

Report by Professor Lena Green on the application of Roedean School (Junior & Senior) to become accredited as an Advanced Thinking School by Thinking Schools @Exeter, University of Exeter.

Introduction

Roedean School has systematically worked towards accreditation of the entire school as a Thinking School. In 2015 and 2016 the two sections of the Junior School were accredited and in 2017 the Senior School was accredited. Thereafter the Junior School was re-accredited in 2018. This application for advanced accreditation refers to both Junior and Senior schools.

The requirement to complete the first part of the Reflective Proforma (Being a Thinking School) has been met by providing fairly brief information in response to Proforma items, supplemented by cross references to updated information related to the criteria that define a Thinking School, a choice that demonstrates flexibility in the school's understanding of the criteria. The additional section for Advanced Accreditation addresses each of the required sections.

School context (as provided in previous reports dated March 2015, March 2016, May 2017 and October 2018)

Roedean School, Johannesburg, was founded in 1903 as a sister school to Roedean, Brighton, UK and values its tradition. Its founding values are Truth, Honour, Freedom and Courtesy and its current thrust is captured by the repeated phrase 'Inspiring a Life of Significance'. It retains a commitment to the Anglican Church, but diversity is encouraged. Strategic planning in 2014 refers, inter alia, to academic excellence, outstanding facilities, creative curriculum and teaching and nurturing/mentoring of both girls and teachers. There are currently approximately 800 girls at the school in classes from Grade 0 to Grade 12, grouped as follows: Grades 0-3, (St Margaret's), Grades 4-7 (Upper Junior School) and Grades 8-12 (Senior School). Each group has its own leader/head but there is emphasis on retaining a sense of the continuity of the school as a whole.

As explained in previous reports, Roedean's Thinking School journey was initiated in 2009 and in 2010 staff explored a number of ways of actively addressing thinking. In 2011 and 2012, after consultation with teachers, it was decided to make Habits of Mind the 'umbrella' framework. Thinking Maps were added to the staff's repertoire in 2013 and Six Thinking Hats in 2014. Most of the staff training has involved teachers from both the Junior and Senior sections of the school. A variety of other ideas for enhancing thinking have also been introduced, notably the Harvard Visible Thinking tools, together with the development and deepening of understanding of the selected overarching framework (Habits of Mind) which is now well established. Despite recent

unexpected leadership changes at the school, the Coordinator and Drive Team have kept the Thinking School journey on track.

Level 1: Evidence that the school is an established 'Thinking School'

Students are made aware of the school's identity as a Thinking School by their teachers (who at times offer explicit lessons on thinking skills and regularly integrate thinking skills and strategies in the course of their teaching, and by the admirable and appropriately more playful activities of the Student Drive Team (Criterion 4), both of which are supported by the planning and monitoring provided by the Junior and Senior School Drive Teams. Student awareness is further enhanced through Assemblies that focus on thinking, opportunities for both oral and written reflection and by means of student surveys (Criterion 10). For example, each class in the Senior School provides formal feedback on the teaching and learning of each subject, including reference to thinking skills and strategies.

Teachers are informed about what it means to be a Thinking School via staff meetings and Google Classroom (Criteria 3-9, 11-12) and are aware of the school's formal commitment (re-affirmed in this application). (Criteria 1 & 2). The status accorded to the Coordinator, (Criterion 3), her competence and her training (Criterion 8) are obvious within the school. Staff Training in Habits of Mind, Thinking Maps and Thinking Hats has been provided for several years and continues to be updated and extended. (Criterion 6). In addition, the notion of a Growth Mindset is well established in the school. Comparatively recently several groups of teachers have completed the Harvard Visible Thinking online course and the portfolio includes examples of the effective use of a number of Visible Thinking strategies in, for example, Senior School Mathematics, Music and English lessons and also with preschoolers in Grade 0.

Training is supplemented by demonstration lessons and, when time permits, group discussions. New staff members are given introductory workshops but it is acknowledged that this is an area that needs further attention, particularly since several experienced teachers are expected to retire in the near future. Teachers cannot fail to be aware that they are expected to integrate thinking skills and thinking vocabulary into their lessons as this is explicitly required in their written planning. Flexibility is valued, and teachers are encouraged to tailor their cognitive input to suit the subject, their students and their personal teaching strengths. As one teacher commented, "We are given more flexibility in terms of HOW we implement the cognitive education programme and it can take many different forms in different subjects". Teachers are also involved in SWOT analyses and surveys, in which a significant concern appears to be difficulty in finding time for sufficient staff collaboration and discussion.

Teachers are encouraged to join the Drive Team (Criterion 4), which operates overall and also separately as both Junior School and Senior School teams, all of which have regular scheduled meetings, of which the minutes provide evidence of lively and insightful discussion, including a concern regarding how best to collect evidence of being a Thinking School.

Staff are aware of the commitment of the school leadership and Board to developing Roedean as a Thinking School through the acknowledged policy of the school, the emphasis on training and support, and the inclusion of the explicit teaching of thinking as an item in performance review documents. Current staff recognize that explicit attention to thinking has become embedded as a school value and practice – to the extent that cognitive education was recently considered by staff to be a non-negotiable when planning a new curriculum.

Parents (Criteria 1-2) are kept informed by articles in the school magazine, parent handouts, parent evenings and by their daughters. The Drive Team is aware that greater parent involvement is desirable and is actively seeking ways to achieve this. The wider school community (Criterion 15) is involved through liaison with Thinking Schools South Africa, for which several teachers at Roedean are trainers.

Students' lessons and assessment tasks frequently include reference to thinking strategies (Criterion 5). For example, a Grade 12 Science examination paper includes guidance about the selection and use of relevant Habits of Mind when answering questions. Examples of lesson plans include mention of the thinking strategies that will be introduced, although there is not always insightful post-lesson comment on their use. Some teachers, however, definitely use the lesson planning and reflection form as a tool for personal learning and there is evidence of teacher collaboration across subject areas and of their perception that this is a valuable activity. Opportunities to discuss and review thinking tools and strategies exist, but staff note that time is a significant constraint (Criteria 12 & 13). Success in the final matriculation examination is an important learning outcome and in 2019 the school achieved outstanding results (Criterion 11) which are likely to reflect the quality of teaching, and the role of thinking skills, but if the two are truly integrated it may be difficult to tease out their relative impact.

Recent examples of teacher lessons and reflections from the Senior School include a range of subjects, for example, Afrikaans, Accounting, Computer Skills, Dramatic Arts, Economic & Management Studies and English. In a few cases the reflections simply describe what happened in the lesson. However, the majority of examples suggest explicit references in lessons to one or more of Habits of Mind; Thinking Maps; 'Bloom's levels'; Thinking Hats; and Thinking Routines, either as recommendations to students or as integrated aspects of teachers' pedagogy. There were also some references to practices such as discussion and learner reflection. My impression was that teachers do apply what they have internalized about explicitly teaching thinking but do not always find it easy to articulate what they do in cognitive terms.

Junior school examples include accounts of lessons in Mathematics, Music, reading, creative writing, elementary Science, Technology, certain Habits of Mind and metacognition in classes ranging from Grade 0 to Grade 7. Teachers referred to various Thinking Routines, Thinking Maps, Thinking Hats and Habits of Mind, although at times it seemed they were not clear about 'Dimensions of growth'. One teacher commented with insight that "This experience also made me aware of how important it is for me to understand the full purpose of the Thinking Maps

before assigning it to the girls to use” and occasionally teachers used the Maps in ways not quite as Hyerle originally envisaged. Their creativity is to be commended but it would be wise to take care not to obscure the original focus.

As a Level 1 Thinking School Roedean has already for some years reached out to *the wider school community* through its social responsibility programme, to which a cognitive dimension has sometimes been added, and through its direct involvement in the development of Thinking Schools.

Level 2: Evidence that the school displays the characteristics of an Advanced Thinking School

Assessment of thinking skills (also Criterion 10)

The school is experimenting with two formal assessment strategies. Some time ago a Habits of Mind pre and post test assessment was carried out but students tended to rate themselves unreasonably highly. After consultation with James Anderson it was concluded that the girls did not fully understand the Habits involved and further testing was postponed. More recently all the Grade 8s (first year of high school) completed a pretest and will be retested at the end of their Grade 9 year. A version with language adapted for the upper Junior School has been created but has not yet been implemented. Secondly, the MALS has been administered and, perhaps not surprisingly, academic self-concept scores have been found to correlate positively with overall grades. Links are provided as instructed.

There is evidence that the Drive Team and Coordinator are committed to exploring assessment options. Students completed an ‘in house’ questionnaire about the explicit cognitive education lessons in 2019 and teachers completed a 2019 survey of their perceptions of themselves as confident to teach thinking, and of Roedean as a facilitative context. Responses to the latter indicated that demonstration ‘thinking lessons’ were highly valued. Proposals were made by teachers for more sharing of best practice, more mutual observation, greater clarity re how different practices to develop thinking relate to each other, and more discussion re how to incorporate in all subjects, suggesting that teachers at this school are well aware of what is needed in order to enrich their practice. As one teacher commented, “The buy-in (as a teacher) as an individual empowers one in the class room and teacher activities, but also in a personal capacity.” Teachers regularly complete lesson planning and reflection templates that constitute a possible source of qualitative evidence of teacher insights, strengths and needs.

It is a challenge for most schools to identify ways of meaningfully yet rigorously assessing growth as a thinker, or as a teacher of thinking. The quality of thinking is difficult to measure. Academic achievement, although an important criterion, is influenced by the quality of teaching, which is high at this school, and the quality of examinations. The MALS Scale addresses academic self-concept but, unless it has been re-normed, it has a limited age-range. The Myself as Thinker Scale

seems a more promising instrument, assuming it has been fully developed as a measure of thinking.

The school has identified the LAST (Looking At Student Thinking) protocol as a relatively non-threatening qualitative strategy to help teachers and students identify and interpret thinking patterns and habits, but this has not yet been implemented. Once teachers are experienced in its use it might prove to be a valuable source of data.

Cycle of lesson study

Teachers at Roedean are regularly expected to plan lessons carefully in terms of curriculum content and pedagogy, to nurture Habits of Mind and to select appropriately from a repertoire of thinking skills and strategies including, but not limited to, Habits of Mind, Thinking Maps and Thinking Routines. Until recently, review of the explicit cognitive dimensions of lessons was by means of an after-the-event form (white front cover) completed by individual teachers after self-selected lessons. There was no formal structure by which the mediation of thinking skills and strategies was explicitly linked to the mastery of curriculum content. An adapted version of the strategy (Thinktrack) developed by the Harvard group, a draft of which is included in the portfolio, is under construction and will be piloted in 2020 in both senior and junior schools.

The draft Thinktrack form consists of a cycle involving both planning and reflection sections, the latter to be applied to further planning, and covers both thinking processes and curriculum content. Teachers in the same Department will be expected to plan and review collaboratively rather than individually. This valuable initiative, which is comprehensive and thought provoking, is likely to benefit from some simplification after piloting.

School data

Success in the final matriculation examination is an important learning outcome and in 2019 the school achieved outstanding results (Criterion 11) which are likely to reflect the quality of teaching over the past few years, and also the influence of a school-wide emphasis on thinking. The Executive Head, Ms Fiona Rogers, was quoted in a national newspaper as saying that she was proudest of the fact that the successful 2019 results included girls who had “struggled academically throughout their high school careers”, which may be evidence of the power of a growth mindset plus a repertoire of thinking ‘tools’. There was no mention of any other assessment findings at the school that might relate in some way to the introduction of thinking skills and strategies.

School development planning past and present

There is a history over the past eight years of planning for development and growth as a Thinking School under the committed leadership of Dr Sonja Vandeleur, the Cognitive Education Coordinator.

The school setting has been fully described in previous applications and is briefly described in the Reflective Proforma document. The school is consistently represented as a well-resourced

context in which the active teaching of thinking is likely to flourish, not least because of the energy and commitment of the Coordinator.

Plans for the Thinking School journey have been systematically developed and revised over the years. Current planning includes deepening of teacher understandings and encouragement of teacher ownership of a range of cognitive education practices, together with further outreach to parents, visibility in the public sphere through the ICOT Conference 2020, succession planning taking into account anticipated retirements, including that of Dr Vandeleur at the end of 2011, and application for Advanced Accreditation in 2020. Actions to date include ongoing teacher development initiatives, curriculum revision, investigation of new ways of assessing thinking, numerous activities associated with the International Conference on Thinking (ICOT) 2020, the identification of certain measurable success criteria and the submission of this application.

Dissemination

Within the school new teachers attend workshops and are mentored, and thinking skills and strategies feature on the agendas of staff and HOD meetings. Parents are informed via newsletters and magazines and at specific events. Within the education community Roedean staff members offer training for Thinking Schools South Africa in different parts of the country. Certain staff members present at conferences (such as ICOT 2018 in Miami and ICOT 2020 in Johannesburg). Dr Vandeleur, who is a member of the ICOT 2020 organizing and scientific committee, recently presented a talk in Norrkoping, Sweden, which can be viewed on YouTube, and she has published initial results of research using the MALS.

Conclusion

The portfolio is extremely thorough and well provided with links. Its structure was not immediately apparent but emerged as one engaged with the material. There was some unnecessary repetition at times, for example, in the four PowerPoint presentations submitted. Repetition could be in part attributable to misinterpretation of the Exeter University website instructions, which it may be worth reviewing.

The portfolio highlights the fact that the Thinking Schools journey has no fixed end point but consists of repeated cycles of growth. Although thinking skills and strategies are embedded in teachers' practice, some teachers at Roedean are not yet able to articulate and write about their practice in fluent cognitive terms and at least one acknowledged that she/he needed a better understanding of a particular strategy. Teachers know, however, what is needed and have made insightful recommendations for training, stressing the need for regular collaborative dialogue. The value of cognitive education is widely recognized and teachers are motivated to continue to develop and extend their skills. Their involvement in action research of their own practice might be an appropriate growth experience and a valuable source of data.

I thank Exeter University and the school for the rewarding experience of reviewing this portfolio and can report that my overall impression was of a well-established Thinking School, which despite unexpected school leadership changes, was able to sustain its internal focus on growth as a thinking school, continue its local and national outreach and begin to develop international connections. I do not hesitate to recommend that the school be recognized as an Advanced Thinking School.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Lena Green". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

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

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PMI based on Portfolio submitted by Roedean School: February 2020

PLUS

- The links made between cognitive education and the aims and practices of another important school initiative – Round Square activities;
- The attention to ethical thinking;
- The perception of connections and overlaps between different forms of cognitive education that use different vocabularies;
- The regular identification and provision of additional relevant and helpful teacher resources;
- The ongoing investigation of different ways of assessing thinking;
- The creativity of teachers in adapting thinking resources to the needs of their subjects and their students;
- The organizational and planning skills and creativity of the members of the student drive team;
- The emphasis on caring and the wellbeing of both staff and students;
- The involvement of non-teaching staff (Cheat Sheet example);
- Continuing close liaison over several years with Thinking Schools SA and outreach beyond the school;
- Engagement with the world-wide interest in the teaching of thinking via the literature and conferences such as ICOT.

MINUS

- Insufficient time for teacher collaboration and shared enquiry;
- Teachers' research skills not yet well developed;
- No examples of the application of cognitive skills/strategies to 'difficult' and discipline situations;
- Possible risk of losing key aspects of any approach if over-adapted;
- Unavoidable marks orientation on the part of both girls and parents;
- MALS not established as appropriate at all age levels.

INTERESTING

- Confirmation of evidence from elsewhere that teacher development and engagement in cognitive education requires *ongoing* attention and support;
- A possible tendency on the part of some teachers to take too much responsibility – to perceive themselves, not as models who share their own thinking processes and collaborate with students, but as experts who need to guide at all times;
- Pros and cons of a great many acronyms?
- Consider encouraging teachers to create experiences for students that make them aware that thinking and learning can at times be satisfying experiences in themselves and do not always need to be 'sweetened' by 'fun';
- Consider possible research re measurable changes in teachers' practice or in forms of classroom talk?