



*Hillyfield on the Hill and in the Park - 2016*

## Background

**Hillyfield Primary Academy, Walthamstow, is a seven-form entry school for children aged 2 to 11 years old. At present there are over 1200 children on roll and the school will continue to grow over the next three years to reach its full capacity of 1600 children. The school is split over two sites: Hillyfield on the Hill and Hillyfield at the Park. We have been awarded Outstanding status in our past two OFSTED inspections (2006, 2014).**

Our vision for our pupils is 'Brilliance in Every Child, Excellence Every Day'. We believe that every child who attends our school has their own brilliance and it is our responsibility and privilege to enable them to find and develop their talent. We strive to ensure that every child is academically equipped to succeed at Hillyfield, secondary school and beyond.

At the time of writing (February 2017) Hillyfield is not yet an accredited Thinking School. We aim to achieve accreditation later in 2017.

## The Journey Thus Far

Hillyfield commenced its Thinking School journey in 2013/14. The Head of School at the time, Matt O'Dowda, had introduced the Thinking Schools model in his previous school in New Zealand and had already worked with Thinking Schools International and also David Hyerle. The leadership team wanted to equip children with transferable skills which would set them up to succeed not just at Hillyfield but at secondary school and beyond.

Furthermore, the Habits of Mind sat perfectly with our vision of 'Brilliance in Every Child'; the idea that intelligence is not fixed. We wanted to develop learning goals that reflect the belief that ability is a continuously expandable repertoire of skills and that, through a person's efforts, intelligence grows incrementally.

The school adopted a three-pronged approach: Thinking Maps, Philosophy for Children and Habits of Mind. The Governors were involved from the outset and received their own training. Matt and Executive Head Anna Mackenzie attended an initial meeting with TSI then enrolled on train the trainer course for Visual Tools run by Hyerle himself. This led to whole-staff training on Thinking Maps in the first year followed by parent workshops. Habits of Mind were introduced the same year in a similar manner.



Mrs Mackenzie recalls a smooth introductory phase. *“Embedding Thinking Maps and Habits of Mind was a straight forward process. The value of the approach seemed to speak for itself and staff and children alike adopted the language and approach quickly.”*

Several benefits emerged almost immediately.

**Thinking Maps** enhanced children's ability to plan for writing; for example, circle maps were used to record initial ideas, tree maps to plan reports and flow maps to plan narratives. The shared visual language of thinking maps also facilitated teacher planning, which is done in year group teams of up to seven teachers.

The **Habits of Mind** helped children to articulate different "types of intelligence" and talk authentically about why they are, for example, good at managing their impulsivity or listening with empathy and understanding. Our celebration assemblies were immediately better attended and parents were praising of focus on the Habits.



In September 2015, the whole staff team was trained in **P4C** Level 1. Staff and students alike were quick to recognise the value of P4C, which soon became a staple of class timetables. The inclusive approach to inquiry fostered a deeper kind of reflectiveness among our students. Many teachers commented that students had articulated insights that belied their age, and these insights may have gone undiscovered if not for the caring, collaborative, critical and creative climate of P4C. We have since applied for the Bronze Level Award for P4C and are awaiting the outcome of our application.



In the years since, the school has worked hard to consolidate use of its Thinking Tools. The Habits of Mind are explicitly taught across all year groups and reinforced through daily teacher language and weekly Habit of Mind award assemblies. Thinking Maps are employed as visual tools for helping students organise ideas. Philosophy for Children is taught weekly in all classes across the school.

We are striving to embed the 4Cs (caring, collaborative, critical, creative) and other P4C language and strategies across the curriculum. School-wide 'Thinking Weeks' occur annually and serve to focus students and staff on our aspiration to be an outstanding Thinking School. This year's Thinking Week coincided with the Christmas period and the theme was 'It's the thought that counts'. Teachers conducted communities of inquiry around themes of giving, love and altruism. Each year group focused specifically on one Habit of Mind and strove to improve their own understanding and application of that habit through a range of activities combined with self-reflection. As an outcome of this week, the students wrote hundreds of Christmas cards for a local aged care home and a troupe of Year 3 students delivered the cards and sung a series of Christmas carols at the home as an offering of gratitude to our senior citizens.

## **The Journey Ahead**

While we acknowledge that great strides have been taken in our journey as a Thinking School, we remain aware of the many challenges still ahead. The size of our school presents a significant challenge in the induction of new staff and how best to ensure that the quality of teaching of thinking tools and the school ethos are not diluted over time.

Engagement of parents is another significant challenge that is a key area if the children are really to carry these thinking skills beyond Hillyfield.

With respect to our thinking skills, there is the continual challenge of integration at a deeper level. At the time of writing, our primary focus is on teaching the thinking process behind each map so that students are more able to select maps for themselves.

We are also striving to integrate the Habits deeper into our curriculum by providing more structured opportunities for students to specifically practise each Habit.

Our overarching challenge is the prioritisation of training, budgets and time on continued development of thinking skills at a time when we are facing a number of other challenges. Thankfully, it is a deliberate, structured approach to thinking that will provide the answers to these and our future challenges!

***Jack Graziotti, Cognitive Coordinator***

***[Hillyfield Primary Academy](#)***

*(Jack Graziotti commenced as the Cognitive Coordinator of Hillyfield Primary Academy in November 2016. He also teaches Year 3.)*