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Report following the analysis and evaluation of evidence submitted by Moorings Way Infant 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

Moorings Way Infant School (MWIS) is a popular and highly successful school comprised of three schools within the 'M3' banner. The three schools are further situated within the TSAT family of schools currently comprised of 24 schools. Together, they provide a rich 'all-through' educational experience for a large number of children across two hubs in the south east and south west of England. The school has a clear vision outlining its beliefs and how to achieve them. The overarching focus is on lifelong learning and holistic growth for all pupils regardless of starting points. MWIS aligns its vision to TSAT's 6 'Pillars of Success' Specifically namely:

- Success through learning
- Evolution of self
- Growing great leaders
- Building with confidence
- Delivering value for money
- Be the Trust of Choice for parents.

Within this lies a clear ethos of 'Learning for Life to be our Best Self'. This clearly captures the school's belief in learning being an active and dynamic process. These facets have been so well embedded that they form the culture of the entire organisation. There is a palpable culture of thinking, culture of excellence, and culture of care. MWIS's Thinking School journey started a number of years ago and has gained continuous ongoing momentum. The Drive Team is highly experienced and well represented. As a result of this rich blend of staff, the

team has high status and is highly influential. These factors combine to create consistency of approaches via clear and collaborative leadership. Active Trust support at every level is also prominent in the development process. Judged 'Good' by Ofsted in 2021, MWIS demonstrates an unswerving commitment to securing the highest educational provision for its children. Pupil Premium is in line with national averages, although this fluctuates. Indeed, the school's context is one of high deprivation. Parental engagement is exceptional, and children tend to come to the school with strong starting points.

The school's curriculum is clearly mapped and underpinned by 8 clearly set out elements spanning:

- Embedding learning habits
- Empowering children as lifelong learners
- Creating an environment conducive to learning
- Equipping children with strategies and schemas to respond and adapt to new situations
- Development of independent self-regulatory learning qualities
- Helping children understand themselves and their place in the world
- Providing experiences for holistic educational growth
- Harnessing the power of practice to strengthen learning.

Of particular note, is the curriculum focus on pupil-centred development as this fits exceptionally well with the philosophy of being a Thinking School. MWIS is research-informed and this embraces knowledge / skills, cognitive science, Thinking Routines (and associated deliberate practice / Growth Mindset), Habits of Mind, Bloom's Taxonomy, Thinking Maps, Thinking Keys and Thinking Hats. Together this acts to operationalise the school's mission to include the recognition of close links between emotional wellbeing and academic achievement, encouragement of ambition, curiosity, positivity and resilience and parental engagement.¹

¹ Reflective Proforma and Evidence Platform

Pupil progression through phases has high priority at MWIS. The overarching drive is based around a firm belief that children learn best when they feel happy and safe. Therefore, the school ensures that its provision is based on high expectations, motivating lessons, every child being treated as an individual, and embraces the wider community. Since beginning its Thinking School Journey, MWIS 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 our school life and curriculum' is a reality. This is illustrative of the school's commitment to foster deep thinking for all pupils.²

The school is relentless in pursuing high standards of achievement. However, it is lifelong holistic learning that is placed at the core of the educational provision at MWIS and not just the end result. Subject specific learning sits alongside wider dimensions such as the development of psychological wellbeing and dispositional growth. Underpinning this provision is a fully inclusive pastoral care provision embracing children, parents, staff and the community.³

Evidence Base

Thinking Schools @Exeter received the school's submission for accreditation from Tamara Gale (Thinking Skills Coordinator) 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 over the last three years. The evidence for accreditation is skilfully woven into the reflective proforma and includes links to a comprehensive Evidence Platform together with website links, all of which are clearly linked to the 15 criteria and accreditation rubric. This structure is exceptional and is a model of excellent practice. MWIS maintains a 'golden thread' throughout the holistic educational process and has a particular focus on personal development based key meta-cognitive elements, leadership, work-related aspects, sport and the arts.

² Ibid

³ School's Website, Reflective Proforma and Evidence Platform

Thinking School Ethos and Culture

From the evidence presented, it is clear that Thinking Skills are embedded within the culture of MWIS. 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

MWIS has a prominent and visible thinking culture, and this is due to the excellent organisational structure and visual presentation. P4C / Questioning for Enquiry is used daily in order to develop reflective communication skills. The excellent 'Be Your Best Self' (BYBS) reflective journal adds further to the reflection dimension. Indeed, Thinking Hats are also used in order to reflect on behavioural aspects. These reflections are subsequently shared with teachers and parents. This ensures that the thinking partnership between the school and parents is strong. Indeed, parents are fully involved in their children's thinking successes. They also get an opportunity to actually see their child's work via a range of engagement opportunities. The high premium placed on awards, celebration opportunities and displays further strengthen the Thinking School ethos and culture. The TSAT conferences and events, where Thinking Tools are showcased, provide wonderful examples of embedding a whole school approach to the teaching of thinking. As a consequence of these actions, the whole learning community is equipped to support children's learning.⁵

MWIS 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, MWIS 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

⁴ Ibid

⁵ Ibid

⁶ Ibid

Senior Management and Whole School Commitment

The Executive Headteacher is fully committed to the implementation of the cognitive development agenda. In addition, the Head of School champions the Thinking School approach through coaching and supporting staff. The addition of a Thinking Lead to the senior leadership team adds further to the 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 leadership structure stands as a model of excellent practice. The collaborative and integrated leadership model provides exemplary support and feedback based on a comprehensive audit of the key accreditation elements.⁷

The Governors 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. Governors are kept fully up to date about the school's approaches to cognitive education. Indeed, there is a dedicated Governor lead who is responsible for the development of thinking. This role involves challenging and evaluating impact in this domain. This stands as a model of excellent practice. Feedback indicates a positive shift in pupils' thinking skills together with whole school development as a Thinking School.⁸

The Drive Team is comprised of a rich blend of staff and is very well structured and led. It is comprised of members from across the 3 'M3' schools and has a wonderful collaborative approach. Indeed, together this has created an integrated learning organisation geared towards the holistic development of 685 children. Communication is excellent as are planning processes including meetings and subsequent developmental actions. The full inclusion of pupils and parents adds another rich layer to developments. The integral and active involvement of parents and pupils 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

⁷ Ibid

⁸ Ibid

⁹ Ibid

There is ample evidence to indicate that MWIS is receptive to change and innovation. The school's wide and varied communications provide 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 a considerable period of time 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 thinking routines.¹¹

There is a specific organic School Development Plan designed to secure the wide-spread use of thinking tools across the school. This is an integral part of MWIS's aspirational development framework for continuous whole school improvement. The range of cognitive developments indicates that plans are aspirational and designed to empower children to progressively take ownership of their 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 MWIS 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. For example, Thinking Maps are fully embedded including the highly effective application of the Frame of Reference. Further, Thinking Hats are used for reflection throughout the school. Of particular note, is the innovative customisation of thinking tools. For example, the school has expanded the illustrative format of Thinking Maps to provide further detail and layers of understanding. 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. Thinking tools are integrated into subjects. For example, in Mathematics the flow map is used to focus on key thinking concepts such as

¹⁰ Ibid

¹¹ Ibid

¹² Reflective Proforma School Website and Evidence Platform

retrieval, cognitive agility, fluency, reasoning, problem-solving and reflection. MWIS places a high premium on the mental health of the whole learning community. Collaboration is at the heart of this and 'Teams' have replaced 'Classes' to reinforce this. All curriculum elements provide valuable feedback to parents regarding pupil progress and emotional wellbeing. There is ample provision for pupils who need support, and teachers know the children exceptionally well. The 'Thinking Tool-box' approach is highly effective in terms of developing children's independence by allowing them to choose the most appropriate and supportive strategy. The Drive Team typically focus on what works best, for whom and how. This, aligned to excellent leadership and communication, ensures that good practice is shared judiciously 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 pupils 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

The school's pedagogical approach is informed by ongoing CPD which has metacognitive research as its foundation. Specific research-informed elements include Thinking Maps, Thinking Hats, Thinking Keys, Habits of Mind and P4C. In addition, the school is exceptionally aware of cognitive load theory. 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 MWIS'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 and children routinely develop dialogic growth through pedagogic strategies such as 'Turn to Your Partner'. 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-

¹³ Ibid

¹⁴ Ibid

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. MWIS has clear evidence of developing learning and teaching and the appreciation of elements such as Cognitive Load has shifted practice from a teaching approach to a pedagogical research-informed 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-ordinator 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 tools, strategies and resources for established and newly appointed staff. Training is all-encompassing and includes key elements such as:

- Initial training for new staff
- Familiarisation with accreditation criteria
- Incorporation of the TSAT 'Hubs'
- Developing a Thinking Vision.

There is a highly effective cycle of lesson study in place that centres on core elements. For example, the focus on retrieval practice has been forensic and has addressed 'real' pedagogic issues such as application not developing learning intentions. To further illustrate, retrieval practice techniques not supporting transfer to long-term memory. The impact of taking this approach has been exceptional and pupil interviews show that recall has improved over time such that pupils' knowledge and understanding has grown. The leadership of the school is

¹⁵ Ibid

¹⁶ Reflective Proforma, School Website and Evidence Platform

committed to creating and maintaining world-class teachers. Indeed, MWIS has played a lead role in the international Festival of Metacognition where the school's expertise in self-regulatory learning was show-cased. It is clear that staff model life-long learning and 'Growth Mindset'. The staff teaching resources are aligned to an excellent coaching and mentoring programme. This is highly innovative and takes a holistic approach embracing peer modelling, peer guidance, peer support and peer review. Indeed, training reflections typically focus on 'what went well' and 'even better if..'. The full inclusion of all staff in Thinking Schools training is exemplary. 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 and in the school's communications. Staff are encouraged to work collaboratively and to provide mutual support through the development of thinking generally and also through particular foci such as cognitive load. 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 include internal ongoing practical surveys and judgements that inform next stages in the learning of pupils. Pupil interviews are widely used alongside assessment end-points. The innovative BYBS Journal provides opportunities for children to reflect on the use of thinking tools and also personal, social and emotional development. Reflections are at a class/team level and also individual/self. The Pupil Voice is extremely strong at MWIS and assessments are via interviews, questionnaires and classroom artefacts supplement formal assessment practices. Thinking Hats are also widely used for self-assessment. The 'Gratitude Jar' is used to enable children to reflect on things they are grateful for. Outcomes are routinely shared with teachers and parents. This is another example of exemplary practice. Assessments,

¹⁷ Ibid

including attendance and behaviour, indicate high cognitive and self-perception development together with signposting strategies for further improvement. MWIS may want to consider the use of the Myself as a Learner Scale (MALS) to further add to the already well-developed assessment processes as this has the added quality of 'norms' in order to benchmark cognitive development 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. Outcomes MWIS show marked improvements. Maths results show particular improvement as a result of the focus on a retrieval-based curriculum. Assessments indicate that pupils are well prepared for the next stage of learning. MWIS demonstrates excellent use of qualitative indicators, particularly classroom artefacts and again this is an example of good practice. MWIS 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 Governors about how the development of learning behaviours are associated with positive outcomes for pupils and are associated with high academic outcomes and improved motivation.

The excellent pupil 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, strategies and learning behaviours. MWIS makes excellent evaluative use of learning walks,

¹⁸ Ibid

¹⁹ Reflective Pro-forma, School Website and Evidence Platform

²⁰ Ibid

display standards, surveys, and pupil / staff questionnaires. Other evaluative processes include termly curriculum reviews provided by pupils, parents and middle leaders where the focus is on the quality of learning as a result of Thinking Skills. There is a formal half-termly evaluation of the improvement plan as a whole to further add to the evaluative processes. Pupils are integral to the evaluative process at every level. By way of further development, the SPARE model of Illuminative Evaluation (Action Research) would benefit from dissemination at all levels (from 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 pupil voice features prominently. Evaluative practices make excellent use of thinking tools to evaluate the effectiveness and impact of taking a whole school approach to the teaching of thinking. There is a clear evaluative focus on developing the transfer of thinking skills and strategies and the collaborative nature of learning walks is a model of excellent practice. It is clear that MWIS 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 MWIS 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 laid a strong foundation that ensures the whole school approach to the teaching of thinking flourishes. The 'Learning for Life to be our Best Self' ethos is alive throughout the school and has done much to ensure that learning is an active process. Teachers, pupils and parents combine to effectively promote the educational growth of all children by providing them with ownership

over their own development. Teaching and learning at MWIS has moved from being an educational process to being an exemplary pedagogical culture such that the school stands as a wonderful example of holistic child-centred educational provision.

MWIS is a truly inspirational educational community dedicated to the promotion of lifelong learning. It has carefully developed and nurtured its core values so that they permeate throughout the entire school and beyond. Staff and children think deeply about what they do, and levels of collaboration are exceptional. MWIS places a high premium on continuous whole school development and innovation. This places MWIS at the cutting edge of educational provision. As a result of this high-quality educational provision, all children achieve the highest holistic standards. This has not been at the expense of psychological well-being and the school community interact such that this element flourishes.

Conclusion

The range of evidence submitted undoubtedly indicates that Moorings Way Infant 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 October 2026.

I would like to thank the school for the clear and judicious evidence base, clearly organised around the evaluation rubric, which 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 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 could 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.
- 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.

- MWIS may want to consider the use of the Myself as a Learner Scale (MALS) to further add to the already well-developed assessment processes as this has the added quality of 'norms' in order to benchmark cognitive development outcomes.
- Use the criteria of an Advanced Thinking School to frame future developments, in order to deepen and extend the understanding and expertise of MWIS. 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.



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

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