

Article for Thinking Schools International/Thinking Matters Newsletter Issue 16 – Cumran Primary School

We embarked on our Cognitive Thinking Journey in 2008, with a vision to equip all of our pupils with a range of skills and tools for the 21st century.

With the introduction of the Revised Curriculum, I attended SEELB training and implemented ideas, strategies and tools into my classroom practice. At whole school level, we began with a staff audit where teachers identified Thinking Skills and Personal Capabilities (TSPC) as an area of focus for the School Development Plan. The staff were extremely responsive and began to develop a more consistent approach throughout the school, each teacher embracing this as a PRSD target.

Along the way, we worked with thinking experts to help us develop a range of thinking tools and skills, to enable our pupils to be 'better thinkers'. We worked with Lyn Irwin, a CASS officer who assisted us in infusing TSPC into the curriculum, however in 2009 we felt that we needed to develop cognitive skills further.



Mike Fleetham, a learning consultant, played a significant role in developing the cognitive abilities of pupils throughout the school. He led a staff development day for teachers, assistants and Governors. This was very successful and all teachers implemented a range of tools in their lessons. As curriculum leader, I established close links with Mike and participated in video conferencing sessions, where Mike taught my class a range of additional thinking tools, which I then disseminated to the staff. We hosted two 'Live Learning, Real Thinking' conferences led by Mike, these were attended by many teachers from across Northern Ireland.

Our journey took a new path in 2013, after our principal, Mrs Moles, attended a 'Thinking Conference' and was introduced to the 'Thinking Maps' tool. Following contact with Richard Cummins, (CEO of TSI) we were introduced to S. McKillop and L Gardiner, trained CASS officers who provided training in 'Thinking Maps' to teachers and assistants. In October 2014, S. McKillop trained the staff in the use of thinking hats and in March 2015, they delivered 'Creating links with literacy' training, which was fundamental in developing literacy and significantly improving writing standards throughout the school.

Pupils have also been empowered to become more reflective in their learning, identifying areas of strength and improvement through the use of Assessment For Learning Tools, including Thinking Hats and Mrs Potter's questions.

Developing the growth mindset of pupils was another focus, helping to support our children in taking risks with their learning, enabling them to persevere and overcome barriers. Learning power phrases continue to play a vital role in the motivation of pupils' learning. This has had a positive effect on pupil attitudes to learning, which have been monitored through the use of the PASS survey.



At each stage of the journey, parents have played an integral role. An annual event, 'Come and See Us Think Day' encourages parents to join their children, having the opportunity to learn about and use thinking tools in active lessons. We held a 'Thinking Maps' workshop for parents where pupils explained the thinking process behind each map and the introduction of a Thinking Skills page on the website, has also proved to be a useful tool, developed in response to parent questionnaires.

In June 2017, we were delighted to obtain our 'Thinking School Status' from the University of Exeter, and are currently the only accredited thinking school in Northern Ireland. We are tremendously proud of our achievement which reflects the extent of the enthusiasm, commitment and dedication of our pupils, staff, parents and Governors. The journey continues.....

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