



Report on IQM Inclusive School Award



School Name: Gothic Mede Academy

School Address: High Street
Arlesey
Bedfordshire
SG15 6SL

Head/Principal: Thomas Clarke

IQM Lead: Alison Sugden

Assessment Date (s): 1st July 2021

Assessor: Kasia Fejcher-Akhtar

Sources of Evidence during IQM Review Day:

- Visit to school.
- Observation on arrival before entering the school.
- Paperwork available during meeting.
- Tour of school.
- Displays around the school.
- School's website.

Meetings Held with:

- Principal.
- IQM Lead.
- Chair of Governors.
- 2 Teachers.
- 2 Teaching Assistants and Administration Staff.
- 2 SLT (including Maths Lead).
- 3 Parents (1 virtually).
- 7 Pupils ranging from Reception to Year 4.
- Casual brief conversations with other members of staff during the assessment day.



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Overall Evaluation

Gothic Mede Academy is part of the Bedfordshire Schools Trust (BEST), which consists of two nurseries and nine schools, cumulatively providing all through 0-19 education for children in local communities. Gothic Mede Academy is a larger than average lower school, with 12 classes of children aged 3-9, caring for 331 pupils at the time of assessment. The school is located at the centre of an ancient parish of Arlesey in Central Bedfordshire. Many children who attend Gothic Mede Academy, live in the village, and walk to school. Arlesey has a diverse population, which includes socially and economically deprived families and two traveller sites.

The school is a three-form gender mixed junior phase provision serving predominantly white local community, with a small number of pupils from ethnic groups. Gothic Mede Academy building is all on one level so is entirely accessible (this is especially important as there is one pupil in a wheelchair,) and there are outside grounds including a playground with several quads and a large field in the vicinity. Although the field does not belong to the school, it is available and used regularly for sport and outdoor learning. All classes are smaller than average; they all have direct access to outside areas, which are utilised as a learning space when appropriate. Classrooms are tidy and well organised, helping to promote a calm atmosphere, with interactive and informative displays evidencing the learning and reflecting the ethos of the school. Pride is this year's value for the school, and it was visible and documented in each classroom. The pupils were engaged in work that helped them to understand the meaning of this abstract concept. Thus, the school provides plenty of opportunities through its meaningful curriculum and activities to develop in children an understanding and appreciation of the values they stand for and are guided by.

Gothic Mede Academy has a very well equipped, well-designed wet room and a recently added library; it has an ICT suite and a music room. In two years' time, the school is hoping to relocate to newly built premises that would provide, in the words of the Leaders, further opportunities for creating an inclusive learning environment that will serve the school's population's needs and reflect its values.

Gothic Mede Academy is committed to deliver on its ethos and values which are ingrained into the fabric of the school; inclusion permeates every aspect of this vibrant learning community. This commitment was evident at the outset of the assessor's visit during an informal observation of parents and children arriving at school and continued through the rest of the day in professional meetings and conversations. Visitors are warmly welcomed by all the staff and children and there is a happy and productive feel to the school with an atmosphere of energy and positivity.

The children are enthusiastic and enjoy their school; they value and praise their teachers and adults who work with them. In the meeting with the IQM Assessor, the children stated that: "I had my say", it is "a learning school" and "We have fun and interesting learning takes place." The pupils spoke confidently about their work and opportunities to extend learning beyond structured lessons. They also were keen to engage in discussion about the ways they learn and how the school celebrates them as individuals. This is clearly a place for children to develop their personality, learn about how to conduct themselves in a range of situations knowing that they are safe and cared for by all professionals. This awareness of feeling safe



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and accepting the necessary boundaries when learning and playing came across strongly in observations during the assessment day.

The school Leadership and staff form a strong team, united in their desire to create a happy and safe place for children to thrive; they know about the area they serve and believe that every child in the school should have opportunities to learn, experience a rich curriculum and feel included. The school was graded “good” in its last Ofsted inspection (June 2017) and staff have worked hard to develop their practices under the Leadership of the Principal and his Senior Leadership Team. Together they all work tirelessly to continually drive the school forward and to overcome difficulties that the pandemic posed to all stakeholders. This was evident from the discussions with the Principal, SENCO with IQM Lead responsibility, two SLT and the Chair of Governors, and confirmed by subsequent conversations with members of staff. Further evidence was seen during the school tour where a newly developed area was pointed out to me, and the Leaders explained how the space was utilised to accommodate interventions and peripatetic music lessons without disruption to structured group lessons.

There are clear structures and procedures in place at the Gothic Mede Academy and the Principal is ably supported by the SENCO, who plays a pivotal role in ensuring that pupils with SEND and additional social, emotional, and other needs are provided for. Her knowledge and understanding of the needs of SEND and vulnerable pupils is exceptional, as is her relentless pursuit of inclusion funding to address emerging issues like a child being at risk of exclusion or having specific barriers to learning like a speech disorder.

The school is proactive in supporting families who struggle financially or have problems that disadvantage children when at home. For these reasons and others, a significant number of pupils were in school during the lockdowns and all teachers taught full time. Though the pandemic restrictions brought some difficulties, the school recognised that there were unexpected benefits for SEND pupils too. Having found themselves in smaller classes, those pupils gained in confidence. Quiet children opened up when accessing mental health parts of the curriculum. These experiences were noted and discussed, and effective strategies, methods and resources have been retained for the future. All SEND pupils within the provision are integrated with the rest of the pupils, which impacts positively on their wellbeing and teaches other pupils tolerance and acceptance of differences and individuality as described in the school’s ethos and values. This means that all pupils are catered for, they become confident and enjoy learning and being together.

There is a collaborative feel at the Gothic Mede Academy with everyone contributing to the vision and strategic planning for the smooth running of the school and to secure its successful future. The Leaders communicate clearly and openly with staff and care for wellbeing of all, including themselves. There are regular two weekly, or as often as necessary, check-ins for members of staff with their line managers and SLT are offered supervision too. This degree of support helped the team to overcome difficulties caused by the pandemic, at work and at home. Staff were extremely praiseworthy of the Leadership and appreciated the genuine support offered: “we could say when we felt unwell, and it was accepted without a judgement.” This caring attitude contributed to the high staff morale that was so obvious in how they interacted and related with each other and treated children and responded to visitors.



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The Principal and SLT have reflective skills that guide them in their Leadership, wanting the best outcomes for all: pupils and staff, whatever their individual needs and stage of development or professional destination.

It was a pleasure to meet with Leaders and witness their hard work and determination combined with a sense of purpose; they demonstrated resilience, resourcefulness and research informed knowledge about educational matters that sets them on the road to achieve further improvements and raise standards for all. Though working in a demanding and dynamic environment, they demonstrated a profound professional demeanour, with a touch of humour that staff and children related to very well and appreciated.

I am of the opinion that the school fully meets the standard required by the Inclusion Quality Mark's Inclusive School Award. There are only minor areas requiring development and the school is aware of these. I recommend that the school be awarded IQM's 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: Kasia Fejcher-Akhtar

Findings confirmed by Inclusion Quality Mark (UK) Ltd:

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



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Element 1 - The Inclusion Values of the School

Leaders of Gothic Mede Academy value all members of the school community and enable them to contribute to continued improvement in a fully inclusive environment. Their introductory statement on the school's website: "We are a values-based village school and see this as our foundation stone", echoes through relationships, work ethic, observed in and expressed by staff, and provision for children. The school values are displayed all over the building and referred to constantly so that they are fully understood, believed, and adhered to. They are "visible" in the staff and pupils conduct, attitude to work and felt in the school's calm, friendly and happy atmosphere where a visitor is greeted with many smiles and much kindness.

In the true spirit of school's ethos and values, SLT presents as a strong unit that support each other. They have a strategic view of the school but also look at day-to-day issues and respond to emerging needs and solve problems. They have a reputation of being approachable; the Principal's open-door policy is not just a slogan but reality. The SLT team have a very good overview of the school because they are spread over all Key Stages, with some teaching regularly and having own class to take care of. They are clear about their role as Leaders and how demanding it can become. When difficulties arise, Leaders treat themselves as they would advise any member of staff who works under their direction – they seek help. Two members of a Leadership Team actively sought help when they felt overwhelmed demonstrating that there is no stigma to seeking help when required. This endorses the school culture of support for staff wellbeing, to enable them to deliver positive teaching experiences for pupils in their care.

The Principal of Gothic Mede Academy has demonstrated well-honed people skills and sensitivity towards everyone who share issues with him, that mattered to them, but perhaps were not necessary noticed and seen as priority by others. This evidences excellent inclusion practice and results in staff feeling supported and valued for who they are. Staff are continually encouraged to develop their expertise and they buy into school ethos with one saying of the school values: "this is exactly how I feel". Staff have a collegiate approach to policy development and planning and have professional conversations on all that matters to the school to maintain high standards and create the best possible working environment for all.

The school's SENCO is highly knowledgeable about the emotional and educational needs of the whole school community; her passion for doing everything possible came across in many conversations as well as respect she earned from her colleagues and parents was clear. The SENCO's collaboration with the family worker and external providers to secure help for children are shining examples of good practice, exemplifying the school's ethos and values. The academy's SENCO oversees SEND and other pupils with extra needs and ensures that staff have the appropriate skills to address any issues their pupils may present with, with confidence and professional understanding that is based on extensive research outside of pedagogy, such as psychology and neuroscience.

The Leaders and staff of Gothic Mede Academy stated that the inclusion is a constant feature of school life and that they strive to ensure that all pupils reach their utmost potential to ensure equal access to optimal life chances. This is evident in their curriculum planning where



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the values are embedded in all areas and promoted through a cross curricular approach to teaching and learning.

Leaders are acutely aware of the importance of well-being of everyone in school. They recognise that there are differing needs that will be identified and addressed so that pupils can engage in learning in a safe and caring, inclusive environment, with staff who are collaboratively prepared for any challenge that may arise.

Next Steps:

- To consider writing an inclusion policy so that the inclusion agenda is articulated and familiar to all stakeholders and external agencies.
- To consider including the United Nations 17 Sustainable Development Global Goals into the curriculum and interventions programmes like e.g., forest school.
- To develop relationships with external educationalists through an IQM Cluster Group.



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Element 2 - Leadership and Management and Accountability

Leadership of Gothic Mede Academy have an ambitious and aspirational vision for the school; they strive for improvement of every aspect of the school with measured, professional confidence. They work collaboratively with staff and the Trust to optimise planning and assessment process and develop effective structure and systems for monitoring the quality of teaching and learning and behaviour. Leaders are uncompromising in their effort to secure the best outcome for all pupils and when redesigning curriculum, they made sure that it was meaningful, purposeful, and appropriate for their pupils.

There is a clear hierarchical structure of Leadership and Management of Inclusion Trustees which illustrates how staff with different roles and the Governing Body are engaged and accountable for developing, implementing, and supporting the inclusion agenda across the Trust and at the Gothic Mede Academy. This means that inclusion is at the centre of the Trust ethos and operation and consequently the schools that are part of BEST.

Leadership and Management maintain constant focus on the provision of high-quality education for all. This ambitious attitude is prevalent among staff who confirmed in conversations that they are able and prepared to carry out daily duties and still face challenges that inevitably happen, from time to time, in every school community. There is expectation of all staff to engage fully in CPD, and to emphasise the importance of professional development the school renamed its weekly staff meeting to CPD Sessions. This means that the school places training and professional development at the centre of staff activities and sends a message that professional development is infinite and unbounded in support of the delivery of inspired and inspiring teaching practice.

Staff of Gothic Mede Academy consider themselves fortunate to be given many opportunities for personal growth and development of individual interests. Without hesitation, they recited a long list of statutory and subject based training that has been available to them during the last 12 months and in previous years. One of them said: "if you have a particular interest, shadowing is offered to gain some experience before you commit yourself." By allowing staff to fulfil their potential, the school makes positive long- term investment in staff that in turn directly benefits pupils, who are as a result, taught by qualified and enthusiastic adults.

Gothic Mede Academy and the Trust identify emerging and potential issues that inform their annual School Improvement Plan, which is also influenced by their independent School Improvement Advisor, who visits the school each term. Both documents, the advisor's report and the SIP reflect on the inclusion and make appropriate recommendations. This monitoring cycle, where parts of inclusion are regularly reviewed by external agency, helps the school to stay focused on an inclusion agenda throughout each academic year.

The whole school's approach of "Pupil Premium First" championed by GMA, where the idea is to ensure that the needs of disadvantaged pupils come first when it comes to teacher time, is an example of the schools' unique inclusive practice. This way of thinking is not only in line with the inclusive practice, but it is a pragmatic and a clear demonstration of the school's ethos, woven into daily teaching and learning activities.



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Thus, Leadership and staff are united in delivering on their values and inclusion statements and policies. There is evidence of collegiate approach to work across the school and a clear understanding of each person accountability. A recent decision to increase focus on staff wellbeing with regular, weekly checks by line managers and easy access to SLT, inevitably helps to develop positive professional relationships and clarity of expectations and accountability. As one members of staff commented: “We can have any conversation in this school”.

Next Steps:

- To increase the Governing Body’s understanding of the inclusion agenda so that they are in a better position to pose relevant questions to hold the Leadership to account.
- To increase opportunities for greater cooperation between Leaders beyond the Trust and Bedfordshire Local Authority.



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Element 3 - Curriculum –Structure, Pupil Engagement and Adaption

Leadership and Management ensure continued innovation in the school's curriculum design, they are reflective and creative in terms of pedagogical approaches, activities, resources, and forward thinking. Their priority during the last academic year was to re-design the whole school's curriculum to implement Ofsted changes and address the high level of needs with which pupils' present. Despite Covid-19 interruptions of the usual school operation, the academy managed to fulfil at least 6/7 out of 8 objectives that it identified at the outset of the work on curriculum.

When working collaboratively on the new, relevant, and meaningful curriculum, staff set themselves a target to build new learning, as well as develop pupils' characters, to ensure success in life. The school's Curriculum Intent document displayed on their website, summarises this intention in a straightforward way therefore ensuring it is accessible to all.

Gothic Mede Academy adopted a book based English curriculum, as opposed to a thematic approach, though it retains its links to other subjects. This allows the school to choose ambitious texts to challenge and stretch more able pupils and engage and inspire all learners. Pupils' surveys conducted regularly in English and maths inform Leadership about how their curriculum intentions are received by pupils and help them to set aspirational targets. In the conversation with the Assessor, the pupils stated that: "we learn new things about the past and about what you can do in future." An introduction of maths mastery at Gothic Mede Academy has been successful in terms of pupils' progress, and the enjoyment and enthusiasm that this highly structured programme engenders in pupils increases their confidence in tackling abstract concepts. The children were talking about maths as: "easy to do lessons." Somewhere able to give examples of "hard maths, that after a while wasn't hard anymore."

Gothic Mede Academy curriculum is planned with a view to providing stimulating learning for all and includes an in-built differentiation; the growth mindset approach to learning ensures that pupils can access learning in line with their cognitive ability. Its richness aims at pupils learning about our diverse world and allows them to appreciate different cultures thus broadening their horizons. They learn to value different traditions because the curriculum that is offered to them addresses local, national, and global dimensions.

The school believes in learning beyond the classroom and organises or takes part in many events that are either well established and loved by children like: a Book Day or aim at enhancing current classroom learning like: Arts Around the World Week or Ambitious Day. Through this whole school's effort, the children learn in a kinaesthetic way and are given experiences that will help them to become well-rounded citizens of the future. Though limited due to Covid restriction this year, the school still offered such experiences via Zoom, or a combination of visits and use of electronic resources.

At Gothic Mede Academy pupils' attitudes are developed through the core school values and the curriculum is one of the main vehicles to achieve these goals. Staff discuss curriculum content and approaches frequently and openly so that they can prepare their pupils for future learning and help the children to understand their place in the world, express themselves and articulate their values and beliefs.



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Next Steps:

- To develop outdoor learning e.g., Forest School.
- To evaluate the impact of the new curriculum on pupils' understanding of inclusion and diversity considering current national events.



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Element 4 - Learner Progress and the Impact on Learning

Effective planning for teaching and learning, informed by data, teachers' observations, other professionals' reports, and frequent self-evaluations of effectiveness of provision, contributes to pupils continuing to make good progress. Typically, pupils enter Reception class working slightly below or at age expected level of development and understanding. When children transition to Year 1, they are broadly in line, or slightly above the local and national average. For a number of years, the school scores higher in Year 1 Phonic Screening in comparison with local and national average scores. This is attributed to high quality teaching and learning and the school's effort and ambition to equip pupils with the essential, core skills that are fundamental for future learning. At the time of this assessment, a group of children were receiving additional phonic sessions delivered by a specialist teacher, who was employed specifically to work with children who had gaps in their phonics knowledge and were slower in decoding words than their peers. Such interventions are consistent with the school's reputation of being strong in teaching phonics.

Gothic Mede pupils generally achieve higher in all core areas of learning at the end of KS1 in comparison with local and national figures. This pattern of attainment is reflected throughout the rest of school. Some previously highlighted weaknesses in spellings and writing presentation (Ofsted 2017 Report) have been acted on by Leadership and teaching staff, clearly demonstrating that the school is consistently caring for all needs and groups, preempting and addressing any underachievement in groups or individuals. This is despite having a higher percentage of SEN and EHCP pupils than the national trend (in 2019) and pupils from disadvantaged backgrounds that rely on school to broaden their linguistic, emotional, and cultural experiences. One teacher shared her "spiritual moment" with the Assessor when she was told that she was the first positive female role model the child she supported had connected with. Clearly, the school reaches out to all children to fill the gaps beyond educational ones, through its strong pastoral care at the group and individual levels to maximise children's learning.

The impact of the re-designed curriculum can be seen from the progress of the pupils, evidenced in their books, and confirmed by teachers, who use assessment for learning in lessons and a basket of termly assessments to keep track on pupil progress. Leaders ensure they review and evaluate data, carry out learning walks and lesson observations as well as monitor pupils' books to ensure high standards of work. Pupil voice is included into a monitoring process and valued; the school sees it as an important part of monitoring but also promoting in pupils' self-evaluation and metacognition. In this way they contribute to pupils learning about how to explain what they learn, why they learn and their next steps of learning.

Attendance at Gothic Mede Academy is monitored closely as the Leaders recognise the relationship between attendance and progress as well as the emotional and social development of the pupils. If there is an attendance issue with any pupil, this is raised sensitively and with the support of the Family Worker, SENCO and any member of staff who is the most appropriate person to deal with a particular family. This is effective, because despite having a slightly higher rate of persistent absentees compared to national average, the school's overall attendance is in line with national figures, 97.09% during the week of this assessment. There has not been any internal or permanent exclusion in the last 12 months,



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though there is 1 pupil at risk of exclusion, who has been so far effectively supported by SENCO.

Next Steps:

- To use the Leuven Scales to measure the impact of pastoral support and therapeutic interventions.
- To develop a recording process to measure the impact of all interventions.
- To gather anecdotal evidence of how metacognition improves outcomes of children and promotes inclusion.
- To synchronise teaching of phonic with spelling (decoding and encoding of the same words) to pupil who experience severe difficulties with spellings.



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Element 5 - Assessment

At the Gothic Mede Academy, the teachers identify what pupils understand and can do through the rigorous assessment of learning practice in lessons and use a Target Tracker to store information. The analysis of such data informs subsequent planning and allows for detail consideration of the needs of their learners, with a particular focus on disadvantaged and SEND pupils, as per the whole school approach. The Target Tracker has also been utilised to identify gaps in learning in pupils due to Covid-19 and to help make decisions regarding how to spend the Covid Catch Up Premium.

Through ongoing learning progress being measured and tracked using the Target Tracker, pupils who need extra support or challenge are quickly identified. In addition, the school keeps developmental records of individual needs and progress reports from external professionals involved with the child. Thus, there is a basket of assessments available for each child enabling the school to closely monitor achievements and identify issues as they arise. Leadership with SENCO are fully aware of the importance of early interventions and there is plenty of evidence in each classroom (planning, displays, deployment of support staff, extra equipment, visual teaching aids and more) to conclude that this is the bread and butter of academy practice.

There are a number of interventions available to pupils such as art and play therapy, an offer of extracurricular individual music tuition, the use of external phonics teacher and more to support teaching strategies for identified pupils to improve their attainment. This applies to any child who benefits from an extra learning time regardless background or any other characteristics – a truly inclusive practice. There are 40 children who took up an opportunity to learn to play musical instruments. The SENCO works closely with external professionals as well as the Teaching Assistants and teachers to monitor and track the progress of every pupil receiving support. Because of the close monitoring and reviewing of all interventions, all pupils make good progress.

Staff timetable interventions sensitively so that the pupils do not miss on their favourite time like PE and remain fully focused on tasks. Another inclusive intervention practice is the use of Talk Partners strategy. The teachers regularly change the seating plan in every classroom so that pupils have the opportunity to work with all children in class.

The school is extremely fortunate to attract and motivate staff to run extra-curricular activities and after school clubs. Though these activities are not measured for impact and different clubs are attended by different children, these opportunities inevitably impact positively on children's progress is social, personal and health proud development. Judging by the pride of a particular member of staff in increasing the number of clubs available to children from 4, to 26 per week where everybody is included, the enrichment of curriculum and children's learning through play is well understood and supported in this school.

The monitoring cycle for teaching and learning is thorough. This means that all staff understand the expectations of them and the next steps for the school development as well as for their classes and themselves. The process means that all staff are accountable for raising standards. It also ensures that there is a total communication and transparency to support staff in improving attainment for all pupils.



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Next Steps:

- To assess the impact of metacognition approach to learning on pupils' confidence as independent learners (e.g., case study).



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Element 6 - Behaviour, Attitudes to Learning and Personal Development

These core values are at the heart of the school and in the forefront of the Leaders, teachers and other staff thinking, which are manifested in a positive atmosphere immediately felt by visitors. The outstanding relationships between staff and pupils are noticeable in every interaction, formal or informal, and these contribute to the school being a calm and orderly organised environment. This has been achieved because Gothic Mede Academy has a strong Leadership team, who have researched behaviour management strategies, made appropriate choices for the school, and continues to adapt its methods in line with current research. They review, as necessary, risk assessments for pupils with challenging and significant behaviour issues to minimise potential disruptions and support these pupils with self-regulation.

True to its ethos, staff are trained to use positive language when dealing with behaviour. This helps learners to develop an understanding of what happened and the consequences of their actions. Such approach allows the learners to reflect on own behaviour and encourages them to take responsibility for their actions. The school uses the “Ladder of Consequences” consistently, which has proved to be effective in most situations. There is a nurture group for those children who struggle with emotional wellbeing and need a greater, individualised input from staff to achieve a degree of self-regulation sufficient for re-integrating with their class.

Gothic Mede Academy has a well- established routine and high expectations of behaviour adhered by all staff and children. This is evident in structured lessons and play time and confirmed by staff and children in conversations with the Assessor. The pupils were very clear about positive behaviour strategies promoted in their school and they particularly liked it when their names were mentioned in celebration assemblies. They said they were motivated by rewards to “try harder and do their best”.

A growth mindset approach introduced to the school encourages children to strive for improvement. There is a culture of appreciation, tolerance, and acceptance of individual differences that creates an atmosphere conducive to learning. Children are treated as individuals who deserve the best the school can offer. This caring attitude married with highly structured educational provision allows the children to learn, grow healthily, develop personally and fully participate in school life.

Throughout the assessment day, it was evident that a positive attitude to learning is not limited to pupils but expressed by members of staff too. There are many adults at Gothic Mede Academy who have progressed professionally over the last few years whilst working at the school. They spoke openly about their journey and support they received from Leadership and colleagues. More so, they shared their experiences with the pupils thus modelling to children the value of education. This is also another example of the school being an inclusive learning establishment that provides opportunities for all.

Next Steps:

- To include pupils into behaviour management strategies by developing a mentoring scheme.



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Element 7 - Parents, Carers, Guardians

Relationships with all parents, carers and guardians is a real strength of the school. The parents feel that they are listened to and respected for who they are and for the fact that they know their children best. The school values and appreciates the importance of parental involvement in the child's learning and goes to any extent to engage parents with school life. There are some parents who have school phobia due to their own negative experiences when in school themselves, therefore, Gothic Mede Academy makes an extra effort to invite and include those parents into the school community. This has been successful, particularly with the traveller community who now work closely with the school to benefit their children's education.

In the conversations on the day of assessment, parents were extremely praiseworthy of Leadership and staff. They considered themselves very lucky to have their children in a school that provided everything they could wish for: excellent curriculum, effective pastoral care, exciting learning opportunities and individually tailored support for SEND pupils. One parent said that Gothic Mede Academy "were phenomenal in lockdown. They always had things for children to do. They gave parents so many options." They commented on how the school motivates the children to challenge themselves "if they see they have aptitude for something like e.g., music, they push them further. They give them extra challenges." Parents confirmed the inclusive nature of the school where all children, and especially those at the polarised ends of the learning community, SEND and Gifted and Talented, have the right conditions to continue to thrive.

The parents felt they are very well supported in all aspects of their children and families' needs, educational, developmental and with behaviour management at home. One parent described how she was offered the strategies to use at home that mirrored the school's practice and that provided effective and consistent support to her child. This made a huge difference to the whole family, and she very much appreciated it. Parents have enormous confidence in the school because Leaders and staff continue to reach out to them and are always available, despite the current pandemic restrictions. Staff greet the parents and pupils each morning, hold termly parent meetings and send out pupil annual reports as well as keeping parents informed of parenting courses run by external agencies. Parents feel fully included and part of the school's community.

Home-school communication is exceptional, according to parents and is carried out through Tapestry in Early Years and Reading Diaries for SEND as well as others typical for schools' ways like newsletters and regularly updated information on website. Reports are clear and accessible, and teachers are always happy to expand on their comments in face-to-face meetings, or by Zoom. This is a school, where parents feel like partners and do not hesitate to turn to school when in need.

There is an active Parent Association, which provides another forum for parents to voice their ideas and support the school in a pragmatic way. They ran lots of fundraising events e.g., raised money for the newly open library, and are ready to resume these kinds of activities as soon as the restriction are lifted. Parents came across as passionate about the school and believe that they have an active role to play, which they take seriously and enthusiastically; they want to have fun at the same time too, as one of the parents stated.



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The Family Worker provides the link between school and parents, but this is not the only route to gain help or contact; all staff are available to pupils and their parents. This promotes valuable discussions and conversation about learning, which impact on how children feel about school.

Parents of all pupils celebrate successes of their child both within and out of school so that they can be applauded in the Celebration Assembly. Parents are invited to join key festivals and Leaders make every effort to plan, organise and celebrate events to include parents. These have been had to be amended and restricted because of the pandemic but never actually stopped as the school is creative in overcoming difficulties. For instance, instead of performing indoors, they take the activity outside and space it out so that it is safe for all participants.

Much work is taking place to include and involve parents in their children's learning. This was evident throughout the conversations with the Principal, IQM Lead and the parents themselves.

Next Steps:

- To continue to explore channels of communication so that parents are aware of the improvements taking place in school.
- To continue to hold regular workshops for parents in support of the positive impact of the previous events.



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Element 8 - Links with Local, Wider and Global Community

The school has strong links with the local community, it accesses local community resources like the library, churches and other places of worship, the allotments, other schools, and open spaces. This is to take advantage of the locality for educational reasons but also to instil in children respect for their immediate environment and show them the benefits of living in this part of Bedfordshire.

The Gothic Mede Academy's presence in the local community was confirmed by parents who are also keen to get involved in work with local organisations on behalf and in support of the school.

There is a long history of the school organising enrichment activities that welcome local residents and businesses alike, for instance the whole school assemblies and Christmas show. Although this kind of activities were disrupted by the Covid-19 restrictions, the school organised, where possible, equivalent events to maintain the links, or will resume them from September 2021.

Leaders recognise the importance of collaboration with other educational establishments like Etonbury Academy where KS2 pupils took part in a musical event. So far majority of these partnerships are with the BEST schools so Gothic Mede Academy might consider widening its circle of friends with schools beyond the Trust, when the conditions are right for such an initiative. The benefits of linking up with other schools are that staff will share their experience and will be exposed to innovative and creative ideas within education. For the pupils, it reduces fears and anxieties of transitioning into a new environment.

Sport plays a large part in school life and the school makes sure that Sports Premium is spent effectively and in line with the school's identified needs to enrich a range and quality of activities for all children. Sport Days are very popular with parents and the local community and often are linked to broader educational issues like healthy lifestyles.

The school has never completely stopped using local facilities during lockdowns but had to restrict some activities to for example just a walk, instead of a visit to a local organisation. Leaders are very keen for the pupils to resume participation in community events, and the school remains a welcoming hub for all connected.

Next Steps:

- To develop global links and offer an enriched curriculum by developing links with other countries including non-European countries.
- To continue to offer support to parents who are keen to be involved in local community projects for the school's benefit.
- To continue to share and learn from the cultures within the school community.