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Report following the analysis and evaluation of evidence submitted by Cumran Primary School for the purpose of accreditation as an Advanced Thinking School by Thinking Schools @Exeter, School of Education University of Exeter, UK.

Evidence base

The criteria for accreditation as an Advanced Thinking School starts from the assumption that all the criteria for the first level of accreditation by Thinking Schools@Exeter 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. Much of the evidence referenced in this report reflects the significant and sustained progress the school has made in its on-going journey as a thinking and learning community and follows on from the previous accreditation as a level one Thinking School.

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.

The University of Exeter received the school's submission for accreditation as an Advanced Thinking School from Cumran Primary School (CPS) in the form of a Reflective Proforma with evidence links, extensively illustrating the continuing work the school is undertaking as a level 1 Thinking School together with how it has continued to move forward as a level 2 Thinking School. School evidence includes pupils' work, examples of displays and posters, relevant sections of the

school improvement plan, Principal reports, photographs, newsletters, project plans, video evidence, Drive Team documentation, action plans, meetings minutes, learning walks observations, other data. From the evidence provided, it is clear that the school exceeds the Level 1 Thinking School criteria, and the focus of this report will be on continued development of the school on the basis of the level 2 criteria.

Starting point: the school context

CPS is a popular is a popular and average size primary school with 215 pupils on roll. The school has a long history of Thinking School development and accreditation has been at the core of the Thinking School movement for many years.¹ The school has sustained its Thinking School development superbly and has gone from strength to strength by continually refreshing its focus and building progressively on its initiatives. It was awarded Level 1 Thinking School Accreditation in June 2017 and it clear from the evidence provided that CPS has built fully on the recommendations for development arising from this initial evaluation. Indeed, the school has gone well beyond in this respect. CPS is a school where every individual is encouraged to achieve excellence, and this is captured well in its motto 'Look Up and Aim High'. The school's vision is one of 'Learning together in a changing world' and this reflects the collaborative nature of the educational provision embedded in and evidenced in a wide range of exemplar material. These principles are further illustrated in the mission statement and core values. CPS is also developing as a Rights Respecting School and clearly places the individual child at the centre of its work.

In aligning the school's vision and values to a metacognitive developmental process, CPS has ensured that the Thinking Schools approach is a firm and secure part of the learning culture of the entire school. The school achieves excellent pupil outcomes as demonstrated by a wealth of robust indicators. For example, based on GL Assessment statistics, 94.8% of pupils demonstrate expected or higher attainment compared to the national average of 75%. PASS progress data is exceptional and clearly indicates growth in personal attitude and attitude to school as a whole. This is indicative of an educational provision that serves the wider needs of all pupils. CPS is rated 'Outstanding' by its most recent ETI inspection report with key areas such as teaching, leadership/management, and pastoral care receiving particular attention for exceptional quality. CPS is clearly a school that prides itself in achieving and maintaining the highest educational

¹ School's website, reflective proforma and digital evidence

standards. In addition, the school has an excellent reputation for supporting students through its inclusive pastoral system together with an outstanding extra-curricular and enrichment offering. These achievements reflect the school's drive for sustained holistic development, together with an unwavering commitment to lifelong learning for all.²

The school's cognitive education development journey has moved forward unswervingly since its previous accreditation. Subsequently, a clear thread of training has been in place capturing ten pivotal and innovative curriculum areas:

- Shared Education
- Language and Literacy
- Mathematics and Numeracy
- Thinking Skills and Personal Capabilities (TSPC)
- The World Around Us
- Using ICT
- The Arts
- Personal Development and Mutual Understanding
- Physical Education
- Religious Education

Indeed, TSPC principles are fully embedded in the curriculum provision and there is a solid evidence-based developmental foundation. Within this, Thinking Hats, Thinking Frames, Growth Mindset / Dispositional Development, Mrs Potter's Questions (Reflective Learning), Philosophy for Children, and the Question Matrix (Personalised Learning) are skilfully used to further operationalise the school's Thinking School vision. Indeed, parents and carers work form an exceptional partnership with CPS in terms of the teaching and learning provision.³

The school's aims and ethos have a clear focus on excellence for all pupils. What sets CPS aside from many schools, is its emphasis on *how* this is achieved. With reference to this, the school seeks to make learning irresistible by developing children as creative, adaptable, and resilient

² Ibid

³ Digital evidence

thinkers so that they become committed lifelong learners.⁴ CPS has embedded thinking and meta-cognitive approaches in all aspects of school life in order to ensure that its aims and ethos are a reality. High quality CPD has done much to secure a cohesive staff team, and there is a real sense of collaboration at all levels.⁵

Dissemination of practice

For this area of accreditation, we assess the way in which the school can demonstrate evidence of sharing their Thinking Schools practice and experiences across subject areas with others. There is extensive evidence of sharing practice within the school, across subjects and teams, with all sections of staff participating in formal and informal staff training events and programmes. Parents and support staff are fully included via a range of training events. The parent workshops are of particular note and provide high quality input geared towards the holistic development of children. There is ample evidence of effective dissemination of tools, but also a focus on differentiation. There is a rich blend of qualitative data that contributes well to the collaborative dissemination of best practice. This includes casual observations, pupil interviews and vibrant displays. The Thinking School Lead co-ordinates a wealth of training and support and is particularly influential in the dissemination process, including contributing to publications. As a Thinking Schools National Hub School, CPS hosts visits, leads conference sessions (regionally and nationally), together with a wealth of focused support such as being an SEN Hub. Data relating to impact on learning is judiciously collated, evaluated and disseminated. As such, there is a clear whole school understanding of children's learning progress in both qualitative and quantitative domains.

Teachers and support staff are fully involved in dissemination activities. The Teacher Professional Learning sessions are particularly innovative and provide high quality support via short webinars for busy teachers from a wide range of schools. Dissemination also extends to trainee teachers and ETI. Regionally, CPS leads high quality webinars with a Thinking Schools focus and nationally these extend to online Drive Team meetings and conference input. On an international level, the school has led sessions at the BETT conference and is also working in collaboration with educators from the USA. The use of expert groups to share knowledge and expertise is particularly effective

⁴ School's website, reflective proforma and digital evidence

⁵ Ibid

and stands as a model of outstanding practice. As a result, CPS disseminates high impact practice across internal subject areas, the local community, cluster schools, nationally and internationally.

All new staff receive training in theory, pedagogy, and practical approaches relating to Thinking. There is an extensive and innovative range of resources and structures to further support the dissemination of Thinking School approaches and students are pivotal to disseminating best practice. Rigorous timelines ensure that the process of dissemination is planned and actioned effectively. Conferences and associated workshops further add to the school's process of dissemination. In addition, CPS links well with schools nationally and globally through visits and innovative video presentations.⁶

Evaluative research

This area of evaluation is particularly concerned with the ways in which staff are seeking evidence of the positive impact and outcomes of the Thinking Schools approach and how this evidence is used to drive whole school learning and improvement. Based on the evidence of Level 1 and level 2 criteria, there is a continuing and wide-ranging programme of evaluation within the school. This includes specific consideration of the process and impact of initiatives on the learning and development of pupils. Evaluative Research is embedded in the working practices of the entire school. CPS utilises a range of data collection tools including thinking tools audits, focused staff meetings, PASS analysis, and pupil / teacher evaluation of writing folders. The Drive Team play a pivotal role in coordinating data collection and the subsequent analyses. The recent Cycle of Lesson Study has had a focus on the use of questioning. This has led to the development of innovative visual resources such as a Large Questions Matrix, pupil Question Matrix, Spinner Wheels, and a Three-Story Intellect Tool. The Drive Team lead on lesson observations and facilitate evaluative reflective feedback. The proactive involvement of the Student Voice via the School Council ensures that evaluative research has an inductive as well as deductive dimension. PASS is used formatively to inform and evaluate the impact of research-based interventions and this process has undergone astute development. The evaluation of the Engaged Programme is particularly impressive.

Evaluative Research at CPS has clear, succinct parameters outlining what is being studied, who is being studied, together with associated timeframe. This is an excellent example of the school's

⁶ Reflective proforma and digital evidence

commitment to delivering practitioner research excellence. Of particular note, is the regular feedback of evaluations to Governors via presentations. Together, this has done much to secure an ongoing cycle of Thinking School development. Findings from research have directly influenced the work of the CPS Drive Team and staff across the school, and the cycle of Lesson Study feeds into the process well. Quality Assurance and ongoing support is provided extremely effectively by Lorna Gardiner (external consultant) and visits from Lorna are an excellent example of integrating internal and external evaluative processes. Evidence is presented that demonstrates the ongoing collection of data related to Thinking Skills across the school, in particular with respect to how well Thinking Skills are embedded within the school system and what the impact is on pupils and staff. It is clear that there are effective strategies in place across subject areas that encourage and support evaluation and reflective practice of learning and teaching approaches and impact.⁷

The Drive Team provide a skilful and rich representation of expertise from across the school so that new ideas for teaching and learning are explored, researched and, if successful, fed back to the wider staff body. Furthermore, Thinking Skills and dispositional development are part of ongoing evaluations of pupil progress, providing further evidence of the ongoing evaluation of Thinking Skills approaches throughout the school. It is important to note in this respect, that pupils are routinely consulted about what the Thinking Tools mean to them. Another important factor within the continuous evaluation of the outcomes of taking a whole school approach to the teaching of thinking, is the evidence of the development of pupil resilience and self-reflection, as well as a sense of shared responsibility towards one another. The focus on the development of the whole child is a particularly strong aspect of school life at CPS. Evaluation has a focus on impact, and this indicates that the Thinking School approach has a clear impact on the positive learning outcomes and behaviours of the whole school community.⁸

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, it is clear from the school development planning that new members of staff are routinely training in Thinking Skills. CPD has been effectively framed as a

⁷ Reflective Proforma and digital evidence

⁸ Ibid

collaborative process. The highly effective use of Baker Days and School Development Days, where classroom assistants and teachers work in collaboration to further embed metacognitive approaches, stand as a model of professional growth excellence on a school wide level. The clear and integrated curriculum is outstanding. TSPC principles are fully integrated, and this does much to aid the overall coherence of the pedagogical aims. There is an excellent induction programme in place and ensures that professional development opportunities are consistent and well embedded in the culture of the entire school. New staff are automatically trained in all the thinking tools and associated pedagogy. This is wonderfully supplemented by the provision of opportunities to shadow, discuss, and observe lessons conducted by lead practitioners.

The Drive Team Lead evaluates the TSPC action plan annually via the analyses of quantitative and qualitative data. This feeds into high quality targeted professional development activities. Indeed, the Drive Team has an excellent blend of highly skilled leaders and is comprised of the Principal, Vice-Principal, Literacy / SEN Curriculum Leader, and the Drive Team Leader / Thinking Skills Co-ordinator. Together, they provide exceptional leadership and professional development for all staff. Professional development has evolved into a reflective process model based on contextual need and application. The recent Cycle of Lesson Study focus on the effective use of questioning, together with the innovative associated resources, is just one of many high-quality developmental initiatives at CPS. This is evidence of the school's commitment and appreciation of the need to consider the specific setting for educational developments.

CPS has responded to the pandemic with unwavering commitment and resilience in order to keep the professional growth provision moving forward. The evaluation of the Engaged Programme is exceptional in terms of actioning high impact professional growth opportunities. Judicious ongoing evaluative research builds individual strengths and areas for development into whole school planning and actions. The Drive Team has regular focussed meetings with clear development action points that further feed into CPD linked to priorities. CPS provides a range of innovative bespoke resources for staff in order to operationalise the priorities. These excellent resources are supplemented by modelled examples so staff can actually see how they might apply what they have learned in their own classrooms. Pupil feedback plays an intrinsic part on development planning and is used to triangulate reflections, plans and actions. This has allowed the school to focus not so much on the use of specific Thinking Tools, but to provide a strong background and rationale for Thinking across subject areas, which demonstrates an excellent understanding and awareness of Thinking as a pedagogic strategy throughout the school.

Conference input and associated workshops are wonderfully organised and provide a wealth of rich and inspirational opportunities for professional growth. The quality of classroom assistant training is exceptionally high and adds significantly to the overall quality of CPD provision. There is strong evidence of the continued focus of staff on the development of their own knowledge and understanding of Thinking and Thinking Skills approaches in general. Thinking Skills approaches are continually evaluated throughout the school and staff are routinely asked to reflect on their use of Thinking Tools. This again provides strong evidence that the use of Thinking Skills and the language around Thinking is strongly embedded within the school, the teaching practice, and its overall ethos, such that the school's developmental influence is far reaching. It is clear, from the evidence provided relating, that all staff are immediately made aware of this ethos and practice. Importantly, staff are given the time and resources to train and to work with colleagues through cycles of lesson observations. The parent workshops and webinar sessions for partner schools further extend the professional development reach of the school.⁹

Differentiation

This area of accreditation includes the value of thinking tools in the education of specific individuals and groups. This includes a sensitivity to the individual needs of all the children in lessons, and a focus on developing autonomy and individuality in students' approaches to problem-solving. Through thorough and on-going dialogue with pupils, teachers are able to mediate learning such that learning is geared towards the needs of all students at an individual level, regardless of starting point or specific barriers to learning. Weekly and medium-term planning fully embrace differentiation and teaching clearly puts this into practice. As such, CPS has developed a unique culture of personalisation that goes beyond a 'broad-brush' approach to learning and teaching. The Engage Programme and associated evaluative reports indicate high impact with the evaluations spanning whole school impact, individual lesson impact and pupil self-evaluations. In addition, the Gifted and Talented provision is excellent and evidence informed, such that children get personalised support. A variety of Thinking Tools are used adaptively, to suit the abilities of different students, for instance, through the engagement of pupils in taking responsibility for their own development as lifelong learners, skilfully achieved through mediated teaching. Thinking Stories are used to progressively develop pupils' thinking and questioning and school policies reflect a clear commitment to equality, diversity, and inclusion. Progression is clearly mapped via an adaptive and responsive curriculum and all pupils

⁹ Ibid

are encouraged to develop individuality and autonomy. Indeed, the school's most recent inspection further illustrates CPS' personalised approach. For example, the report commends the school's use of Thinking Frames and associated rubrics for self-assessment. Pupil support is also highly personalised and adds significant value to the educational provision at CPS. Resources are carefully differentiated in order to enable all children to access tasks and displays are used actively to promote discussion related to the identification of thinking processes. Pupils choose their own Thinking Hat for reflection on their work and verbal self-assessment provides an inclusive mechanism for enabling all students to access the reflective process. This means that Thinking Strategies underpin the personal learning targets and behavioural goals of all pupils. The Pupil Voice is a strong part of the learning culture of the school and means that teachers can identify what works best, for whom, under what circumstances, how and why.¹⁰

Whole School assessment

This aspect of the accreditation relates to pupils' and teachers' reflections upon their own and others' performance via assessment procedures, as well as critical reflection on Thinking Tools. Whole school assessment policy and practice are a core strength of the school. The policy clearly integrates a range of Thinking Tools and approaches with self/peer reflections. Peer and self-assessment are exceptional and embedded in the culture of the school such that these qualities are nurtured and flourish. The formative use of PASS provides an annual baseline from which progress can be monitored and the Engage Programme assessment/evaluation process dovetails well with this. The Mourne Construction Company project has PASS assessment built in, together with progress tests in literacy and numeracy. This is an excellent example of how assessment is the servant rather than the master of the curriculum. Assessments again indicate high impact. Thinking tools such as Thinking Maps and Thinking Hats are also used effectively for assessment and evaluation purposes.

Evidence is sought for the reflective processes of staff through the emphasis of developing as a researching professional. Staff approach curriculum developments evidence informed reflections that focus on key questions relating to taking thinking approach in this respect. Pupils are encouraged to find meaning in a variety of thinking approaches such that they see the relevance and point of developing them. Assessment and evaluative information are shared school-wide in order to strengthen the consistency of effective teaching and learning strategies. A clear line of

¹⁰ Ibid

pupil feedback has been highly effective in identifying learning needs from the children's perspective. Parents are also involved in the monitoring process. They are supported well by the school and add significant value to the educational provision at CPS. CPS goes beyond using assessment as a summative indicator towards using it as a formative tool to support and enhance pupils' learning. At each juncture the aim of the school is to secure full and effective learning for all pupils. Staff are encouraged to reflect on the use of Thinking Tools and strategies and evidence demonstrates continuous reflection on the implementations, use, and impact of Thinking Tools.

Overall, it is clear that there are continuous formal and informal critical evaluations of Thinking Skills, Approaches and Tools taking place throughout CPS, which include a wide variety of stakeholders. This is a clear indicator of the way in which a culture of thinking is fully embedded within the school.¹¹

Points for further consideration

CPS has responded well to the points for further consideration suggested in the previous accreditation report. The developments relating to higher order questioning and Philosophy for Children are good examples of this and evidence informed reflections (in line with Action Research principles) are part of professional growth. I conclude my evaluation with some suggestions as to how the school could continue to develop as a Thinking School and possibly inform a development workshop to further aid action planning. This might include:

- Consider the work of Project Zero, particularly the research and materials by Ron Ritchhart as these provide a rich source of classroom ideas and real-time dynamic assessment practices to compliment the already excellent practice at CPS.
- Further develop evaluative research and align action research to the SPARE model. 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 Intent, Implementation and Impact approach to curriculum development given the alignment of PAR to Intent, Implementation and Impact. The addition of the Setting (S) and Evaluation (E) would enhance current practice without having to re-invent it.

¹¹ Reflective proforma and digital evidence

- Continue to use the criteria of an Advanced Thinking School to frame future developments, in order to deepen and extend the understanding and expertise of CPS. 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, under what circumstances, how and why.
- Consider the further development of pupil and staff reflections via reflective journals. These may add to the already excellent data sources and also supplement the exceptional assessment and evaluation practices.

Outcome

The substantive evidence provided by CPS creates a very clear picture of a Thinking School in which Thinking Skills are at the heart of school life. CPS is an inspirational school. It brings its vision and values into every corner of educational provision. The school's commitment to continually developing as a Thinking School is modelled brilliantly and has influenced a number of schools locally, regionally, nationally, and internationally. The fully inclusive collaborative approach to leadership, teaching and learning is exceptional and stands as a model of exemplary practice for other to emulate. The school is a learning community in every sense and has managed to bring a whole school approach to the teaching of thinking to life. As such, the whole learning community develop as holistic lifelong learners in an ongoing way. CPS is clearly evidence-informed, and this is illustrative of a school that is committed to the highest standards of educational provision for all children. High achievement and the wellbeing of both pupils and staff flourish. It has been a pleasure to review the progress of the school. In conclusion, the application has provided compelling and comprehensive evidence for accreditation, and I therefore recommend that accreditation as an Advanced Thinking School be awarded until July 2026. Congratulations to Cumran Primary School for an exceptional achievement!



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

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