



Quality Mark Assessment of Newlands

Woodend Farm School

Dr Neil Hawkes
30th June 2026

*Recognising high quality practice through
Values-based Education*

Accreditation Visit for the Quality Mark in Values-based Education (VbE)

On the 30th of June 2026, I spent the day at Woodend Farm School, an independent school for children with complex special educational needs (SEMH), in Witham Essex, conducting a school audit for the IVET Foundation's Quality Mark in Values-based Education (VbE).

The school's values lead, Kirsty Page, had provided comprehensive evidence through the school's self-evaluation tool to show that the school had been working meticulously and comprehensively to prepare for the accreditation visit. The school's written evidence, such as the VbE Policy, showed that the school is deeply and wholly committed to the philosophy and practices of VbE. What she wrote in the audit tool I saw in practice during the day. For instance, she wrote, "*Staff actively model our values and wider virtues including honesty, accountability, respect and honesty, creating a calm, caring and purposeful atmosphere*". I found that without exception they do create this special ethos, which forms the basis for the students to achieve and thrive.

I interviewed the Head Teacher, Values Lead, a parent, two governors and members of staff, as well as observing students. The Head and Values Lead were on hand throughout the day to answer questions and give rich verbal evidence, showing why the school should be recognised for the Values Quality Mark. Their clear insights, comprehensive knowledge of the school, and passion for VbE were outstanding. They totally embodied the ethos of VbE in their relationships with colleagues and students.

The Headteacher, Gemma Quantrill is a highly skilled 'hands on' headteacher. She constantly and consistently models the school's core and extended values of **kindness, belonging, believing, achieving**, respect, accountability, trust, honesty, forgiveness, teamwork, growth and empowerment. She has been on a VbE journey since reading about it 7 years ago and seeing its potential for creating a school culture in which students thrive. Her dedication to giving the students the best possible care and education is outstanding. Through her leadership, enthusiasm and modelling of the school's values, staff really do ensure that

each student is given unconditional positive regard.

Wellbeing

This is an outstanding feature of the school. Excellent interpersonal relationships are at the heart of everything the school does. The daily briefing session, before the students arrive, ensures that all staff are secure in what they are doing during the day so that each student can feel safe and secure. This is a staff who show that they enjoy being with the children and there is a palpable team spirit of support, love and care for each other. This creates a joyous energy that remains throughout the day, which I witnessed when visiting classes and activity areas. At the end of the day, the staff came together to celebrate the values that they had been showing during the day. Members of staff were nominated to be presented with a values sticker from the Head for showing the current value of growth. This ceremony, which on the face of it is a simple process, was in fact profound and very moving. Staff members were deeply valuing each other by saying why nominations were being made. As seen in the photo, members of staff proudly display their stickers on the backs of their lanyards. I have often seen this process with children, but this is the first time I had witnessed it with adults. Both adults and students are really seen at Woodend Farm School and feel valued as people. Although not one of its explicit values, the school really understands the value of dignity – the inherent worth of each person. It would help to explain why the students are achieving so well.



Compassionate Leadership

This is an enormous strength of the school. The Headteacher, Senior Leadership Team and the whole staff have established an atmosphere of trust and inclusion. There is no hierarchy of relationships only one of roles. The Headteacher expects the best from everyone and has very high expectations. Staff willingly rise to these expectations because of her collaborative style of leadership, which releases the creative dynamic of all in the school. I have often talked about this to professionals, but I have rarely seen it in practice. Congratulations!

Behaviour and Relationships

Behaviour is managed with great skill and compassion. The school promotes a positive behaviour policy which is rooted in its values. The focus is on restoration, reflection and personal responsibility. Pupils understand the importance of showing kindness, respect and accountability in their interactions with others. The Values Lead informed me that positive relationships between pupils, staff, families and governors create a strong sense of belonging across the school community. Children are encouraged to reflect on their actions and identify how values influence their choices. Behaviour expectations are consistent and values-centred, resulting in a calm, safe and purposeful learning environment where pupils develop confidence, self-regulation and positive character traits. My classroom observations showed how children were being helped to self-regulate. A governor, with extensive experience of education nationally, wrote to me about the school. I think it's important for me to quote what she shared, as it is significant evidence about the quality of education at Woodend Farm School and the impact of VbE.

She wrote:

"VbE is crucial at Woodend Farm School because it provides our pupils with the language and understanding to develop, practise and embed their social and emotional skills. Quite simply, VbE stabilises our pupils and enables them to flourish into successful learners."

Typically, our pupils arrive distracted and with little or no understanding of how to interact with others. Many are friendless. Their SEMH needs and complex profiles mean that they have missed out on play dates, attending birthday parties and participating in school trips. Our pupils find it difficult to settle. They show limited, if any, awareness and interest to engage with others.

Staff work tirelessly to give pupils the tools to express themselves and regulate their behaviour. They gently but relentlessly model the school's values including kindness, belonging, believing and achieving. Throughout each school day pupils are prompted and guided to uphold these values and understand how these make a positive difference to themselves and others.

Pupils quickly respond to the explicit teaching of the school's values. Their behaviour improves significantly. Pupils visibly grow in confidence and become ready to learn. They engage in lessons, follow instructions and take turns. They start to work together and make decisions for the common good.

Pupils develop positive relationships with each other because they understand how to be a good and kind friend. They learn to regulate and manage their emotions. This equips them with the capacity to support their classmates to do the same."

A parent of one of the children at the school, talked in a similar vein to the governor, sharing with me with me about the journey she had had to find a school that would be able to support her child's learning and development. She was glowing in her admiration of the staff and the positive effect that they were having on her child. She loved the values-based inclusive atmosphere of the school.

Teaching and Learning

During the day I observed both explicit values lessons and implicit informal teaching. Values are skilfully woven into the curriculum and are at the very heart of the school's teaching and learning. All teaching was engaging and relevant to the students. One group of students learned a lot about weightlessness in space, which was presented in an engaging way using video clips. Another was exploring appropriate ways of behaving in various situations. This was a very effective way to help the students reflect on prosocial behaviour. I noticed how staff used the language of values to help the students to reflect. Another outstanding lesson focussed on photos of members of staff and cards with the school's values (see photos below). This lesson shows both the outstanding

relationships staff have with students and their ability to be confidently themselves.



A special mention needs to be made concerning the excellent school assembly, which was supported by an excellent power point presentation. Students were engaged and participated in the assembly. Some showed empathy towards others and demonstrated through their interactions that they understood the importance of the values in helping them in their lives.

Reflection

Reflective practices, times for stillness and inner reflection, are aspects of the school's curriculum which are being developed. The school says that reflective practices are:

'...an integral part of daily life at Woodend Farm School. Dedicated opportunities for reflection are planned through assemblies, classroom discussions, PSHE lessons and pastoral support. Pupils are encouraged to consider their thoughts, feelings, behaviours and actions through the lens of our school values. Reflection enables children to develop self-awareness, emotional literacy and empathy for others. Staff model reflective practice and support pupils in understanding how values guide decision-making, helping them to become resilient, thoughtful and self-regulating learners.'

From my observations I would agree that the school understands the importance of reflection and the 'Inner Curriculum', which starts with staff reflecting on their own practice and seeing the need to have time out to reflect and self-regulate. I think reflection at the school could be a source for research and the school becoming a case study that exemplifies good practice.

Values Into Action

This is a school that lives its values and encourages the school's community to fully engage with them. Parents are made aware of the status of values at the school. Above all, I saw that the role modelling of the values by staff is having a profound effect on behaviour and attitudes. This is because values are not used simply as a behaviour strategy but as a way of signposting the students to an awareness that values guide their thinking and behaviour.

The School's Standout Area of Excellence

I must congratulate the Values Lead, Kirsty Page on all that she wrote in her own evaluation of the school. Rarely have I found a more accurate self-assessment, especially in this section. I fully agree that the school is 100% authentic. Here I found dedicated adults, enjoying their roles and making a real difference to the lives of the students.

Next Steps

- Continue the next steps as written in the self-assessment and work towards the Enhanced Quality Mark in VbE. I will be interested in how you adapt the Arbor approach.

- Continue to deepen understanding about the Inner Curriculum and reflection.
- Look for a way of showing and celebrating to yourselves and to the world that you are an outward looking values-based school. Consider having a flag/banner, mosaic or a values sculpture outside the school.

Conclusion

There is no doubt in my mind that Woodend Farm School is an excellent values-based school and richly deserves the Values Quality Mark. This is a school with a huge heart, where meaningful inter-personal relationships create an inclusive happy school; pupils are well educated and are given an outstanding level of individual care. Heartfelt congratulations!



Dr Neil Hawkes – Founder Values-based Education (VbE)
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