



Becoming a Thinking School transformed our pupils' learning

The Thinking School approach provides tools to build confidence, resilience and develop self-reflection skills, writes Richard Coe

Like many schools, our delight at our showing in the provisional Progress 8 scores, published in November, has been tempered by the knowledge that the first findings should be treated with caution. But now that the final ones have been published, our 'quiet confidence' has been repaid.



Our schools – separate but co-sited single-sex academies – recorded a score of +1.0 (Glenmoor Academy – girls) and (Winton Academy - boys) +0.60, respectively.

Our P8 English and Maths attainment figure show remarkable progress.

At Glenmoor, we've moved from +0.48 in 2016 to +0.85 in 2017 to this year's +1.05. Over the same period, Glenmoor's percentage of grade 5s in English and maths have moved from 65 per cent to 78 per cent.

At Winton, the P8 figures for English and Maths attainment have moved from +0.37 in 2016, +0.75 in 2017 and +0.51 this year while the grade 5 English and maths attainment figures have gone from 44 per cent to 61 per cent.

So how have we done it?

A key part of our [progress](#) has been becoming a 'Thinking School', one of a growing number accredited by the University of Exeter.

While there's never a golden bullet to improving learning, the Thinking School approach has permeated every part of our school culture. We're sited in a predominantly white, working-class area of Bournemouth. At Glenmoor, 27 per cent of pupils are eligible for pupil premium (PP) funding, 17 per cent have English as an additional language (EAL), and 12 per cent have special educational needs (SEND). At Winton, the PP students number 18 per cent, while 17 per cent have EAL and SEND.

Building resilience and self-confidence are key to what we do.

We have worked hard at developing a curriculum that is rich with knowledge through deliberate practice routines around knowledge organisers, self-quizzing and regular knowledge tests. Thinking maps have allowed

us to take this knowledge and transform it into understanding through different cognitive processes such as comparing and contrasting, categorising and creating analogies. By 'seeing' their thinking structured and clarified, our students become aware of the different thinking processes involved.

These tools help our students to make sense of things and give them confidence. While they're getting their thoughts down on the page, they have to think about the cognitive aspect of what they're doing.

The Thinking School approach draws on Benjamin Bloom's taxonomy of thinking, which classifies thinking according to six cognitive levels of complexity. According to Bloom's pyramid, lower order thinking skills form the base of the pyramid and the most higher-order skills are at the peak. We teach and work with students to recognise the different aspects of cognition so that they are able to move independently through these, consolidating and stretching their learning as they go.

Additionally, this thinking approach includes developing intelligent learning behaviours (such as resilience and growth mindset) as well as a focus on developing a questioning community. As such, a thinking school serves to create questioning, thinking, independent learners who have a true understanding of their own learning (metacognition).

But thinking skills are not an education programme; they are about an attitude to learning as much as they are about the tools and [strategies of developing thinking](#).

Becoming a Thinking School demands the creation of a whole-school culture that constantly strives to develop independent learners through thinking and self-improving behaviours. We have worked hard at the academies to develop education with real character embodied by our mantra to develop learners who STRIVE (smart, thoughtful, resilient, independent, visionary, expressive) to get better each and every day. The focus on STRIVE permeates the academies through lesson integration, assemblies, reward system and now our house system too.

Developing as a Thinking School is certainly not a 'soft' option. Governors, senior leadership teams, 'drive teams' and leaders at all levels need courage, expertise and resilience in huge quantities in order to secure the successful realisation of this vision for learning.

This is a shared vision, written together as a whole-staff team so that everyone has ownership. From that vision came a shared ethos that involved all staff, students and stakeholders thinking creatively and critically and continuously reflecting on their learning while developing a culture where this happens naturally.

[Student confidence and aspiration](#) has increased ten-fold via use of the growth mindset, another hallmark of learning at Thinking Schools.

When students self-reflect on their learning, they use words such as 'yet' to indicate that they are willing to recognise that just because they might be struggling with something it doesn't mean that they cannot or will not improve.

Our students are taught that if they can't do their work immediately, there are five strategies before you ask the teacher. [It's a strategy for resilience](#).

Our improved grade progress is only a by-product of a whole-school approach to the teaching of thinking.

The local community is responding so positively to our work. Our waiting list has gone through the roof and for the first time we're attracting children whose attainment is above the national and students from a broader range of ethnic backgrounds

There's no room for complacency, but the future is looking bright.

Richard Coe is vice-principal of Glenmoor and Winton Academies in Bournemouth

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