

Level Two Criteria - Advanced Thinking School

The criteria for accreditation as an *'Advanced Thinking School'* starts from the assumption that all the criteria for the first level of accreditation by the University of Exeter's Thinking Schools @Exeter continue to be met within the ongoing practices of the community. The second level of evaluation further assumes, therefore, that the original criteria for recognition as a *'Thinking School'* have now become so embedded that staff and students alike 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 at large ('the big picture').

With this in mind the focus for this second level of evaluation now turns towards the presentation of evidence as to how the school has moved forward in seeking to achieve those aims. Evidence will be sought of the 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* are proposed: Dissemination of Practice; Evaluative Research; Professional Development; Differentiation; and Whole School Assessment practices. There are a number of criteria to be met in each area which are outlined below:

Dissemination of Practice

The school can show evidence of sharing practice and experience of the Thinking Schools project across internal subject areas; in their local community with cluster schools; with feeder/receiving schools in the area; and by developing working and/or supporting relationships with other schools within the national and international Thinking Schools project, etc.

(This may be achieved by means of 'Twilight' sessions; ongoing internal training; shared projects; exchange visits; via internet; presentations to parents, governors and interested parties such as local psychological services and other support professionals; presentations at national and international conferences, etc.).

The school should be actively seeking ways to encourage past students and/or receiving schools to continue their students' use and development of thinking tools in different school environments.

Evidence may be shown by contributed articles about best practice in publications (e.g. school magazine; local newspaper; school website; and professional publications such as Teaching Times and the TES).

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Evaluative Research

Members of staff are encouraged to seek evidence of positive outcomes by demonstrating that they are working towards pursuing a higher academic degree and/or conducting action research about the thinking project, either collaboratively or individually, for the purpose of enhancing the whole school's learning.

The school can show evidence of collecting ongoing data drawn from across the whole thinking project that demonstrates that the use of the tools are fully embedded in the school system, and are having an impact on the following: the whole community and the individuals within the community – staff and students. There is evidence to show that teachers are sensitive to all aspects of their students' development: a) cognitive, b) social and c) emotional. That is:

Cognitive/intellectual in terms of how students are applying thinking tools in all curricular subjects. (This may also relate to raised attainments in public examinations or by means of standardised tests).

(Is there evidence that students are encouraged to select their own tools to solve a problem, or are they still relying on the teacher to select a plan for them? Are they flexible in their thinking? That is, have they been given sufficient opportunities to explore their own developing ideas, to be creative, to take risks? Have the tools and the cross-fertilisation of tools been effective in helping students develop a better understanding of how and where different tools can be helpful to their learning in different context. Is the level of questioning and discourse by both teachers and students at a consistently high level in terms of Bloom's revised taxonomy?)

Social/collaborative in terms of how well students work together; respect each other's strengths and weaknesses; care for one other; support one another.

(Have they developed an automatic sense of shared responsibility towards one another, the community of the school and the wider community? Is the level of bullying within the school minimal or non-existent? Is there evidence that students are developing the skills of good citizenship? Are they given the opportunity to share and exchange their opinions through discussion outside of formal lessons, and do they listen to, and respect one another's opinions?).

Emotional/affective in terms of students' developing attitudes to new or challenging topics/situations/problems; their interest in the world around them; their level of (intrinsic) motivation, self-belief, self-expectation and optimism about the future.

(Do the students' attitudes reflect a positive response to new and unfamiliar challenges? Do they persist in the face of adversity? Do they demonstrate self confidence in their abilities? Do they show pride in their accomplishments? Do they show pride and pleasure in their peers'

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accomplishments and those of their school? Are they encouraged to constantly reflect on their learning and celebrate their achievements?

The school can demonstrate outcomes evidence of such changes by means of a wide range of assessment and evaluation tools, information about which can be obtained from Thinking Schools @Exeter.

Professional development

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

- Technical:

Are new members of staff automatically trained in all the thinking tools utilised throughout the school?

Have new members of staff, after training, had sufficient opportunity to shadow, discuss and observe lessons conducted by more experienced practitioners in the school?

Has the lead team continued meeting regularly since their first level of accreditation as a thinking school?

Can they produce evidence to show where and how the project has developed in the intervening period since accreditation through discussion and collaboration, possibly by incorporating new approaches to complement those already being used?

- Qualitative:

The effectiveness of any 'Thinking School' will depend as much upon the quality of the teachers (as mediators) as upon the thinking tools that are applied. Even the best tools will be ineffective unless they are well taught. Therefore, after having acquired technical skills in the introduction and application of a range of thinking tools, teachers moving to an advanced level should be considering the quality of their professional practice as the key factors in their students' reflection on what they have gained from ongoing INSET courses or conferences will be very helpful in this respect.

Across the school, are there clear indications that the vast majority of the teachers strive to make their lessons meaningful and relevant to their students; allocated homework is mainly perceived by the students as serving a useful purpose; the majority of students in all classes can demonstrate that they understand why they are doing a particular lesson or task and are willingly involved in doing so; the students can relate what they are doing to previous tasks and future demands and/expectations; the tasks are set at a level that is not too easy and not too difficult (i.e. they are challenging) for most of the students; a significant amount of time

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is allocated at the end of each lesson to reflect on what has been learnt and why this is important; the level of discourse between adults and children is friendly, respectful, supportive and intellectually stimulating.

Differentiation

The school can provide evidence of the value of thinking tools in the education of specific individuals and groups.

With regard to individual students, the teachers should demonstrate in the quality of their interaction that they are sensitive to the individual needs of all the children in their care, across the ability range; actively encourage individuality and autonomy in each child's approach to problem-solving; organise tasks and activities in such a way as to enable every child to draw upon their thinking tools and skills in order to participate at their optimum level.

With regard to groups, evidence should be available to show how the thinking tools have played a significant part in meeting the needs of children with general learning difficulties specific learning difficulties (dyslexia, dyspraxia, dyscalculia) specific gifts or talents, different cultural and language backgrounds, social, emotional and behavioural difficulties.

Whole school assessment practices

Approaches to assessment at every level need to have advanced to reflect the nature of ongoing self-reflection that the cognitive approach to learning demands. In the main, this relates to pupils' and teachers' reflections upon their own and others' and peer formative assessment procedures, as well as critical reflection on the very tools themselves. If such approaches as 'Habits of Mind' and/or 'Building Learning Power' have been introduced, then these self/peer reflections should also include a focus upon the students' developing dispositions. Staff will also be expected to be giving constant thought to their own professional satisfaction and areas in need of further development.