

## Becoming an advanced thinking school – what it has meant for pupils within our learning community

Since taking up headship at Rhydypenau Primary School almost 2 decades ago, I have sought to clarify and articulate our collective vision of what makes a good school. Little by little, through engaging with children and their families, in dialogue with colleagues and other educators, from our work in school and from visiting other schools, from reading and seeking out best practice, the central features emerged.



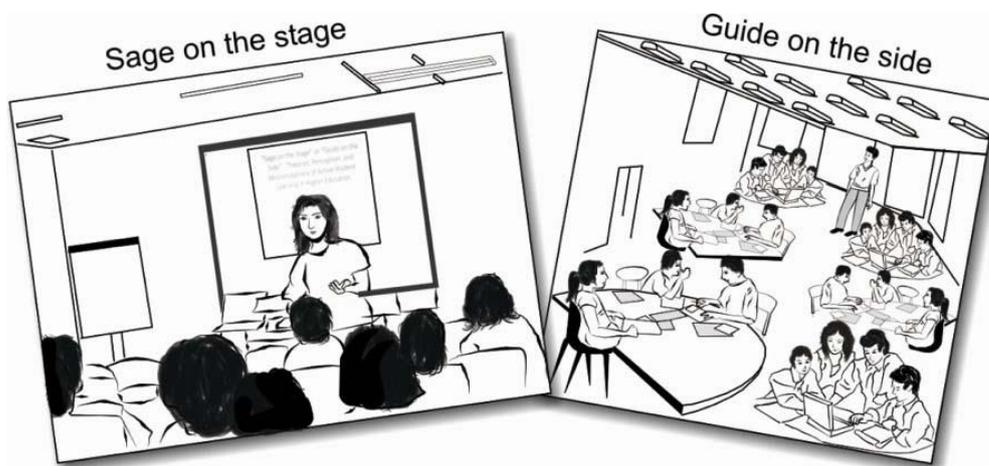
For us, a school must be a community of enthusiastic learners. This is the overall principle on which we ground the other supporting components of our vision. For us, a good school is a place where everyone is learning and where everything is geared towards making us all, pupils and families, teachers and teaching assistants, the best possible learners we can be. A crucial and integral part of the work to realise this vision has been our partnership with Thinking Schools International. We have worked with them enthusiastically and purposefully for the past eight years as they supported us in gaining recognition, initially as a Thinking School and later as an Advanced Thinking school.



### Children from Rhydypenau Primary School

For Rhydypenau Primary is a school where we have high expectations of the children and where we do our best to ensure that they are happy. We work hard to nurture the artists and musicians, scientists and technicians of the future, by striving to achieve high standards in all areas of the curriculum. And our work as a Thinking School has strongly supported these ambitions. Each separate initiative - whether introducing Habits of Mind or the inclusion of De Bono's Hats, the development of Philosophy for Children or the use of Thinking Maps to develop children's writing - all have involved every child and all staff in developing new skills and learning together. These thinking tools combined simplicity and manageability with a good organisational structure. They provided a very solid platform for learning for all our pupils from nursery up to Year 6. Very quickly, children and staff were using common tools and talking a common language about what it is to be a skilled learner. We had found a meaningful and rich way of communicating how we could work together and demonstrate the progress being made.

Step by step together, governors and teachers, headteacher and children worked to create within our school an 'ecosystem' of reflection, growth and refinement of practice. In short, we were able to promote Rhydypenau Primary, not only as a Thinking School but also as a community of learners.



This was by no means a unique journey but, for us, it was certainly a journey of change as teachers were asked to adopt new teaching tools and to develop their own knowledge, and a journey of challenge, as teachers were asked to adapt their role from transmitters of information to facilitators of learning: the change which Art Costa has described as moving from the “sage on the stage to the guide on the side.” This is the aspect of our school life which many visitors find most striking.

It’s now 18 years since I accepted, so enthusiastically, the position as headteacher of Rhydypenau Primary School. Since then, I have enjoyed the privilege of working in partnership with a team of committed governors, an outstanding team of staff, and over 2,000 amazing children - and, of-course, with Thinking Schools International.

But now it’s time to hand the baton on to my successor. As I reflect on my career in teaching, the highs and the lows, the roller coaster each term has brought, there are some aspects of my work which I know served our children very well. Sitting high on that list was our decision to work with Thinking Schools International and to seek accreditation as an Advanced Thinking School. It has greatly enhanced our practice and our reputation but, most of all, it has produced in children a hunger for learning and given them the means of nourishing it.

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