

Report by Dr Judith Kleine Staarman on the application of Alwoodley Primary School to be 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 Thinking School principles and their impact on both pupil learning and their potential contribution to society. Much of the evidence referenced in this report reflects the significant and sustained progress Alwoodley Primary School has made in its on-going journey as thinking and learning community and follows on from the previous accreditation as an Accredited Thinking School.

The focus for this advanced level of evaluation will be on the presentation of evidence of how the school has moved forward in developing 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 thinking 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.

Thinking Schools @Exeter received the school's re-submission from the Thinking Skills Co-ordinator, Jess Hill and evidence of work towards an Advanced Thinking School has been drawn from the Reflective Pro-Forma and the additional information provided in the digital

portfolio. Evidence presented included the school website, MALS survey data and other benchmark data, photographs of classroom displays, lesson planning documents, CPD evaluations, letters, and formal publications. This evidence is matched against the criteria for Advanced Thinking Schools under the themed headings.

Starting point: The School Context

Alwoodley Primary School is a two-form entry community school for pupils age 3 – 11 in Leeds. The school has 479 pupils on roll, who make up a diverse school population in terms of social backgrounds and nationalities, with more than half of the pupils coming from minority ethnic heritages and a large proportion of pupils who speak English as an additional language. The school was rated as ‘outstanding’ by Ofsted, although the last report dates from 2013. The school reported the academic achievements of pupils in 2019, which were consistently higher than the national averages. The school’s motto is ‘Learning Together, Growing Stronger’ and the school community is inclusive, recognising the value of creating a learning environment that includes pupils, staff, parents, and governors¹. The school was first accredited as a thinking school in 2014, with a re-accreditation awarded in 2017. Since then, the school has worked towards accreditation as an Advanced Accredited Thinking School.

Professional development

Evidence of professional development concerns two key issues: technical or functional, in the practical application of a range of thinking tools; and qualitative, focusing on the implementation, reflection and further development of thinking across the school. In terms of technical development, there is a well-established and extensive programme of training and sharing of practice in the school, and every new member of staff is introduced to the Thinking School ethos and trained in the thinking tools used in the school. These include Growth Mindset, P4C, Thinking Maps and de Bono’s hats for thinking. Additionally, staff CPD and staff meetings have been dedicated to topics around metacognition, scaffolding, higher order thinking, critical thinking and questioning². Additional external training is routinely delivered to the school and new members of staff are trained in Thinking Tools by the leader

¹ School prospectus 2020-2021

² Digital portfolio of evidence, slide 28

of the drive team, in order to ensure that thinking tools become embedded in their teaching practice. Subject leaders use staff meetings to disseminate teacher research and evaluations and clear frameworks for self-evaluation targets in line with the school development plans have been implemented across the school³. A programme of CPD is developed with each staff member, according to their interests and in line with the self-development framework and a staff CPD log⁴ is maintained by the school to record training that has taken place. It will be interesting to see how the school will use the Spare Wheel to further develop their professional development targets related to thinking tools and strategies and to align these with the school development plan.

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 within the school and with others. The proforma lists evidence of sharing practice within the school, and across subject areas, as well as with the wider educational community. The school has a long track record of outreach work, in particular in the areas of thinking skills and metacognition, supporting both newly qualified teachers through the teaching school alliance, as well as through staff training around school-to-school support. The school has four specialist leaders in education and two members of staff are subject specialist consultants. Examples of training and support provided are the “Critical Thinking for Achievement” course as part of the Primary Geography Quality Mark, which was developed and rolled out across the Leeds authority⁵ and the module on metacognition, delivered to a cohort of initial teacher training students. The work related to the Primary Geography Quality Mark has supported schools throughout the UK and internationally and provides an interesting example of the integration of thinking skills pedagogy and subject based knowledge⁶. This work has led to publications in key subject-related journals on supporting a thinking-based pedagogy in Geography⁷.

³ Reflective proforma

⁴ Digital portfolio of evidence, slide 28

⁵ Digital portfolio of evidence, slide 31

⁶ Digital portfolio of evidence, slide 34

⁷ Digital portfolio of evidence, slide 35

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. There is a continuing and wide-ranging programme of evaluation within the school, from self-reflection tools for staff and use of MALS to evaluate attitudes and effects of thinking of pupils. Staff consistently uses school data to identify patterns and trends in attainment within year groups and these are then used to develop approaches to support pupils⁸. In addition, staff engaged in lesson study cycles around questioning, growth mindset and mastery learning. Training was undertaken, after which new principles were implemented throughout the school. These were evaluated through a programme of lesson observations, which were used to identify good practice and led to principles of mastery learning to embedded into the long-term planning of teaching in the school⁹. It would be interesting to see whether school data can demonstrate impact of this approach.

The proforma and evidence provided demonstrate a clear schedule of monitoring for subject leaders, demonstrating the school's engagement in systematic gathering and evaluation of school, staff and pupil data in relation to their development as a Thinking School. The MALS survey has been used in previous years (as well as during the COVID lockdown) to gather perceptions of pupils about themselves as a learner, and patterns of pupil perceptions around thinking skills have been identified. There is good evidence that the data is used to develop the school further through action plans and it is good. to see that pupils are consulted about their views¹⁰. It will be very interesting to see the results of this year's MALS survey in relation to last years' and it is clear that, along with the rest of the portfolio of evaluative research within the school, this data will provide the school with a strong foundation further develop itself as a Thinking School.

⁸ Reflective Proforma

⁹ Digital portfolio of evidence, slide 23

¹⁰ Reflective Proforma

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. There is no doubt that Alwoodley Primary School is a school in which differentiation plays an important role within the school curriculum. The school has an extremely diverse population, with pupils speaking 36 different home languages. A large number of staff are specialist support staff. In addition, there is a strong focus on pupil voice, as evidenced in the work done by the School Council¹¹. There is no specific evidence provided of the ways in which teachers support the individual needs of children, and some further evidence of this would be welcome.

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. Evidence is sought for the reflective processes of staff on their own professional practice and development. Overall, it is clear that there is a strong programme of formal and informal critical evaluations of issues within the school and there is good evidence of evaluation and critical reflection of Thinking Tools in relation to processes and outcomes in the school. An example of this is in the way in which the school is using lesson study, in which a range of qualitative data is gathered on a regular basis, giving teachers the opportunity to focus on specific approaches to teaching thinking. Recommendations are subsequently embedded into classroom practice and further school planning. Hopefully, the SPARE wheel can further be used to gather evidence of pupils and other stakeholders, and it would be interesting to see the outcomes of this process.

Conclusion

The range of evidence submitted, in particular around the impressive use of systematic evaluation and the dissemination of excellent practice around thinking, along with the setting of clear targets around school and staff development, indicates that Alwoodley Primary

¹¹ The School Website

School is operating at a level of an Advanced Accredited School on these aspects. I would like to conclude this evaluation with some ways in which the school could continue to develop and refine their practice as they move forward. This might include:

- To further develop the role of the SPARE wheel to help school development. It is clear that the school is planning to use the tool to gather evidence and evaluate practice, and it would be good to see evidence of this process in due course.
- To develop a stronger portfolio of evidence around differentiation. It is clear that Alwoodley Primary School is a school with a very diverse population, which makes for a challenging yet exciting context to develop evidence around differentiating thinking skills practice. It would be very interesting to see this aspect of Advanced Accreditation being developed further in the school.
- In addition to the previous point, to develop initiatives within the school on equality, diversity and inclusion, for instance by focusing on dialogic approaches to teaching, which would fit very well with the Philosophy for Children and metacognition programmes of work already in place in the school. It would be interesting to develop practice around how teachers might use cultural community domains and identities in their teaching of thinking.

Outcome

Alwoodley Primary School was first accredited as a Thinking School in 2014 and the school has gone from strength to strength since. The substantive evidence provided creates a very clear picture of Alwoodley Primary School as a school where Thinking Skills are at the heart of the school and where the Thinking Ethos can be found in all aspects of school life. Teaching Thinking is central to student learning, as well as to staff development and a strong programme of dissemination of innovative and best practice around teaching thinking demonstrates the role of Alwoodley Primary School as one of the leading Thinking Schools in the country. I therefore recommend that accreditation as an Advanced Thinking School be

awarded until July 2024. Congratulations to Alwoodley Primary School for an outstanding achievement!

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'J. Kleine Staarman', written over a horizontal line.

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