

Report following the analysis and evaluation of evidence submitted by Trinity St. Peter's CE Primary School and Nursery (Trinity St. Peter's) to Dr Dave Walters for the purpose of accreditation as a Thinking School by Thinking Schools @Exeter, University of Exeter.

Context

Trinity St. Peter's is a popular and successful one-form entry primary school with a school nursery and its own wrap around care provision, Clubhouse.¹

The school has gained a number of accreditations: 'outstanding' in all areas in its most recent Church School Inspection (SIAMS June 2015), Basic Skills Mark – Quality in Early Excellence (November 2016) and Gold Sports Award (July 2018).²

Persistent absence, pupils with a statement of special educational needs (SEN) or education health and care plan (EHC), pupils whose first language is not English, and pupils eligible for free school meals at any time in the past 6 years, are all below the national average.³ The school was judged as continuing to be 'good' by Ofsted's inspection team in November 2017 with the school being led '...with passion and determination'.⁴

The school's Thinking Schools development journey can be traced back to the Autumn of 2012 where its vision and values were launched to provide a springboard for

¹ School's website

² Ibid

³ DfE performance tables 2018

⁴ Ofsted report November 2017

improvement. Subsequently, a clear thread of internal and external training has been in place spanning the period between Autumn 2012 and the present. This training has an extensive range of foci including Mindfulness, Philosophy for Children, Kagan processes, Growth Mindset, Questioning, Critical Thinking, Becoming a Thinking School, Thinking Skills, Learning Dispositions, Thinking Maps, Thinking Hats, bespoke 4C Thinking Model, Big Questions and The Learning Pit.⁵

The school's mission statement is: Guided by our faith in everything that we do. The school's five core Christian values: Serve (Serve), Hope, Imagine (Creation), Nurture (Kindness) & Enjoy (Joy) are embedded in all aspects of school life to ensure the vision and mission statement are a reality at Trinity St. Peter's.⁶

Evidence Base

Thinking Schools @Exeter (TS@E) received the school's submission from the Headteacher, Deborah Pringle, evidencing the history of the school's cognitive education development journey and the work that the school had undertaken stemming back to its origin in Autumn 2012. The digital evidence for accreditation is skilfully woven into the reflective proforma. The evidence on the school's website includes vision and values, pupil voice pages, whole school/class Twitter feed, Thinking Schools resources and guidance, class blogs, Think Tank and Thinking Ambassadors, evidence of displays, examples of teachers' planning, and examples of how pupils apply cognitive tools to enrich and enhance their learning, communication with parents, presentations and standards of achievement.

School Ethos

From the evidence presented, it is clear that Trinity St. Peter's has core values and a moral purpose at the heart of everything it does. This has created an identity that all children, regardless of background, can connect with. As a consequence, children are '...confident and enthusiastic about their learning'.⁷

⁵ School's record of training for Thinking School Accreditation

⁶ School's prospectus and website

⁷ Ofsted report November 2017

The school provides parents with clear and helpful information relating to the thinking curriculum through the newsletter, school visits, workshops and information on the website. 'As a consequence of these actions, parents are well equipped to support their children's learning at home'.⁸

Trinity St. Peter's has a number of partnerships including Team TSP (where parents and the local community are involved in the development of the school), Formby High School, churches, Connected Network (two other local primary schools), SIG 2 (a school improvement group involving primary and secondary schools in Formby and Crosby), and the Liverpool Diocesan Team.⁹ Through its connections with these stakeholders, Trinity St. Peter's conveys a positive, caring and creative atmosphere, demonstrating that careful thought has been put into its organisational structure and visual presentation.

Senior Management and Whole School Commitment

The headteacher, assistant headteacher and SENDco have made a formal commitment to cognitive education as part of the school's development priorities and together, along with four year 6 pupils, they form the Drive Team. The headteacher is a very experienced practitioner and leader. She is explicit about her passion for 'thinking about thinking' and clearly places meta-cognitive strategies at the core of the curriculum.¹⁰ The assistant headteacher and SENDco bring cognitive principles to life by championing their cause and modelling meta-cognitive approaches in practice.¹¹

The Governing Body are not only fully supportive of the school's commitment to cognitive education, but also demonstrate a good understanding of how this approach enables children to think through their curriculum in order to bring learning to life.¹² Governors are kept up to date about the school's approaches to cognitive education

⁸ Ibid

⁹ School website

¹⁰ Drive Team pen portraits

¹¹ Ibid

¹² Chair of Governors statement

through the website, reports from the headteacher and the nominated governor for the Drive Team.

The Drive Team is led by the headteacher as Thinking Skills Co-ordinator / Project Leader, ably supported by the assistant headteacher and the SENDco. In addition to these core staff members, four year 6 pupils (Think Tank) make up the rest of the drive team members. Thinking Ambassadors have been established in each class and they meet regularly with Think Tank and subsequently then report back to their classmates and class teacher. Meetings include discussion of the Thinking Skills covered in class together with the identification of next steps in moving forward.¹³

There is ample evidence to indicate that Trinity St. Peter's is receptive to change and innovation. The development of cognitive approaches has been part of the school's vision and drive for improvement since 2012 in response to ensuring that the school had an explicit vision based upon core Christian values that would serve as the foundation for a strategic move forward.¹⁴ A range of ways of scaffolding effective thinking and learning skills have been incorporated into all aspects of the school as appropriate spanning visual tools, thinking dispositions and questioning for inquiry.¹⁵

There is an organic Action Plan by which the agreed cognitive tools, strategies and resources are being implemented and taught across the school.¹⁶ The large range of cognitive developments indicates that this plan is very aspirational and the school now appreciates the need to empower children to select their own cognitive tools.¹⁷ The Action Plan and CPD package complement each other well and provide a clear mechanism for ongoing development.

¹³ Reflective proforma

¹⁴ Ibid

¹⁵ Record of training for Thinking School accreditation & website

¹⁶ Thinking School Action Plan

¹⁷ Reflective proforma

Training

The Thinking Skills Co-ordinator is well versed in the theory, application and assessment of cognitive education. She holds a Master's degree which focussed upon differing ways of incorporating learning styles to enhance the impact of teaching reading comprehension.¹⁸ The assistant headteacher is experienced in action research and is currently undertaking a Master's degree in Educational Enquiry and Professional Learning. This is in addition to a wealth of training in other aspects of cognitive education. Further, the SENDco is also experienced in action research through undertaking a Professional Qualification for Aspiring School Leaders and also continues to add to her already wide professional development experiences in cognitive education. The highly trained Drive Team has undoubtedly influenced the focus on establishing a common thinking language across the curriculum.¹⁹

There is an ongoing training programme in place, aimed at the development of expertise in a range of cognitive tools, strategies and resources for established and newly appointed staff.²⁰ There is a cycle of lesson study in place that centres on the consistent use of a bespoke 4C Thinking Model that has comprehension, connectivity, creativity and criticality elements at its core. The cycle of lesson study includes Senior Leaders delivering training, staff implementation and reflection, and collective evaluation / further development identification.²¹

Assessment and Outcomes

Alternative and complimentary forms of assessment span the formative, summative and ipsative domains are routinely used to examine the development of cognitive skills, and how these are related to learning outcomes in the wider sense have been implemented. These include CAT, PASS and MALS at an external level, complimented by internal ongoing practical judgements that inform next stages in the learning of pupils. Assessments indicate largely high cognitive and self-perception development together

¹⁸ Drive Team pen portraits

¹⁹ Thinking Schools Action Plan

²⁰ Record of training for Thinking School accreditation & website

²¹ Reflective proforma

with signposting strategies for further support in the development of children's thinking and learning. Trinity St. Peter's demonstrates a healthy 'data informed' (rather than data led) approach to assessment to avoid assessment becoming the master of the curriculum rather than the servant.²²

The school is clear that the focus on cognitive development through a whole school consistent approach to learning has improved children's attitudes, improved their enjoyment, developed their independence, contributed to high quality teaching and led to better pupil progress.²³ There is qualitative data from staff about how the development of learning behaviours are associated with positive outcomes for pupils and are associated with academic outcomes.

Progress over time (three years) in reading show an upward trend, progress in writing is consistently in line with national outcomes, and progress in maths is also consistent with national outcomes.²⁴ The school's own internal analysis and presentation of these outcomes reflect this trend, together with internal growth, and demonstrates transparency and aspiration for further improvement.²⁵

Evaluation of Programmes

There is a continual review of the range of cognitive tools, strategies and resources employed, with specific reference to their impact on pupils' meta-cognition and the transfer of skills, strategies and learning behaviours. This makes effective use of the SPARE wheel model of illuminative evaluation on which the Thinking School approach is based. Through a collaborative approach to leadership, the Drive Team have established a culture of thinking and school improvement built on regular opportunities for staff to discuss the process and efficacy of cognitive education and how it can be maintained and improved. There is a genuine feel that 'this is the way we do things around here'.

²² Ibid

²³ Ofsted report November 2017

²⁴ DfE performance tables 2018

²⁵ Reflective proforma

Ownership

There is no doubt that Trinity St. Peter's CE Primary School and Nursery has made a full commitment to developing and embedding cognitive education throughout the school. From the initial introduction of cognitive tools and practices, the school has expanded their repertoire of cognitive pedagogy and demonstrate a wide range of practice geared towards the development of thinking. There is evidence that the school is beginning to distil and integrate these practices both in how they are used together and in the way they have become part of the thinking culture throughout the school and across roles and ages. Through the bespoke 4C Thinking Model, linked to the school's vision and values, the school has laid a strong foundation that ensures the whole school approach to the teaching of thinking flourishes. Trinity St. Peter's is a fine example of educational creativity where cognitive tools, strategies and resources are adapted to meet the specific needs of the learning community.

Conclusion

The range of evidence submitted undoubtedly indicates that the Trinity St. Peter's CE Primary School and Nursery meets the criteria set by Thinking Schools @Exeter as a Thinking School and demonstrates a true commitment to the continued development of a whole school approach to the teaching of thinking. I therefore recommend that accreditation be awarded until April 2022.

I would like to thank the headteacher and her team for the clear and judicious evidence base that provided the lens through which the excellent practice could be viewed.

Further Recommendations

I conclude my evaluation with some suggestions as to how the school could continue to develop as a Thinking School to inform a development visit to aid action planning. This might include:

- Further develop and maintain staff development through ongoing external and internal training geared towards rationalising what works best by rationalising the already best practice. This combination of training will secure a balance of internal

self-improvement with an external freshness and perspective. This requires getting underneath cognitive tools and dispositional development to identify the underlying meta-cognitive processes that enhance children's learning and thinking.

- Integrate thinking processes with questioning, visual tools, dispositional development, deliberate practice routines, assessment of process, assessment of product, evaluation of process and evaluation of product. This should take the form of an overview for development planning. Development planning should have a clear focus on meta-cognitive development, feedback and developing teachers as effective mediators of learning.
- Focus lesson observations on key indicators of learning and thinking processes. These need to be simple, clearly observable and made explicit to all staff.
- Add the internal use of effect sizes at an individual teacher, team and whole school level to further strengthen the quantitative robustness of data in order to supplement high quality qualitative data. This will allow impact comparisons of meta-cognitive strategies and feedback with the work of The Sutton Trust and John Hattie.
- Move from evaluation to evaluative research to foster the development of staff as researching professionals. Shift 1 is to move from a self-evaluation processes that produce objectives to ones that generate research questions of the style 'How can we/I improve...?'. Shift 2 is to ensure that all staff sustain the 'open door' philosophy and remain open to evaluating their own impact in an honest and self-critical way. Shift 3 means providing opportunities for best practice impact to be made public. To gain accreditation as an Advanced Thinking School, researching professionals are expected to offer articles relating to best practice to publications such as the school's magazine, local newspapers, the school website and professional publications. Other forums where impact can be made public are leader/teacher learning communities and action research seminars. The SPARE model of evaluative action research is a useful framework through which to apply this.
- Share the excellent cognitive education expertise and experience of Trinity St. Peter's with local schools and build the development of thinking into transition work

with Formby High School. The aspiration should be that Trinity St. Peter's becomes the hub of wider and further cognitive education growth.

- Use the criteria of an Advanced Thinking School to frame future developments, in order to deepen and extend the understanding and expertise of Trinity St. Peter's CE Primary School and Nursery.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'D. Walters', written in a cursive style.

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On behalf of Dr Judith Kleine-Staarman, Director of Thinking Schools @Exeter

April 2019