

Report by Dave Walters on the application of Goodwin Academy to become an accredited Thinking School by Thinking Schools @Exeter, University of Exeter.

Starting point: the school context

Goodwin Academy (GA) is a popular and successful medium sized (800 students on roll) 11-18 mixed secondary school, and part of the Thinking Schools Academy Trust (TSAT), comprised of 18 schools (10 primary and 8 secondary). GA has higher than national levels of deprivation with 36% of students being eligible for Pupil Premium and 41% falling within the criteria for 'disadvantaged'. In addition, the school is below the national figures for prior attainment on entry and has below national levels for EAL and BME students. GA has a clear and straightforward vision – 'Be Your Best' - outlining its beliefs and how to achieve them. The key foci are Brilliance, Enrichment, Society and Thinking. The overarching ethos is one of care, compassion and high expectations dedicated to the holistic development of every student as lifelong learners, equipped for the challenges ahead. GA's curriculum is clearly mapped around three core TSAT intent pillars: Thinking about their Thinking, Being their Best self and Shaping their Success. By doing so, there is an explicit focus on the development of thinking. Specifically, this involves a clear integration of 7 curriculum elements:

- Aspire to brilliance in all areas of the curriculum by being imaginative, creative and reflective in their learning.
- Develop awareness of their own strengths and areas they would like to develop to enable them to be ready for the next step in their life journey.
- Use the Goodwin Gateways to develop lifelong habits to be successful within the Academy and beyond.
- Develop long term knowledge, skills and understanding which can be effectively transferred to new opportunities.
- Develop the cultural capital to successfully engage with a wide variety of social contexts in the wider world around them.
- Become confident and successful individuals who are able to live safe, healthy and fulfilling lives regardless of their individual circumstances.
- Become responsible citizens who make a positive contribution to society, upholding the fundamental British values of democracy and individual liberty.

Within the metacognitive domain (Thinking about Thinking), four main cognitive tools feature and include Thinking Maps, Thinking Keys, Goodwin Gateway (a distillation of 8 clear Habits of Mind) and Thinking Hats. GA keeps abreast of research and evidence and this acts to operationalise the school's mission in a coherent and informed manner. GA's focus on being our best selves is clearly articulated so that children can locate how to move towards this. The eight elements of Persistence, Accuracy, Understanding/Empathy, Clarity/Precision, Application of Prior Knowledge, Thinking about Thinking, Creativity/Imagination/Innovation form the foundations and within this there is the recognition of

close links between emotional wellbeing and academic achievement. This is further evidenced through the impressive recognition of GA by the Kent School Award for Resilience and Emotional Wellbeing.¹

Pupil progression through phases has high priority at GA. Mental health and psychological wellbeing also have a high profile at the school and there are strong support structures in place embracing aspects such as Autism Spectrum Condition, Dyslexia and Processing, Sensory Circuits, Social, Emotional and Mental Health Wellbeing, Speech, Language and Communication. The school has recently gained recognition for excellence in respect of these areas via the Kent School Award for Resilience and Emotional Wellbeing. The mantra at GA is that 'all teachers are teachers of SEND' and this is further strengthened by a highly qualified specialist team led by an exceptionally qualified SENDCo. In addition to this provision, GA has a rich extra-curricular offering designed to build children's cultural capital.² Achievement continues to rise across the school with attendance, behaviour, progress and attainment all showing improvement over time. The school is very astute in attributing this impressive trend to a rich blend of educational provision whilst recognising the contribution of its whole school approach to the teaching of thinking. Teaching and Learning data also shows year-on improvements and this aligns well to students' overall development. This would strongly suggest that GA is an attractive place for children to learn.³ The school's Thinking School journey started three years ago. Since then, GA has gone from strength to strength with its work surrounding metacognitive development and additional foci have been skilfully introduced and embedded.⁴

GA has a highly effective and well led Drive Team. A significant factor underpinning the high impact of the Drive Team is the full and inspirational support provided by the Principal and the Assistant Principal (Teaching and Learning) who is the Thinking Skills Coordinator. These factors combine to create consistency of approaches via clear and collaborative leadership.⁵

Evidence Base

Thinking Schools @Exeter received the school's submission for accreditation from Simon Smith and Rachael Moon (Principal of GA, Thinking Skills Coordinator respectively) evidencing the school's cognitive education development journey and the work that the school had undertaken stemming back to its Thinking School origin, specifically since 2019 when the focus moved towards embedding metacognitive strategies for learning, enhancing consistency, reducing cognitive load and improving pupils' ownership of their learning.⁶ The evidence for accreditation is skilfully woven into the reflective proforma and captured brilliantly on the school's website via a dedicated criteria linked section.⁷ This structure is consistently applied across the TSAT family of schools and is a particular strength, providing consistency without undermining the specific contexts of the individual schools. The evidence on the school's website includes an overall curriculum development structure referencing 7

¹ School's Website

² Ibid

³ Reflective Proforma

⁴ Ibid

⁵ Reflective Proforma and School's Website

⁶ Reflective Proforma

⁷ School's Website

core elements. In addition, the school's thinking approach is illustrated by thinking pathways that outline how specific tools map onto key thinking processes. Within each of these domains there is ample explanatory information and exemplar materials linked to the school's curriculum policy and development planning.

Thinking School Ethos and Culture

From the evidence presented, it is clear that Thinking Skills are embedded within the culture of GA. Curriculum policy documents and plans clearly map out a thinking strategy that subsequently feed into teaching strategies, and so moves thinking approaches from policy to practice. This has a judicious blend of TSAT and GA elements. Pivotal to this is the high premium placed on sharing of best practice across the school to include all staff. 'Map Monday' is an excellent example of GA's commitment to sharing best practice for all staff in a regular and ongoing way.⁸

The school provides parents with rich, clear and helpful information relating to the thinking curriculum through the newsletter, presentations, school website, parents' evenings, thinking workshops, students' planners and online platforms. Thinking tools are used to convey GA's thinking approaches to parents in a visual and interactive way. As a consequence of these actions, parents are well equipped to support their children's learning at home.⁹

GA has forged a number of partnerships underpinned by a Thinking Schools focus in order to further disseminate and embed a thinking culture. The TSAT family of schools is a good example of how to secure continuity and progression for children as they move through the various phases of provision. In addition, TSAT provides a high-quality extension to this and further strengthens the Thinking Schools focus via events such as the TSAT conference, focus groups, Deep Dive sessions and other CPD events. In respect of this, GA has led training across the trust on aspects such as self-mobilisation through the application of self-regulatory tools to enable students to learn more effectively at home. GA works with Thinking Horizons (an ITT provider) and is developing a bespoke programme for dance and performing arts across the trust. In addition, GA has a firm commitment to raising aspirations through cultural capital in order to develop social mobility and has led training in this area across the trust. More widely, a member of the school's Drive Team is the Thinking Lead for the Kent hub. Other partnerships include the Deal Festival, DAPA dance and Deal Town Rangers. This high-quality ethos is not confined to formal partnerships however, and GA is open to collaboration with other schools on a more informal basis. Through its connections with these stakeholders, GA conveys a positive, caring and creative atmosphere, demonstrating that careful thought has been put into its organisational structure and visual presentation. This is clearly evidenced via excellent visual displays across the whole school such that there is a real sense of GA having a real thinking environment and culture.¹⁰

Senior Management and Whole School Commitment

The Principal is high profile and gives full commitment to both the Thinking School ethos and the implementation of the cognitive development agenda. This has cascaded to leadership throughout the school and is extensively evidenced in school improvement planning documentations, SEF/SIP

⁸ Ibid

⁹ Ibid

¹⁰ Reflective Proforma and School's Website

feedback, communications with parents, Leadership Maps, Principal's reports, subject impact reports and Governor reports/presentations. This whole school commitment has galvanised GA's development.¹¹

Both the regional and academy Governing Bodies explicitly support the thinking ethos in full demonstrate a good understanding of how this approach enables children to think through their curriculum in order to bring learning to life. This is achieved through actively underpinning GA's curriculum intent and implementation. Governors are kept up to date about the school's approaches to cognitive education, particularly through school visits and learning walks where thinking skills are seen in action. Governor visits and drop ins have a clear purpose and are supplemented by regular meetings with senior leaders throughout the year. Within this framework key elements are addressed. This stands as a model of excellent practice.¹²

The Drive Team is comprised of a rich blend of staff and is extremely well structured and led. The Drive Team Lead has high status and Thinking Schools developments are core to their job description. The Drive Team has clear distributed responsibilities and undergo a rigorous selection process. Interview activities and questions focus on individual/collective commitment to cognitive education, the GA vision for thinking, and specific specialist skills. As a result, the Drive Team is highly qualified and able to deliver the highest standards of training, support, mentoring and coaching. Collectively, these aspects ensure that there is continued dialogue about Thinking Skills so that specific areas of development can be identified and acted upon.¹³

There is ample evidence to indicate that GA is receptive to change and innovation. The development of cognitive approaches has been part of the school's vision and drive for improvement for a number of years in response to ensuring that the school had an explicit vision based upon inclusive educational values that would serve as the foundation for a strategic move forward.¹⁴ An impressive range of cognitive approaches have been incorporated into all aspects of the school as appropriate spanning visual tools, thinking dispositions, reflective tools (Thinking Hats, Thinking Keys and Frames of Reference), and memory tools (including retrieval practice). In addition, GA's Purple Zone dimension resonates with Vygotsky's Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD) and is particularly unique and innovative.¹⁵

There is an organic Thinking Action Plan by which the agreed cognitive tools, strategies and resources are being implemented and taught across the school. This is framed around the TSAT acronym and embraces the setting/context, plans, actions, impact and evaluation. This stands as a model of excellent practice. The range of cognitive developments indicates that plans are aspirational, designed to empower children to progressively take ownership of their cognitive development. The Action Plan clearly sets out an aspirational agenda with the overarching focus being to transform the life chances

¹¹ Ibid

¹² School's Website

¹³ Ibid

¹⁴ Ibid

¹⁵ Ibid

of all students.¹⁶ Plans and CPD provision dovetail well and provide a clear mechanism for ongoing development in this respect.

Learning and Teaching

It is clear, from the documentation provided, that Thinking Skills are embedded within the culture of GA. Planning and Drive Team meetings provide an effective springboard for action in order that all lessons include thinking skills. In this regard, the Drive takes a collaborative approach to leading developments and there is an underlying focus on what works best, for whom and how. This, aligned to excellent communication, ensures that good practice is shared judiciously with all staff to develop their classroom impact. There is a universal staff belief that all students are capable of making progress and this further supports the school's commitment to cognitive education. This clearly demonstrates how it is one of the school's main aims.¹⁷

The school's pedagogical approach is informed by ongoing CPD which has the core elements of Thinking Maps, Thinking Keys, Thinking Hats, metacognition, memory and schema development, the Purple Zone, and the Goodwin Gateway as its foundation. This sound research evidence base has allowed learning and teaching to move forward with purpose and coherence. The emphasis placed on the learning environment is also clearly illustrated in the evidence provided by the school. These elements, combined with GA's commitment to the development of psychological well-being, have resulted in learning and teaching that is focused on the holistic development of every child.¹⁸

Recent learning and teaching developments include memory training, led by the school's memory expert. This has a comprehensive and thorough coverage of key memory elements such as retrieval, spaced / distributed practice, interleaving, dual coding, concrete examples and elaboration. The aim is to reduce students' cognitive overload in order to free up capacity for higher order thinking. Higher order thinking qualities are nurtured in a way that allows wider opportunities to flourish. The highly effective use of displays enriches the learning environment by encouraging a common language for learning and fostering self-regulation of thinking and learning. This is another example of how GA has established cognitive education as an integral part of the learning culture. Of particular note is the interactive quality of displays and resources where children are encouraged to interact with the content by selecting a particular focus for their learning. An example of this is the use of thinking icons for class resources where the thinking tools to be applied are clearly identified. Where feasible, the school has personalised and contextualised visual displays, resources and tools to aid consistency, recognition and application of Thinking Skills. The creation of the Goodwin Gateway is an excellent illustration of this. Children are encouraged to strive for high standards through displays of high-quality pieces of work. GA has clear evidence of developing learning and teaching and the current focus on developing consistency across the school reflects an unswerving commitment to carefully embed cognitive approaches within lessons to encourage children to increasingly move out of their learning comfort zone. This may provide an interesting area for continued development, perhaps through formalising some of the successful tools and dispositional approaches to embrace thinking routines into self-regulatory strategies for moving out of a 'I am stuck' moment.¹⁹

¹⁶ Reflective Proforma and School's Website

¹⁷ Ibid

¹⁸ Ibid

¹⁹ Ibid

Training

The Drive Team are well versed in the theory, application and assessment of cognitive education and psychological well-being. The highly trained Drive Team has undoubtedly influenced the focus on establishing a common thinking language and approach across the curriculum.²⁰ 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. There is a cycle of lesson study in place that centres on the development of cognitive pedagogy and includes an overarching theme of 'culture is everything'. This dovetails well with the overarching 'Six Starting Points' and the 'Thinking Pathways' integral to the TSAT vision and model. The GA training model has created a very supportive lesson study climate that has undoubtedly fostered creative and innovative practice. There is ample provision for staff to trial and extend approaches to the teaching of thinking. Parents are fully informed of the Thinking Schools ethos, which features prominently on the website, school environment and in the school's communications. Staff are encouraged to work together and to provide mutual support through the development of thinking generally and also through subject contexts. Good practice is shared widely, and lesson observations are used extensively to evaluate and share good practice in a climate of mutual support.

GA makes innovative use of an online platform called 'Think Ahead' to sharply identify trends in teaching and learning in order to inform future training needs. An annual QA of teaching and learning adds to this. GA refers to Performance Management as 'Professional Growth' and this illustrates the underlying emphasis on sustained staff development. Moving forward, this would benefit from further developing a practitioner research approach to data collection, analysis and application and the Drive Team are well placed to lead on this aspect in this respect. Mapping the Ofsted curriculum focus of Intent, Implementation and Impact onto the SPARE model of evaluative research would be a good way of driving this as the Planning, Action and Reaction/Results match directly. It would therefore extend the Ofsted model by taking the Setting into consideration and also adding Evaluation in order to set out the next steps. GA is well placed to adopt this approach as it also relates well to the TSAT acronym for its action plan. This would also fit well with the focus on becoming a reflective practitioner. Staff feedback in relation to training is extremely positive and indicates clear improvements to learning and teaching.²¹

Assessment and Outcomes

Alternative and complimentary forms of assessment spanning 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. AfL is well established and aligned to the use of thinking tools. MALS is used to aid reflection on the school's three-year journey to accreditation and acts as a feedforward to drive further developments. A good example of this is the way the school initiated the application of the Purple Zone in order to introduce more challenge into lessons and raise students' levels of enjoyment. The overall MALS picture in KS3/4 is extremely positive and reflects an equally positive student profile gleaned via the 'Be Your Best Self' (BYBS) journals. The MALS profile in the sixth form raised concerns, specifically in the light of the impact of COVID-19 and increased student anxiety. GA has responded to this feedback swiftly and the school

²⁰ Reflective proforma and School's Website

²¹ Ibid

clearly places a high premium on building students' confidence and securing their well-being. A student voice questionnaire is undertaken regularly and has a particular focus on securing the holistic learning gains of students who face disadvantage. In addition, a 'Thinking about my Thinking' questionnaire provides further feedback in relation to a cross-section of students in order to feedforward into how best to take learning forward as a whole school. Thinking tools are used to structure self-assessment, and this further illustrates that GA has embedded a whole school thinking approach. Assessments, including attendance, behaviour, progress and attainment indicate high holistic student development. GA demonstrates excellent use of qualitative indicators, particularly classroom artefacts and again this is an example of good practice. The school 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 student progress.²³ There is qualitative data about how the development of learning behaviours are associated with positive outcomes for students and are associated with academic outcomes and improved motivation.

The evidence provided indicates impressive achievement growth. The school's own internal analysis and presentation of these outcomes reflect a positive achievement trend together with dispositional and psychological wellbeing growth. The use of the BYBS thinking journal has ensured that students have a voice in this process. Indeed, a high premium is placed on student voice across the school.²⁴

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 use of the SPARE wheel model of illuminative evaluation on which the Thinking School approach is based. The SPARE model would benefit from wider dissemination at all levels (from leadership to individual teachers) in order to further foster a 'researching professional' culture. The SPARE model can be easily aligned to the Ofsted curriculum focus on Intent, Implementation and Impact areas together with the school's Change Management Plan structure. 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. A wide range of mechanisms are used to gain reflective feedback from staff and students. An annual QA of teaching and learning informs the school's ongoing CPD provision, and the Drive Team undertake early and regular drop-ins as a follow-up on priorities in order to ensure that cognitive strategies are being embedded. Staff feedback is extremely positive and shows how receptive the school is to feedback aimed at improving practice. Students are integral to the evaluation process at GA and the BYBS reflection journal is a model of excellent practice in this respect. GA is looking to further develop the role of students to include the establishment of a Student Drive Team to work alongside the Staff Drive Team. This will

²² Ibid

²³ Ibid

²⁴ Ibid

be an excellent addition to the already exceptional mechanisms for driving whole improvements. GA has a real thinking culture across the school. There is a genuine feel that 'this is the way we do things around here'.

Ownership

There is no doubt that GA 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 committed to distilling and integrating 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. Inclusion is a high priority for the school, and it leaves no stone unturned. The focus on social, emotional, psychological, sensory and physical dimensions is testimony to this. Through the careful and progressive introduction of cognitive tools and CPD geared towards developing teachers as mediators of learning, 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. Feedback in the form of quotations from staff, students and parents provide a wonderful illustration of how GA has truly developed a culture of thinking across the entire learning community. GA is an inclusive, caring and inspirational organisation. The school stands as a model of excellent practice for holistic educational provision geared toward the development of lifelong learners.

Conclusion

The wide range of evidence submitted undoubtedly indicates that GA meets the criteria set by Thinking Schools @Exeter as a Thinking School and demonstrates an unswerving commitment to the continued development of a whole school approach to the teaching of thinking. I therefore recommend that accreditation be awarded until April 2025.

I would like to thank the school for the clear and judicious evidence base, clearly organised around the evaluation rubric, 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 and possibly inform a development workshop to further aid action planning. This might include:

- Further develop and maintain staff development through ongoing external and internal training geared towards rationalising what works best, for whom and how, by fine-tuning 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.
- Further 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 would benefit from an overview for how these elements are integrated and could build on the GA's models already in place and act as

a means of providing a concise overview. Thinking Schools@Exeter is well placed to support this via a bespoke workshop.

- Consider further focusing lesson observations on key indicators of learning and thinking processes. These need to be simple, clearly observable and made explicit to all staff. The work of Project Zero (Harvard University) is a particularly useful source in this respect.
- 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.
- Further develop evaluative research to continue the development of staff as researching professionals. To gain accreditation as an Advanced Thinking School (a suggested next step), 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 at all levels of leadership and classroom practice and could easily be applied to the Intent, Implementation and Impact approach to curriculum development given the alignment of PAR to Intent, Implementation and Impact. The addition of the Setting (S) and Evaluation (E) would enhance current practice without having to re-invent it.
- Use the criteria of an Advanced Thinking School to frame future developments, in order to deepen and extend the understanding and expertise of GA. In particular, the extension of practitioner research through wider dissemination of the SPARE model of illuminative evaluation may provide a vehicle for further contextualising cognitive approaches to find out what works best, for whom and how. GA is well placed to be a centre of excellence for the teaching of thinking and radiate best practice out to infant, primary and secondary schools in the Trust and beyond. The pursuit of Advanced Accreditation would support this vision.



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