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Report following the analysis and evaluation of evidence submitted by Westbrook Primary 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

Westbrook Primary School (WPS) is a popular and successful larger than average multi-faith stand-alone academy (568 pupils on roll, 3-11). WPS has higher than national levels of deprivation with a high % of EAL, SEND and FSM/PP. Currently, the school's Ofsted status remains 'Good' despite the significant challenges it faces. For example, many families live in overcrowded accommodation with many living in one room. Refugees with no English attend the school and there is a high staff turnover due to high rents / costs of housing. Indeed, there are currently 6 Early Career Teachers at WPS which is a higher-than-normal number. Despite these significant challenges, WPS is committed to an upward developmental trajectory with a clear mission to develop responsible lifelong learners. The school's mission is 'Aim High, Learn Together, Feel Proud'. This is built on clear aims with the development of metacognitive qualities at the core. The overarching ethos is one of care, compassion and high expectations dedicated to the holistic development of pupil as lifelong learners, equipped for the challenges ahead. This commitment to securing high achievement for all pupils is evidenced in all aspects of school life. WPS is a Maths specialist school and links with parents are exceptional. Indeed, the Thinking Drive Team regularly share feedback from parents and levels of collaboration are exemplary. WPS's curriculum is clearly mapped around giving all students autonomy over their studies together with ownership for their learning. By doing so there is an explicit focus on the development of thinking. Specifically, this involves a clear integration of five elements:

- Thinking Frames/Maps
- Thinking Hats
- Thinkers Keys

- Zones of Regulation
- Higher Order Questioning (based on Bloom's Taxonomy)

WPS keeps abreast of research and evidence and this acts to operationalise the school's mission in a coherent and informed manner.¹

Student progression through phases has high priority at WPS. 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. In addition to this provision, WPS is a centre for vision impairments, the only base in West London.² Achievement continues to rise following a 'dip' as a result of the covid pandemic. 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 pupils' overall development. This would strongly suggest that WPS is an attractive place for children to learn.³ The school's Thinking School journey started many years ago and was based on the firm foundations of significant developments in the area of student attitudes and behaviour. Since then, WPS has gone from strength to strength with its work surrounding metacognitive development and additional foci have been skilfully introduced and embedded.⁴

WPS has a highly effective and well led staff Drive Team comprised of teachers, SLT and higher-level teaching assistants. A significant factor underpinning the high impact of the Drive Team is the full and inspirational support provided by the highly qualified and experienced Headteacher. These factors combine to create consistency of approaches via clear and collaborative leadership.⁵

¹ School's Website and Reflective Proforma

² Ibid

³ Reflective Proforma and Digital Portfolio

⁴ Ibid

⁵ Reflective Proforma and School's Website

Evidence Base

Thinking Schools @Exeter received the school's submission for accreditation from Ms. Amarin Nagra and Mrs. Helen Keane (Drive Team Lead and Assistant Headteacher respectively) evidencing the school's cognitive education development journey and the work that the school had undertaken stemming back to its Thinking School origin, when the focus moved towards embedding metacognitive strategies for learning and improving pupils' ownership of their learning.⁶ The evidence for accreditation is skilfully woven into the reflective proforma and captured clearly in a digital portfolio.⁷ The evidence on the school's website is evidence based and rich in resources. Within each of the metacognitive 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 WPS. Curriculum policy information 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 metacognitive elements and wider curriculum disciplines. Indeed, the school follows the Westbrook Wonder World curriculum which aligns well with the Thinking School approach due to its cross-curricular, skills and knowledge-based features. Pivotal to this is the high premium placed on sharing of best practice across the school to include all staff.⁸

The school provides parents with rich, clear, and helpful information relating to the thinking curriculum through the newsletter, presentations, school website and parents' workshops. Parents also receive weekly 'Big Talk' support materials in order to help children with home-learning with a specific focus on thinking and oral language. This is excellent in terms of outlining the knowledge children need to retain together with guidance on metacognitive strategies to support thinking and learning. Excellent displays around the school further convey WPS's thinking approaches to parents, visitors, and school community in a visual and interactive way. As a

⁶ Reflective Proforma

⁷ Ibid

⁸ Reflective Proforma and School's Website

consequence of these actions, parents are well equipped to support their children's learning at home.⁹

WPS has forged a number of partnerships underpinned by a Thinking Schools focus in order to further disseminate and embed a thinking culture and the school has a firm commitment to raising aspirations through cultural capital in order to develop social mobility and the inclusive ethos of the school. Individualised learning is at the heart of this. Through its connections with a range of stakeholders, WPS 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 WPS having a real thinking environment and culture.¹⁰

Senior Management and Whole School Commitment

The Headteacher 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. This whole school commitment has galvanised WPS's development.¹¹

The Governing Body explicitly supports the thinking ethos in full and demonstrates 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 WPS's curriculum intent and implementation. Governors are kept up to date about the school's approaches to cognitive education, particularly through dedicated Thinking School agenda items. Indeed, one of the Drive Team members is also a Governor.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 and responsibilities are distributed well. The House System is equally effective and has a clear remit so that the student voice is an integral part of the school's development. As a result of the collaborative and collective leadership, the school has great capacity to deliver the

⁹ Ibid

¹⁰ Reflective Proforma, Digital Portfolio and School's Website

¹¹ Ibid

¹² Ibid

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 WPS is receptive to change and innovation. The development of cognitive approaches has been part of the school's vision and drive for improvement for many 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 Thinking Frames/ Thinking Maps).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. The range of cognitive developments indicates that plans are aspirational, designed to empower children to progressively take ownership of their cognitive development. The overarching focus is clearly geared towards transforming the life chances of all pupils.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 WPS. Planning and Drive Team meetings provide an effective springboard for action in order that all lessons include thinking skills. In this regard, the Drive Team 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 pupils 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

¹³ Ibid

¹⁴ Ibid

¹⁵ Ibid

¹⁶ Reflective Proforma, School's Website and Digital Portfolio

¹⁷ Ibid

The school's pedagogical approach is informed by the Bloom's Taxonomy rubric, and this forms the basis of lesson planning. Destination Reader is particularly effective in terms of developing inference and questioning. Extensive CPD provision is focused and is built upon firm metacognitive foundations. Specifically, this includes Thinking Tools and Zones of Regulation. 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 WPS'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 the introduction of pupil Thinking Booklets in order to foster ownership of the application of Thinking Tools. Indeed, children use a range of Thinking Tools independently and, as a consequence, self—regulation is wonderfully developed. 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 WPS 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. Where feasible, the school has personalised and contextualised visual displays, resources, and tools to aid consistency, recognition, and application of Thinking Skills. WPS 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. The pupil voice is extremely strong and pupil focus groups provide a rich source of qualitative feedback. In addition, all medium-term planning has a dedicated Thinking Skills section and End of Unit Reflections provide opportunities for

¹⁸ Ibid

children to use Thinking Hats in order to reflect on the efficacy of their own learning and progress.¹⁹

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 formative cycle of lesson study in place with a clear remit and focus. There are two cycles of peer lesson study per year with clear foci such as the effectiveness of Thinking Frames and cross-curricular writing development. The foci have been formatively designed and have impacted positively on pupils in terms of improved levels of confidence, engagement and understanding. The WPS 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.

Moving forward, training 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. WPS is well placed to adopt this approach as it would extend current practice further towards enabling staff to develop as reflective, researching practitioners.²¹

¹⁹ Ibid

²⁰ Reflective proforma, School's Website and Digital Portfolio

²¹ Ibid

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. The introduction of Thinking Booklets is having an excellent impact in terms of monitoring progression, particularly in relation to Thinking Frames. These align well with the end of unit reflections and the use of Mini Thinking Hats add to this effectively. These alternative forms of assessment are well established and reflect the school's pedagogic foundations, rooted in Bloom's Taxonomy. The overall picture is extremely positive and reflects an equally positive pupil profile gleaned via other indicators. The pupil voice is very much a part of WPS's culture and is intrinsic to securing the holistic learning gains of all children. Thinking Tools are used to structure self-assessment, and this further illustrates that WPS has embedded a whole school thinking approach. Assessments indicate high holistic student development. WPS 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 pupil progress.²³ There is qualitative data about how the development of learning behaviours are associated with positive outcomes for pupils 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.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

²² Ibid

²³ Ibid

²⁴ Ibid

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 development 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 pupils. The innovative Westbrook Wonder World curriculum is a model of excellent leadership and teaching practice, serving to integrate learning, teaching, assessment, evaluation, and metacognitive development. WPS 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 WPS 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. WPS is an inclusive, caring, and inspirational organisation. The school stands as a model exemplary practice for holistic educational provision geared toward the development of lifelong learners. It's long and hard development journey stands as an example of organisational resilience, vision, and belief in achievement for all. WPS is a beacon of metacognitive excellence, and the school is well placed to develop as an Advanced Thinking School due to its clear capacity to support other like-minded schools and educators.

Conclusion

The wide range of evidence submitted undoubtedly indicates that Westbrook Primary School 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 July 2026.

I would like to thank the school for the clear and judicious evidence base that provided the lens through which the excellent practice could be viewed. It has been a pleasure to undertake this review.

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.
- 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.
- WPS 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 WPS. 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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