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Report following the analysis and evaluation of evidence submitted by Knights of Knowledge International School for the purpose of accreditation as a Thinking School by Thinking Schools @Exeter, School of Education, University of Exeter, UK.

Starting point: the school context

Knights of Knowledge International School (KKIS) is a popular and highly successful large 'all-through' school serving the educational needs of around 2000 students from Nursery to Grade 11. Opened in 2014, KKIS has a clear vision to prepare students through world class educational programmes, state of the art facilities, and empower students to develop as self-regulating lifelong learners. KKIS's Thinking School journey is highly aspirational and a clear developmental timeline for the introduction and embedding of cognitive tools has been in place since 2020. This is aligned to a development partnership with ReThinkers, an organisation committed to supporting schools on the journey to develop a whole school approach to the teaching of thinking. The aim is to transform education systems into something better suited to the real needs of the 21st century by enabling KKIS to develop as a Thinking School. This clearly captures the school's belief in learning being an active and dynamic process. Indeed, the exceptional Integrated Learning Theme approach to the curriculum is a highly innovative mechanism for operationalising applied thinking. This involves connecting different areas of study so that learning is relevant, meaningful and connected to real life. KKIS has a very clear vision based around creating an atmosphere of continuous learning for students and staff. The goal is to create generations of positive and productive leaders who will lead change and advancements in the communities they find themselves part of. KKIS is very much guided by the collective beliefs of the entire learning community. Specifically, these beliefs are:

- Students learn best when they are loved, respected, involved, encouraged and engaged in rigorous learning experiences that meet individual needs.
- Students should be recognised as future leaders.
- Students should be aware of their own and others' talents and potentials.
- Students should take responsibility for their own learning and be self-directed in this regard.
- Students should be able to self-assess their own learning experiences.

These facets have been so well embedded that they form the culture of the entire organisation. There is a palpable 'Culture of Thinking to Learn'. The Drive Team is comprised of the Chairman of the Board, General School Manager, Academic Directors, Director of Training and Development, and English, Maths, Science, STEAM, Computing, Islamic and Arab Coordinators. This leadership model is highly effective due to the high premium placed on collaboration. Indeed, KKIS has Advisory Councils for comprised of parents, students, and teachers. These factors combine to create consistency of approaches via clear and collaborative leadership.

The school's curriculum is clearly mapped. Thinking Pathways are included into all facets of the curriculum. These pathways embrace Habits of Mind, Thinkers Keys, Visual Thinking Tools, Philosophy for Children, and Questioning for Enquiry.¹ Pupil progression through phases has high priority at KKIS. Since beginning its Thinking School Journey, KKIS has gone from strength to strength with its work surrounding meta-cognitive development. A number of foci have been skilfully introduced and embedded such that the school's mission to develop and deeply embed thinking tools into school life and the curriculum is a reality. This is illustrative of KKIS's commitment to foster deep thinking for all students.² Students at KKIS have an history of excellent achievement and the school is relentless in pursuing high academic standards. Indeed, the school has been awarded an 'Excellent' grade by the internationally prestigious 'Cognia' accreditation for school wide educational development at the highest level. However, it is lifelong holistic learning that is placed at the core of the educational provision

¹ Reflective Proforma, School's Website and Evidence Links

² Ibid

at KKIS and not just the end result. Subject specific learning sits alongside wider dimensions with leadership development at the core. Underpinning this provision is a fully inclusive support provision embracing children, parents, staff, and the community.³

Evidence Base

Thinking Schools @Exeter received the school's submission for accreditation from Mr. Muaz Al-Hayek and Ms. Sahar Abdul-Jaber (Chairman of the Board and Thinking Skills Coordinator respectively) evidencing the history of the school's cognitive education development journey and the work that the school had undertaken stemming back to its origin and also specifically since 2020 when the focus moved towards Thinking Schools and embedding metacognitive strategies for learning. The evidence for accreditation is skilfully woven into the reflective proforma and includes links to a comprehensive Evidence Platform together, all of which are clearly linked to the 15 criteria and accreditation rubric. KKIS maintains a 'golden thread' throughout the holistic educational process and has a particular focus on leadership development based key meta-cognitive elements and integrated learning.

Thinking School Ethos and Culture

From the evidence presented, it is clear that Thinking Skills are embedded within the culture of KKIS. 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. Pivotal to this is the high premium placed on sharing of best practice across the school to include all staff.⁴

KKIS has a prominent and visible thinking culture, and this is due to the excellent organisational structure and visual presentation. Students are able to show how cognitive skills are a crucial component of everything that happens in their school. Staff are fully committed to applying the ReThinkers principles and there is an exceptionally strong collaborative ethos between the family, the community, and the school. This ensures that the thinking partnership between the school, parents and community is strong. Indeed, there are

³ Reflective Proforma and Evidence Links

⁴ Ibid

opportunities for parents and the community to discuss the process of cognitive education in terms of how to maintain and improve it. Indeed, the Advisory Councils are excellent examples of the collaborative and inclusive approach to educational provision. The high premium placed on awards, celebration opportunities and displays further strengthen the Thinking School ethos and culture. As a consequence of these actions, the whole learning community is equipped to support children's learning.⁵

KKIS has forged a number of partnerships underpinned by a Thinking Schools focus. This outstanding collaboration enables best practice to permeate throughout the partner schools and also more widely. Through its connections with these stakeholders, KKIS 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.⁶

Senior Management and Whole School Commitment

The senior leadership of KKIS 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 the strong senior influence within the Drive Team leadership structure stands as a model of excellent practice. The collaborative and integrated leadership model includes Advisory Councils for parents, students and teachers. This is exceptional and also stands as a model of excellent collaborative leadership practice. Leadership gains exemplary support and feedback based on a comprehensive audit of the key accreditation elements from Dr. Lana Mbaideen and the ReThinkers advisory team. This high-quality external support adds great value to the excellent 'in-house' development structures.⁷

The senior team 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. The Executive Team are kept fully up to date about the school's approaches to cognitive education as a result of the excellent distributed and collaborative leadership model. This stands as a model of exemplary

⁵ Ibid

⁶ Ibid

⁷ Ibid

practice. Feedback indicates a positive shift in students' thinking skills together with whole school development as a Thinking School.⁸

The Thinking Drive Team has a clear domain of distributed responsibilities directly linked to the Thinking Schools accreditation criteria. Action plans (general and executive) are specifically developed to execute the school's curriculum Thinking Pathways at every level and is closely integrated with the educational provision as a whole. There is an executive training programme designed to outline and align thinking skills, together with pathways, in advance of the academic year. This also has continual formative evaluation built in. Communication is excellent as are planning processes including meetings and subsequent developmental actions. The integral and active involvement of the students is an excellent addition to the leadership of cognitive education. Together, these aspects ensure that there is continued dialogue about Thinking Skills so that specific areas of development can be identified and acted upon.⁹

There is ample evidence to indicate that KKIS is receptive to change and innovation. The school's marketing provides the wider community with a clear and concise visible illustration of the school's Thinking School vision and approach. The development of cognitive approaches has been part of the school's vision and drive for improvement for well over three years in response to ensuring that the school has an explicit vision based upon inclusive educational values that would serve as the foundation for a strategic move forward.¹⁰ 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 higher-order reflection.¹¹ There is a specific organic School Development Plan designed to secure the wide-spread use of thinking tools across the school. This plan has a clear and robust time schedule, and this has done much to secure rapid development of metacognitive approaches across all educational phases. The range of cognitive developments indicates that plans are aspirational and designed to empower children to progressively take ownership of their

⁸ Ibid

⁹ Ibid

¹⁰ Ibid

¹¹ Ibid

cognitive development.¹² Also, plans and CPD provision dovetail well and provide a clear mechanism for ongoing development.

Learning and Teaching

It is clear, from the documentation provided, that Thinking Skills are embedded within the culture of KKIS and that there is a clear 'golden thread' of holistic education throughout the school. Planning and Drive Team meetings provide an effective springboard for action in order that all lessons include thinking skills. The four Thinking Pathways (Thinkers' Keys, Visual Thinking, Habits of Mind, and Philosophy for Children) are extremely well embedded in the school's pedagogy. Of particular note is the innovative customisation of thinking tools. For example, the school has a rich evidence base of strategies, tools and resources being modified to better meet the requirements of the entire educational community. Where possible, this has involved the curriculum being wonderfully connected to real-life experiences. Excellent support and resources ensure that staff and pupils develop thinking approaches effectively. This is largely due to a 'keep it simple and clear' approach. KKIS uses highly innovative integrated learning projects in order to engage students through bringing learning to life. These projects make full use of thinking tools in order to design lines of enquiry based on deep thinking and wide application of knowledge. KKIS places a high premium on the mental health of the whole learning community. There is ample provision for pupils who need support and the Thinking Drive Team meetings typically focus on what works best, for whom and how. Indeed, robust diagnostic assessments are used judiciously to monitor growth and impact in this respect. Indeed, this aspect is a real strength throughout the whole school. This, aligned to excellent leadership and communication, ensures that good practice is shared effectively with all staff to develop their classroom impact. There is a universal staff belief in the importance of taking a whole school approach to the teaching of thinking and that all students are capable of making progress. This further supports the school's commitment to cognitive education. This clearly demonstrates how it is one of the school's main aims.¹³

¹² Reflective Proforma and Evidence Links

¹³ Ibid

The school's pedagogical approach is informed by ongoing CPD which has specific research-informed elements built in. This sound research evidence base has allowed learning and teaching to move forward with purpose, coherence and impact. The emphasis placed on the learning environment is also clearly illustrated in the evidence provided by the school. These elements, combined with KKIS'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.¹⁴

The school has heavily invested in character development, leadership, and entrepreneurship. As such, children receive recognition for exhibiting effective learning habits. The Community Club and competitions in the community serve to provide a rich forum for achievement celebration. The aim is to develop a learning approach where higher order thinking qualities are not only nurtured but are also given the practical opportunities to flourish. Effective use of displays enriches the learning environment by encouraging a common language for learning and fostering self-regulation of thinking and learning. Of particular note is the interactive quality of displays where children are encouraged to interact with the content by selecting a particular focus for their learning. Where feasible, the school has personalised and contextualised visual displays to aid consistency, recognition and application of Thinking Skills. Children are encouraged to strive for high standards through displays of high-quality pieces of work. KKIS has clear evidence of developing learning and teaching and the appreciation of elements such as Habits of Mind has shifted practice from a teaching approach to a pedagogical culture.¹⁵

Training

The Drive Team are well versed in the theory, application and assessment of cognitive education and psychological well-being. The highly trained Thinking Schools co-ordinators and Drive Team has undoubtedly influenced the focus on establishing a common thinking language and approach across the curriculum.¹⁶ There is an ongoing and differentiated training programme in place, aimed at the development of expertise in a range of cognitive

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¹⁵ Ibid

¹⁶ Reflective Proforma, School's Website and Evidence Links

tools, strategies and resources for established and newly appointed staff. There is an exemplary cycle of lesson study in place that centres on core elements. This has clear goals and topic selection aligned to the Cognia developmental resources. Together these provide the content standards for English, Maths, Science, STEAM, Computing, Media and Islamic/Arab studies to illustrate the curriculum emphases for students to develop the skills and concepts required for the 21st Century. The leadership of the school is committed to creating and maintaining world-class leaders and teachers. It is clear that staff model life-long learning and 'Growth Mindset'. Staff training materials are aligned to excellent external and in-house provision. This is highly innovative and takes a holistic approach embracing peer modelling, peer guidance, peer support and peer review. Of particular note is the full inclusion of non-teaching staff and parents. 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 in the school's communications and displays. Staff are encouraged to work collaboratively and to provide mutual support through the development of thinking generally and also through particular foci. Good practice is shared widely, and lesson observations are used extensively to evaluate and share good practice in a climate of mutual support. Moving forward, this would benefit from the further extension of a practitioner research to embrace the SPARE model of evaluative action research and the Drive Team are well placed to lead on this aspect.¹⁷

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. These follow the excellent Cognia 'Balanced Assessment System that has a clear integration of Formative, Benchmark, Interim and Summative dimensions. Thus, the innovative integrated assessment process has multiple foci. The ReThinkers survey (pre and post intervention) is exemplary in terms of students feeding back on the efficacy of thinking tools. Outcomes are then shared with teachers and parents. This is another example of outstanding practice. Assessments, indicate high cognitive, oracy, critical thinking, visual planning, and

¹⁷ Ibid

philosophical development. KKIS may want to consider the further use of MALS and the use of norms in this respect to further enrich the benchmarking of outcomes. In addition, dynamic ('real-time') assessment processes illustrated by the work of Ron Ritchhart (Harvard University) in his book 'Making Thinking Visible' may also provide further avenues for assessment development. Academic outcomes for KKIS are consistently high and the excellent ReThinkers data support the conclusion that academic impact of taking a whole school approach to the teaching of thinking is high. The Post Exam Reflection Grade process is another model of exemplary assessment practice that aligns well with KKIS's evaluation strategy. A future development area may well include the use of baseline and subsequent growth indicators via both quantitative and qualitative data sources. KKIS demonstrates excellent use of qualitative indicators, particularly classroom artefacts and again this is an example of good practice. KKIS 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.¹⁸

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.¹⁹ There is qualitative data from staff, pupils, parents and a range of stakeholders about how the development of learning behaviours are associated with positive outcomes for students and are associated with high academic outcomes and improved motivation.

The excellent student achievement results indicate impressive curricular impact. The school's own internal analysis and presentation of these outcomes reflect a positive achievement trend and demonstrates transparency and aspiration for further improvement.²⁰

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,

¹⁸ Ibid

¹⁹ Reflective Pro-forma and Evidence Links

²⁰ Ibid

strategies and learning behaviours. KKIS makes excellent use of the Cognia Performance Standards which is based around four key pillars:

- Culture of Learning
- Leadership for Learning
- Engagement of Learning
- Growth in Learning.

Students are integral to the evaluative process via student reflections. The reactions to the ReThinkers support is high in both qualitative and quantitative indicators. There are clear evidence-informed recommendations for future development as a result. By way of further development, the SPARE model of Illuminative Evaluation (Action Research) would benefit from dissemination at all levels (from executive leadership to individual teachers) in order to further foster a 'researching professional' culture. 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'. The development plan is an organic collaborative, document, and the student voice features prominently. Evaluative mechanisms include:

- Cognia's Tools
- Thinking School Evaluation Points
- School Teacher's Evaluation Tool
- Coordinators Checklist
- HR's Evaluation
- Teacher's Self-Assessment Tool
- Supervisor's Evaluation.

Outcomes are extremely positive in terms of quantitative and qualitative data. The 'Thinking as an Organisational Culture Questionnaire' is particularly informative and supports a high impact conclusion. There is a clear evaluative focus on developing the transfer of thinking

skills and strategies and the collaborative nature of the entire process is a model of excellent practice. It is clear that KKIS is well placed for future Advanced Accreditation and this reflects the ongoing ambition to develop an exceptional whole school approach to the teaching of thinking.

Ownership

There is no doubt that KKIS 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 carefully and judiciously expanded their repertoire of cognitive pedagogy. 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 careful and progressive introduction of cognitive tools and CPD geared towards developing teachers as skilled mediators of learning, linked to the school's vision and values, the school has made phenomenal progress on its Thinking School journey. This is particularly impressive given the 'all-through' nature of the organisation. The school ethos is alive throughout the school and has done much to ensure that learning is relevant, active, and based on real-life contexts. Teachers, students, and parents combine to effectively promote the educational growth of all children by providing them with ownership over their own development. The focus on developing future leaders has undoubtedly contributed to the excellent growth in self-regulatory learning. KKIS has a unique blend of pedagogical approaches and has integrated metacognitive strategies brilliantly. This combination positions the school as a gold standard educational leader of holistic lifelong learning.

KKIS is a wonderful educational community. It has core values that permeate throughout the entire organisation. KKIS nurtures thinking from the moment children enter the school and this is grown through careful attention to continuity and progression at every level. Collaboration is an intrinsic part of the culture at KKIS and there is a real sense of team-work within the entire learning community. As a result, KKIS stands as a model of exemplary metacognitive educational development.

Conclusion

The range of evidence submitted undoubtedly indicates that Knights of Knowledge International School 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 June 2026.

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 exemplary 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 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, thinking routines (geared towards further developing Growth Mindset), assessment of process, assessment of product, evaluation of process and evaluation of product. This should take the form of an overview for how these elements are integrated. This would enable teachers and leaders to have a clear overview of metacognitive development as a whole.
- Further extend lesson observations to include 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. These indicators of thinking development can be utilised both formatively

(ideally in 'real time') in order for teachers to provide feedback at the point of need, and summatively so that teachers and leaders can monitor and evaluate impact.

- 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. The key evaluative questions are 'What works best?', 'For whom?' and 'How?'. A multi-method approach to data may serve to get to the heart of these questions and focus group interviews are particularly effective in generating efficient data to supplement outcome and survey data.
- Further move from evaluation to evaluative research to further 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 evaluative research at all levels of leadership and classroom practice and could easily be applied to the evaluative protocols already in place. Thinking Schools@Exeter is well placed to support in this regard.
- KKIS may want to further consider the use of the Myself as a Learner Scale (MALS) and associated norms to add to the already well-developed assessment processes. Student Reflective Thinking Journals may also add value to both assessment and evaluation.
- Use the criteria of an Advanced Thinking School to frame future developments, in order to deepen and extend the understanding and expertise of KKIS. 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.

- Continue to develop and refine the school's website and include a dedicated menu of Thinking School information and accreditation evidence. In terms of the evidence format, consider grouping the evidence under the key headings. For Level 1 these are School Context, Evidence Base, Thinking School Ethos and Culture, Senior Management and Whole School Commitment, Learning and Teaching, Training, Assessment and Outcomes, Evaluation of Programmes and Ownership. For Level 2 these are Dissemination of Practice, Evaluative Research, Professional Development, Differentiation and Whole School Assessment Practices.



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

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