

Report by Dr Judith Kleine Staarman on the application of Barton Court Grammar School to be re-accredited as an Advanced Thinking School by Thinking Schools @Exeter, University of Exeter.

Evidence base

The criteria for accreditation as an 'Advanced Thinking School' starts from the assumption that all criteria for the first level of accreditation by Thinking Schools @Exeter continue to be met within the ongoing practices of the school community. The second level of evaluation further assumes that the original criteria for recognition as a 'Thinking School' have 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 Barton Court Grammar School has made in its on-going journey as thinking and learning community and follows on from the previous accreditation as an Advanced Accredited Thinking School.

The focus for this advanced level of re-evaluation will be on the presentation of evidence of how the school has continued to move forward in developing and sustaining itself as an Advanced Thinking School. Evidence has been sought on teaching and support staff's skills as reflective practitioners; their impact on the overall development of the students beyond their technical skills in the use of the tools; and the continuing impact of teaching thinking 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 to staff, students and beyond; Evaluative Research of Thinking Skills; Professional Development of staff; Differentiation; and Whole School Assessment.

The University of Exeter received the school's submission for accreditation as an Advanced Thinking School from Barton Court Grammar School in the form of a reflective proforma and evidence presented in the form of a digital 'Evidence Wheel', which includes a wealth of evidence related to the schools continuing journey as an Advanced Thinking School.

Evidence includes examples of reflection documents, research reports, student work and other data, along with many other forms of evidence. From the wide range of evidence provided, it is clear that the school has continued to operate at an Advanced Thinking School Level since the previous Advanced Thinking School accreditation and is continuing to lead the way as an Advanced Thinking School.

The school context

Barton Court Grammar School was first accredited as a Thinking School in 2015, having started their journey as a Thinking School in 2012, when a Drive Team was established, and various thinking tools were introduced subsequently. The school was accredited as an Advanced Thinking School in 2017 and aims for the school included to develop their progress as a Thinking Hub for Kent and Medway and further afield, to further embed thinking tools throughout the school and to further develop a thinking ethos in relation to differentiation. It is clear from the evidence presented that Barton Court Grammar School has continued to develop a culture of thinking in the school and, as an Advanced Thinking School, their ethos is carried out at every opportunity, for instance via the school website, which very clearly displays the school's Thinking School ethos and provides excellent information about the journey as an Advanced Thinking School, tools used and how these benefit student learning.

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. The evidence shared by the school in relation to dissemination of practice is impressive, and it is clear that the school's practice and ethos is shared widely - internally, between staff and students, as well as regionally, nationally and internationally. All new staff are strongly inducted into the Thinking Schools programme and the school has established a

Thinking School Protocol, which sets out expectations around the use of Thinking Skills and development of Teaching Thinking for staff. Staff development is used effectively to develop the knowledge and understanding of staff around thinking skills and it is clear from examples from a range of departments that thinking tools are used very effectively across the school and staff are actively encouraged to share best practice across the school and these sharing mechanisms have been formalised in staff development protocols. In addition, staff are encouraged to engage in research related to Thinking Skills and outcomes and findings are presented back to the rest of the staff. In this respect, active collaborations with university researchers ensure that staff not only develop the technical and practical knowledge around Thinking Skills, but also develop a wider conceptual and theoretical understanding of thinking and learning.

There is ample evidence of disseminating practice to students, not only in terms of enrichment programmes and information, but also by providing excellent opportunities to include student voice and representation. The student drive team meets regularly with the staff drive team and with senior leadership and students are actively engaged in school improvement. Displays and student work demonstrate the Thinking Ethos throughout the school and in all departments and students are not only able to technical skills in using the thinking tools offered, but they demonstrate a high level of sophistication in using the various tools, which indicates they have internalised the tools and understand how to use and adapt them to best effect. The school's Thinking Ethos is similarly shared beyond the school walls, in communications with parents, governors and the wider school community, as well as within the Multi-Academy Trust of which it is the lead school. Barton Court Grammar School is actively supporting feeder schools and other schools within the trust, by disseminating their Thinking Ethos and supporting the development of thinking skills. Furthermore, the school has hosted an impressive number of international visits, sharing their best practice with educators around the world. The dissemination of practice, and in particular of the Thinking Ethos, across and beyond the school is undoubtedly one of the strong points of Barton Court Grammar School and they clearly indicate the schools leading role as an Advanced Thinking School.

Evaluative research

This area of evaluation is particularly concerned with the ways in which staff is seeking evidence of positive outcomes of the Thinking Schools approach and how this evidence is used to develop whole-school learning. A range of evidence of evaluative practices and outcomes is shared using the evidence wheel and Padlet and the school uses a range of data to evaluate and substantiate decision making. Data includes staff feedback on the use of thinking tools, student attainment and behaviour data and, interestingly, student drive team learning journals, which allow students to reflect on thinking tools used in lessons. Staff also engaged in Action Research projects, which not only enable staff to study and reflect on a range of key issues, but have enabled the whole school to collect evidence and disseminate findings to support whole-school learning.

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 various departments and data is used consistently to drive school improvement and teacher development, for instance through the use of MALS, which has informed the school's Learning to Learn programme. Student wellbeing surveys are regularly administered, and results help staff to identify and act upon potential barriers to learning for students.

While it is clear that the school utilises an extensive and systematic programme of evaluation across all aspects of the school, and there is extensive evidence of schemes of work and outcomes, one area to develop further would be around staff collaborative and reflective practice, for instance in the form of a more embedded programme of Lesson Study, which allow staff to systematically develop, evaluate and share best practice in a non-threatening, collaborative and reflective manner.

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, new staff receive training in the use of thinking tools and strategies related to these and are provided with extensive information about the school's Thinking Ethos. Teacher trainees from local universities and internationally

are taught in the schools Thinking Approaches and are invited to observe and discuss lessons conducted by members of staff in the school. Staff development is being used effectively to help introduce and support new thinking tools, and this programme of work is extended to parents and carers, who are also offered training in approaches to thinking used in the school. Staff are kept up to date throughout the year with various enrichment days, and an extensive programme of professional development throughout the year, which is monitored through the METAL programme. Staff seem well-supported in their professional development and it is clear that the programme of support and enrichment has led to a high level of knowledge, expertise and skills around Thinking Skills and strongly contribute to the school's Thinking Ethos, by ensuring a common language of thinking throughout the school. There is extensive evidence of novel and in-depth use of thinking tools which demonstrates a sophisticated understanding of staff around the role and function of the various thinking tools used within the school.

Differentiation

This area of accreditation includes an evaluation of the value of thinking tools in the education of specific individuals and groups and the way in which the school harnesses the strengths of Teaching Thinking for ensuring the individual needs of all pupils are met. This also includes a focus on developing autonomy and individuality in students' approaches to problem solving. From the extensive evidence of student work, it is clear that students at Barton Court Grammar School have an excellent understanding of thinking tools. The tools and approaches to thinking are continuously modelled by staff and management and students are encouraged to use Thinking Tools such that it helps them to participate effectively in lessons across the school. Through CPD, staff is being encouraged to evaluate the needs of all learners, and to support learners in a wide variety of ways, including through diversifying lesson planning, scaffolding and content. The school effectively uses wellbeing surveys to identify potential barriers to learning and a number of projects have taken place to enhance student engagement and achievement. In addition, there is a well-established gifted and talented programme to support more able students in the school.

Whole School assessment

This aspect of the accreditation relates to pupils' and teachers' reflections upon their own and others' and peer formative assessment procedures, as well as critical reflection on Thinking Tools. Barton Court Grammar School engages in a continuing formal and informal programme of critical evaluations of thinking skills, teaching and dissemination practices, and student wellbeing and achievement. In this process, students are seen as stakeholders, and are actively included in critical evaluations and are given a clear voice in evaluating and reflecting upon their use of thinking tools. Clear areas for development are set out in the school's development plans and the Evidence Wheel, along with other indicators is an excellent example of the way in which the school is demonstrating its whole school assessment processes, allowing the school to identify targets and evaluate systematically whether the targets have been completed.

Points for further consideration

The submitted evidence has enabled the accreditor to identify the following areas for further consideration during the 3-year period of accreditation. Thinking Schools @Exeter would welcome your response to these points and whether they might provide the focus of the support visit from a member of our team at a time to be mutually agreed.

- To consider developing a more robust framework of developing staff's reflective practice, either by more systematic uses of the Lesson Study approach (and developing and sharing evidence of engaging in these practices) or by expanding the already existing Action Research practice. Having said that, Action Research can be demanding for staff, while Lesson Study is a more accessible and possibly collegial approach.
- The school has presented their evidence using innovative methods (evidence wheel, padlet) which indicates a good understanding of the potentials of technology. The school might want to consider further how technology can be harnessed to develop a Thinking-based pedagogy.

- To further develop staff's knowledge and meta-awareness of underlying cognitive principles and processes, that underpin the Thinking Tools – this would allow staff to develop their own Thinking pedagogy/ curriculum, and to think more critically about 'how' thinking tools actually help students to learn. It will help staff to move from being a 'thinking tool user' to becoming a 'thinking tool creator' and will further enhance their abilities to reflect on the use of thinking tools and make informed decisions about which tools to use in relation to context and purpose.

Outcome

Barton Court Grammar School was first accredited as a Thinking School in 2015, and it has made great strides in its continuing journey as an Advanced Accredited Thinking School. The school's Thinking Ethos is carried out throughout the school, and the student and staff Drive Teams and school leadership have developed very strong Thinking practices. There is an extensive programme of staff development, evaluation and in particular dissemination, and the school is a strong example of how the Thinking Ethos can be disseminated and how Thinking Skills can be harnessed to support not only student learning, but also staff development and how it can be used effectively to inspire teachers around the world.

The application of Barton Court Grammar School has provided comprehensive and compelling evidence for accreditation as an Advanced Thinking School, until February 2024. I would like to thank Barton Court Grammar School for their commitment to Thinking Schools, the extensive evidence provided and I would like to congratulate the school for an outstanding achievement.

 :aarman

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