

Report by Dr Judith Kleine Staarman on the application of Stanley Park Infants' School to be re-accredited as an Advanced Thinking School by Thinking Schools @Exeter, University of Exeter.

The Reflective Pro-Forma with links to public documentation on the website provided evidence of progress in maintaining the school as an Advanced Thinking School – level two criteria.

Starting point: The Thinking School context

The criteria for accreditation as an 'Advanced Thinking School' starts from the assumption that all criteria for the first level of accreditation by the University of Exeter's Cognitive Education Development Unit continue to be met within the ongoing practices of the community. The second level of evaluation further assumes that the original criteria for recognition as a 'Thinking School' have now become so embedded that staff and students have developed a deeper understanding of the principles of cognitive education and its impact on both their individual learning and its potential contribution to society.

The focus for this second level of evaluation turns towards the presentation of evidence as to how the school has moved forward in seeking to achieve those aims. Evidence has been sought on teaching (and support) staff's developing skills as practitioners; their impact on the overall development of the students beyond their technical skills in the use of the tools; and their continuing impact on the community of the whole school and beyond. Five key areas for accreditation as an Advanced Thinking School have been assessed: Dissemination of Practice; Evaluative Research; Professional Development; Differentiation; and Whole School Assessment.

Dissemination of practice

There is clear evidence of sharing practice and experience across curriculum areas within the school. The school use a school-wide programme of Thinking Skills, focusing more recently in particular on 'Growth Mindset'. In addition, the school has developed a set of 'Super Learner Characters' based on the work of Professor Guy Claxton as an extension of the work on Growth Mindset. These approaches are clearly visible on the school website and are used throughout the school, alongside other Thinking Tools such as Thinking Maps, Thinking Hats and Philosophy for Children.

Community links are very strong in the school, as the school has recently joined the Cirrus Academy Trust, which has enabled collaboration with five local schools to disseminate their practice around Thinking Skills. Schools have been supported in curriculum development, assessment and SEND training and teachers from Stanley Park have delivered training sessions to partner schools and the junior feeder school. Being an infants' school limits the reach of the dissemination practices somewhat, although the 'Learning Powers' lead has worked with the Head Teacher of a partner school to develop a Learning Powers approach in said partner school. Visitors to the school from wider afield and internationally have had an opportunity to learn from the school's practice and staff has presented their reflections on practice at Thinking Schools International conferences for the past three years.

New parents receive information on the school's Thinking ethos and on the school's website, the school has shared all thinking tools used within the school, with clear explanations for parents. In addition, curriculum evenings and further training are organised for parents to help them best support their children. In the Early Years section, parents are invited to use an online learning record, to help develop parents' understanding of their child's learning journey in the school. The choice to focus specifically on parents in the Early Years section is strategic, to ensure these parents are well-informed about Thinking Skills practices from the start. It is interesting to note that parents are not only seen as 'receivers of information' but their input is actively sought in the further development and implementation of thinking skills approaches. The relationship with parents and their input in developing a Thinking Ethos seems a real strength of the school.

Evaluative research

Stanley Park Infants' School engages in a programme of school-wide evaluation, which includes an annual student questionnaire and MALS. MALS has been adapted by the school to make it more suitable for KS1 children and the questionnaire has been developed and improved over a number of years. Both these measurements should be able to provide systematic insight into any changes in children's attitudes and thinking skills over the years.

In addition, systematic qualitative research with children in the school has been undertaken by a member of staff as a way of evaluating the Super Learners programme of work. This work focuses on student awareness and learner identity and demonstrates that students are happy to come to school and a large percentage of students have good awareness of the Super Learners and Learning Mind programmes. Results from annual questionnaires feed into the school development plans. Interestingly, on the basis of the results, the school is developing new tools to better help pupils to regulate their learning behaviours, which demonstrates an ongoing engagement with school-wide evaluative research.

School-wide data in relation to attainment has indicated a steady increase in children reaching age-expected standards across the school since initial accreditation as a Thinking School. Students achieve well-above the local and national average in core subjects and the percentages have increased impressively in each subject over the past few years, showing real progress in student attainment. Together with the qualitative data, they provide a good indicator of the benefit of a Thinking School ethos and are testament to the consistent hard work put in by both staff and pupils in this regard.

In addition to this, all staff (including support staff) in the school has consistently engaged in Lesson Study cycles, with a variety of topics, such as phonics, reading and self-assessment. These Lesson Study cycles are carried out either within year teams or across years, and include members of the school leadership, teachers and teaching assistants. Results from these Lesson Study cycles are continuously informing new practice and pedagogy in the school and are shared amongst all staff. Results of the Lesson Study cycles have also been shared with the wider Thinking Schools community. A strength of the school is its involvement in University-supported Action Research; recent projects included studies around emotions,

gender and LEGO therapy. Results from these systematic studies will be published in formal research reports, as well as by the school, and enables the school to operate at the forefront of knowledge and thinking in education. Developing this further, in particular in relation to Thinking Skills and developing the integration between Thinking and, for instance, the role of emotions in learning or gender issues, seems like an interesting way forward for the school.

Professional development

Evidence of professional development concerns two key issues: technical, in the practical application of a range of thinking tools; and qualitative, demonstrated by the quality of staff as mediators.

In terms of technical development, regular training sessions are held to develop the knowledge and understanding of staff around Thinking Skills and new staff receive training as part of their induction process to help them understand the Thinking Skills approaches used in the school. All teaching staff participates in the regular Lesson Study cycles and research-based professional development sessions take place throughout the year. From the evidence provided in the portfolio, it becomes clear that contiguous professional development based on collaborative (action) research forms a strong basis of the school's Thinking ethos and there are many opportunities for staff to engage in or share research findings and reflect on these as a team. Lesson study cycles are embedded in the school's practice and this year, the focus is on Rosenshine's principles of instruction, with a specific focus on questioning.

Staff is also given the opportunity to share their findings, practice and reflections, which not only helps colleagues from other schools but also adds to the reflective power of Stanley Park's own staff. Key for the school will be to continue developing ways in which the research can be shared more widely and to develop robust ways of linking the various topics under investigation in the school with the further development of Thinking Skills.

Differentiation

There is clear evidence of sensitivity to the individual needs of students across the ability range. The school has established processes of working with a range of abilities, including practice on working memory and vocabulary. For higher ability children, questioning and

higher order reasoning is used to challenge them further. As mentioned previously, a core focus of the school is the development of learning power and metacognition. The use of both the Growth Mindset and Super Learners programmes will help all children to set appropriate targets and children learn how to reflect on their use of Thinking Tools as an aid for supporting their learning. A lot of emphasis is placed on children's own awareness of their learning and thinking process through the use of key language for thinking and good progress is made with this. There is good evidence of the development of high-quality pupil talk in the portfolio, and of different approaches to help all pupils participate in high-quality learning processes. It is particularly interesting to read about the development of awareness of the role of 'making mistakes' as well as the use of questioning in pupil learning. There is a clear emphasis on developing individual children for an ever-changing world, and it would be interesting to see how the school is further developing their differentiation practices to ensure their approaches cater for different needs of children across the ability range, for instance through a focus on specific 'Thinking vocabulary' to enable all children to engage effectively in thinking practices.

Whole School assessment

Stanley Park Infants' School clearly engages in ongoing self-reflection that being an Advanced Thinking School demands. There are a large variety of whole school assessment practices, both qualitative and quantitative, providing in-depth and systematic data about the children's learning, well-being, learner identity and a range of other factors. Data is systematically shared with all stakeholders, including parents and the wider educational community. It is important to note that students also form an important part of the Thinking School ethos, as they are included in the schools Drive Team and both parents' and students' voices are taken into account systematically in the form of regular parent and student questionnaires.

Points for further consideration

The submitted evidence has enabled the accreditor to identify the following areas for further consideration during the 3-year period of accreditation.

Thinking Schools @Exeter would welcome your response to these points and whether they might provide the focus of the moderation and support visit from a member of our team at a time to be mutually agreed.

- Consider how to report on the progress made in developing how thinking tools can play a significant part in meeting the needs of children with general learning difficulties and specific learning difficulties, different cultural and language backgrounds, and social, emotional and behavioural difficulties.
- To further develop opportunities for increasing student voice and pupil contribution to evaluation, perhaps by considering students as research partners in Action Research studies.
- To further consider the development of pupil-pupil talk and teaching strategies around questioning and dialogue, in order to develop students' and teachers' awareness of the important role of language for thinking

Outcome

In conclusion, the application has provided sufficient evidence for accreditation and I therefore recommend that accreditation as an Advanced Thinking School be awarded until February 2023. Congratulations to Stanley Park Infants' School for an outstanding achievement!



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