

**Report by Mrs Fiona Knapp on the application from Hillcross Primary School for re-accreditation as a Thinking School by Thinking Schools @Exeter, University of Exeter.**

Hillcross Primary School is located in Morden in the London Borough of Merton and caters for children aged 3-11. It is a larger than average primary school with a planned admission number of 60 in Reception, although Years 2, 3 and 4 currently have three forms per year group. At the time of writing this report there were some 531 pupils on roll, including 50 in the Nursery, drawn from the local area. About half of the pupils are from minority ethnic groups with approximately 40% speaking English as an additional language with 36 different home languages spoken. Approximately 10% of all pupils are eligible for Pupil Premium Funding, which is below the national average, and 14.3% are identified as having SEND, including those children with an EHC Plan, which is just above the national average

Ofsted last inspected Hillcross Primary School in February 2018, when it was judged to be 'Good' in all areas. The school has also achieved the Healthy Schools London Silver Award and the Merton School Sport Mark Platinum Award. The school was first accredited as a Thinking School in June 2012 and re-accredited in April 2015. Evidence of the continuing learning journey as a Thinking School is documented electronically, and provides detailed and comprehensive evidence that has informed this report.

It is clear from the evidence that there is a passionate and relentless focus on the school as a learning and thinking-focused community, driven to achieve the very best possible outcomes for all children. This is underpinned by an ethos of excellence, high expectations, shared aspirations, a whole school integrated approach and the

determination to create **caring, collaborative, critical and creative learners** who can adapt to meet their future life goals with confidence and success. These 4C's underpin the school's vision and ethos, and are reflected in the Headteacher's welcome message on the school website:

*'Our distinctive features include a strong inclusive ethos where children are kept at the heart of all we do. Our 'Thinking School' status and child centred approach to teaching and learning encourages and supports children to become enthusiastic, positive and resilient learners. We have a clear focus on raising standards in all aspects of the curriculum by inspiring children in their learning whilst also ensuring children develop the personal and social skills they need to be successful in life.'*

The Governing Body is fully supportive of the Thinking School methodology and recognises the part it plays in the development and achievements of pupils as determined and resilient thinkers and learners, who embrace challenge. The Governing Body has welcomed a number of new governors over the last two years, and this resulted in the Senior Leadership team working with all stakeholders to share the positive features of the school as well as the identified areas for development, which then culminated in agreeing a new vision, mission statement and motto. This in turn kindled a renewed commitment to the school's emphasis on continuing to develop as a thinking and learning-focused community. Members of the GB have undertaken training sessions, and the school is currently developing the role of the Thinking Schools Governor.

The school values its partnerships with all stakeholders and uses a range of strategies and approaches to engage parents and carers with the idea of being a Thinking School. These opportunities begin with the initial prospective parents' meetings and develop through their ongoing involvement with the school's life and their children's learning. Parent workshops are now held across the academic year, and these incorporate a clear focus on the thinking tools as the foundation for learning as parents and carers learn

alongside their children. As an extension of this, there is a shared whole school topic in the second half of each summer term, when everyone in the school community has the opportunity to learn together. In addition practical support for home learning is offered through the very detailed and informative Thinking Tools Help Guides on the school website, although the Drive Team has identified that currently only a small percentage of parents and children are accessing this information. Parent consultation evenings, parent surveys, questionnaires, curriculum evenings and shared progress, and attainment updates all reflect the ethos and practices of a Thinking School.

The Drive Team is made up of seven members of staff and includes teachers, support staff, administrative staff, senior leaders and nursery nurses. The Thinking Schools Lead, Stephanie Mayar, leads the team, which plays a key role in establishing a unified and coherent approach to the development, embedding and monitoring of thinking tools and strategies across the school, as well as the development of consistent whole-school approaches and a common thinking language. There are clear expectations of each member of the Drive Team, which meets regularly to evaluate progress and plan future developments in order to build knowledge, expertise and confidence through wide-ranging and carefully planned programmes of support, professional learning opportunities, and on-going monitoring, evaluation and feedback.

All developments are underpinned and informed by detailed and clear action planning linked to and part of the School Improvement Plan, and the school has further focused on the on going development of the school as a Thinking School by including targets for development in the Performance Management process.

Pupil Voice is key, and pupils actively participate in discussions and decisions to ensure that pupil involvement and well-being is fundamental to developing the school for the benefit of everyone. An interesting development has been the identification of Thinking Pioneers from amongst the pupils in Year 1 to Year 6. Their role was not clarified in the evidence submitted, but this group could provide a very powerful link between the pupils and the Drive Team for example acting as role models, supporting the

development of cognitive language, feeding back on successes and challenges and contributing to the action plan. Pupils are also actively involved in School Council, Eco School and Healthy Schools initiatives. In addition to this pupils' views and ideas are gathered through Survey Monkey, P4C sessions, debates, whole school competitions and ideas boxes.

The key thinking tools currently used include Art Costa's Habits of Mind, Tony Ryan's Thinker's Keys, Edward de Bono's Six Thinking Hats, David Hyerle's Thinking Maps, Higher Order Questioning linked to Anderson's Taxonomy, and Philosophy for Children. The tools are introduced in a planned and sequential way across each phase and this progression is clearly documented. The evidence also makes reference to Carol Dweck's work on the Growth Mindset and this could be considered for further development in the future. Although the evidence submitted does not include specific examples of pupils' application and use of the tools, it is clear that the tools are visible in classrooms and around the school, and embedded into everything that makes up the life and work of the school. The school has a particular focus on six HoMs each year, chosen by children, parents and staff together. They are an integral part of the school, underpin the ethos and are fully embedded into the Positive Reward System.

All staff are trained in the key tools and there is a thorough induction programme for new staff, which runs across the whole of their first year. More established and experienced staff within the school attend regular training or refreshers based on their levels of competence and confidence. There are opportunities to identify and share good practice through team teaching and to engage in other learning-focused professional development including the dissemination of ideas for recommended reading and the outcomes of new research. As part of their regular practice, staff are encouraged to reflect on the impact and usefulness of the strategies and thinking tools in a range of ways. These have included informal discussions and more focused evaluations. The outcomes suggest that all staff are familiar with all the tools, value them and use them in practice to engage pupils in the learning, probe and challenge,

deepen their thinking and generate higher-order questioning, although the Thinker's Keys seem to be less well used as identified by the Drive Team. Staff are also encouraged to incorporate the tools into displays, thus creating very clear and visible evidence of the tools in action and providing another means of sharing effective practice.

The success of these approaches is reflected in the most recent Ofsted report:

*'Teachers are adept at questioning pupils so that they develop their critical-thinking skills. Consequently, pupils articulate well-reasoned views on a range of topics. '(Ofsted 2018)*

Over recent years, Action Research, to inform policy and practice, has become an important part of the school's ongoing development as a learning-focused community both to develop skills and enhance the learning opportunities offered to all.

The school has undertaken Action Research projects in writing, home learning and phonics. The outcomes have been incorporated into practice and these new initiatives are said to be running well and are having a positive impact across the school. More recently there has been a focus on the development of reasoning in Mathematics, as highlighted in the 2018 Ofsted report. A core group of staff from a range of phases worked together and piloted the schemes. They then disseminated the information to the rest of the staff to inform and adapt practice.

Lesson studies have taken place across year groups to help support and develop P4C and the effectiveness of Thinking Maps as a language for learning. During 2018-19, together with working towards the Rights Respecting Schools Award, the lesson study focus was on the development of caring and collaborative skills. As the school moves forward it plans to continue to embed and develop the work on Rights Respecting Schools, the Mathematics reasoning project and research on marking and feedback. All of these will need more time to evolve and embed.

One very successful study focused on 'Maximising the Impact of Teaching Assistants' a national initiative that supported the school in reflecting on the effectiveness of TA deployment. The school had already identified the need to ensure that support staff were empowered to teach in partnership with teaching staff in a much more effective way. The project ran over a year and included whole staff training. A drive team was established made up of a range of staff from across the school together with some parents and children. The initiative was led by MITA alongside UCL institute of Education, which supported the school in changing staff mindsets, adapting staffing structures and moderating and evaluating the impact. The project has resulted in changes in attitudes as well as adjustments to the appointment and deployment of support staff across the school leading to a positive impact on children's learning.

There is no evidence as yet that the school is using MALS, which focuses on the analysis and interpretation of pupils' perceptions of themselves as learners and problem-solvers. This would be a powerful tool to use in the future to provide another indicator of the effectiveness of the cognitive approaches the school has put in place.

Since embarking on the journey towards becoming a Thinking School, outcomes in terms of attainment and progress as measured by the end of EYFS, and by Year 1 Phonics and the end of Key Stage results in Reading, Writing and Maths, have improved consistently and are now in line with or above national average, with progress scores above the national average. Although it is difficult to accurately isolate and identify the reasons, one explanation for this may well be the increased focus on developing critical and creative thinking and higher order questioning, and the high profile given to Habits of Mind as positive behaviours for learning.

As Hillcross Primary School has continued to focus on developing as a thinking school, it is clear that much has been achieved since 2015, and cognitive education lies at the heart of everything the school values as a thinking and learning-focused community. Indeed it seems from the evidence that the school is steeped in thinking!

Some suggested areas for future development are:

- To further develop the role of Thinking Pioneers;
- To further develop HOQ and Questioning for Enquiry, considering the introduction of the Three Storey Intellect to link with other key tools and strategies, and Philosophy for Children including further reference to the work of Professor Philip Cam;
- To continue to develop the focus on Habits of Mind and Growth Mindset as key positive learning behaviours;
- To further develop the use of thinking tools and strategies in home learning;
- To consider current research such as that from Project Zero at the University of Harvard to further develop the culture of thinking, and the use of a range of other structures and routines for 'Making Thinking Visible';

<http://www.pz.harvard.edu/thinking-routines>

- To further develop Action Research initiatives (staff and pupils) including a rigorous, wide-ranging and focused approach to Lesson Study, and to consider the use of MALS;

[http://socialsciences.exeter.ac.uk/education/thinkingschools/resourcesforteachers/lesson\\_study/](http://socialsciences.exeter.ac.uk/education/thinkingschools/resourcesforteachers/lesson_study/)

- To continue to promote links with other schools both locally and nationally in order to develop and share expertise in the field of cognitive education and continue to work towards Advanced Thinking School Recognition.

In conclusion, there is much to indicate that Hillcross Primary School has maintained their status a Thinking School since the last re-accreditation and, from the evidence available, I am confident that the school continues to meet all the criteria set by Thinking Schools @Exeter. I therefore recommend that re-accreditation be awarded until January

2023 and that the school now works towards achieving Advanced Thinking School recognition.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Fiona Knapp". The signature is written in a cursive, slightly slanted style.

**Fiona Knapp B.Ed (Hons)**

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

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