and aspirations associated with an IQM Centre of Excellence and is well placed to make an increasingly valuable contribution to wider inclusive practice in the years ahead.

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 Centre of Excellence. I therefore recommend that the school retains its Centre of Excellence 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 Centre of Excellence status.

Assessor: Ms Kat Booker
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

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