

# Thoughtful Thinking: A holistic approach to Cognitive Education

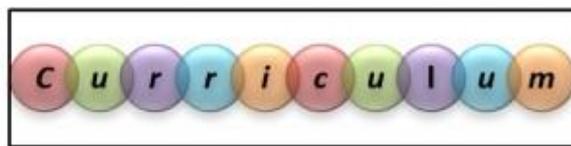
By Paul Harris, Deputy Headteacher, Maidstone Grammar School for Girls, UK



You may wonder from the title what is meant by *'thoughtful'* thinking. Surely all thinking is *thoughtful*? In one sense of course the answer is Yes. The cognitive processes that are used in learning, the way they can be organised and structured, the role of metacognitive reflection and the application of some of the discoveries of neuroscience into practical learning strategies all join together to give us a richer understanding of thinking. Nevertheless, there is another dimension to thinking which has at its heart a deeper, more life-long sustaining element- namely a purpose and for thinking to be really successful that purpose has to be *thoughtful*.

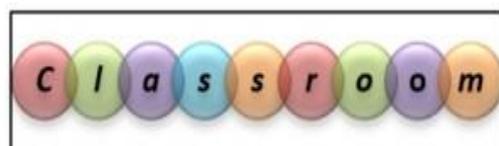
At MGGs our main focus over the years as a Thinking School and now as a recently accredited Advanced Thinking School has been to develop an ethos and culture that really helps to develop our students into thoughtful students - *thoughtful* about the world around them, *thoughtful* in their character and behaviour, *thoughtful* in understanding themselves and others better and of course *thoughtful* thinkers who can tackle problems and challenges with confidence, creativity and persistence.

So how have we tried to do this? At the **curriculum level** we have weekly enrichment lessons in Year 7 and 8 to explore a range of 'Big Questions'. These



are questions that give opportunities to go beyond the National Curriculum, to engage in discussion and debate, to listen to alternative views and be challenged. Over the years we have delivered a range of questions including 'Where does my language come from?', 'Is there life elsewhere in the Universe?' and 'Do actions speak louder than words?'. We also have some specific thinking skills based big questions; 'How do you solve a problem?', 'What makes a great thinker?' and 'What makes a good argument?'. These are thoughtful questions with the purpose of encouraging students to widen their perspectives and develop an enquiring mind. Next year, the school will be introducing a cognitive skills based course to its Year 9 students which will run over two years and lead to a level 2 qualification.

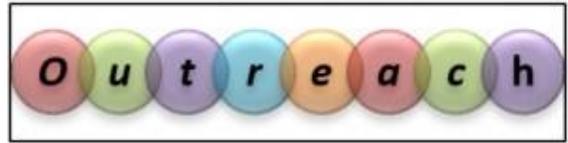
At the **classroom level** we have continued to embed our use of a range of thinking tools including the use of Thinking Maps®, various creative approaches and the development of very effective questioning. The use of rich questioning is key to enhancing student



learning & progress and as a school this has been an important part of our pedagogical practice for many years. Last academic year all the teaching staff had a 'Teaching & Learning Evaluative Research Project' to complete as part of their appraisal process. Any area of teaching and learning

could be researched with several colleagues looking at an aspect related to thinking skills. Everyone completed a standardised report and good practice was shared- an excellent way to promote thoughtful reflection about classroom practice.

In terms of our **outreach programme**, some of our sixth form students have delivered thinking skills sessions to local primary school students. Our students planned the lessons and resources. Topics included issues around 'nature versus nurture' and the story of Rosa Parks- thoughtful lessons leading to thoughtful discussions which move onto wider social and ethical issues. We have also explored some of the developments that have taken place in neuroscience by hosting a sixth form conference for students from around Kent and were privileged to have speakers from King's College, London giving presentations about their work.



And finally at an **individual student level** we have tried to bring all of our work as an Advanced Thinking School together to help students develop their dispositions for learning as much as possible. The 'Habits of Mind' displayed by our students are dispositions that we wish them to naturally use and for these to become second nature in the way they approach their learning. This is for us the benchmark to assess our approach as a thinking school and we are delighted to have a community of young people who are such *thoughtful* thinkers.

To find out more about Maidstone Grammar School and their approach to thinking, [see here](#)