

Level One Criteria – Being a Thinking School

In meeting the following fifteen criteria, a school can justifiably consider itself a 'Centre of Excellence' with respect to cognitive education and will warrant recognition by the University of Exeter as a 'thinking school'. However, it should be understood that some criteria are more heavily 'weighted' than others and the size of a school may also influence the degree to which some criterion are met. Each criteria is accompanied by a brief suggestion (in italics) of the kind of evidence that would demonstrate that criteria are being or have been met.

Senior Management and Whole School Commitment

1. The school's Principal/Headteacher has made a formal commitment to cognitive education as a means of school improvement in terms of the school's development plans (i.e. to staff, parents and governors).

Evidence must take the form of printed documentation to this effect in literature made available to the wider community, e.g. in the school prospectus, and/or recorded reports to governors and parents.

2. This commitment to cognitive education has the explicit support of the school's governors.

Evidence will take the form of minutes of governors' meetings and/or a statement of support from the Chair of Governors.

3. A member of staff with high formal status has been given the role of Thinking Skills Co-ordinator, to organise and oversee the implementation of the cognitive education development agenda.

Details will be needed of this person's background, training and experience in providing cognitive education and their position within the school's management structure.

4. There is a 'Drive Team' committed to the ideals of cognitive education to support the Thinking Skills Co-ordinator and help keep the development process alive and vibrant.

Details will be needed of those involved together with details of any meetings and action taken by the 'Drive Team'. Membership of the 'Drive Team' could include representatives of the governors, parents and student body, as well as key members of the teaching and support staff.

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5. The majority of school staff (including support staff) demonstrate, in their practice, the principles and procedures of cognitive education, and have a commitment to it as one of the school's main aims.

Evidence will be reflected in planning, delivery and review. This will be addressed by observation of lessons and interviews/discussions with a random sample of staff during the accreditation visit.

6. A range of ways of scaffolding effective thinking and learning skills have been incorporated into all aspects of the school curriculum as appropriate. All three areas of 1) visual tools for thinking; 2) developing dispositions for thinking and 3) developing questioning for inquiry should be addressed.

Evidence will be needed of the introduction and embedding of several ways of scaffolding effective thinking and learning skills addressing the three main areas of teaching thinking named above. Evidence is also needed of the development of a common thinking language across the school. Details will need to be provided of how these tools, strategies and resources are being incorporated into all aspects of the curriculum.

7. There is an Action Plan by which the agreed cognitive, tools, strategies and resources are being implemented and taught across the school, both independently and as an integrated aspect of the whole curriculum.

Evidence will be needed of an organic Action Plan and how it is being implemented.

Training

8. The Thinking Skills Co-ordinator will have received appropriate training in the theory, application and assessment of cognitive education.

Details will be needed of initial and ongoing training received by the Thinking Skills Co-ordinator.

9. There is an ongoing training programme in place, which develops expertise in a range of cognitive, tools, strategies and resources for established and newly appointed staff.

Evidence should include documented reports of in-house or external training received by staff.

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Assessment

10. Alternative and/or complementary forms of assessment, (including peer and self-assessment) which can be used to examine the development of the cognitive skills, and how these are related to learning outcomes, are being implemented.

Evidence will include examples of assessment techniques designed to reflect wider aspects of cognitive development e.g. MALS (Myself As A Learner Scale) and MATS (Myself As A Thinker Scale)

Outcomes

11. There is evidence in the learning outcomes, attitudes and behaviour of the pupils to indicate that they are operating as thoughtful, responsible learners who are able to articulate how cognitive skills are an important aspect of all that occurs in their school

Evidence should take a number of forms including: examples of pupil/student work, which reflects the application of cognitive skills, indicators of raised attainment, improved motivation and behaviour, changes in attitude, enjoyment, confidence in learning and independent learning. Evidence will be needed in the form of representative samples of work carried out across a range of classes.

Evaluation of Programmes

12. There is a constant review of the range of cognitive, tools, strategies and resources employed, with specific reference to their effects on pupil/student metacognition and transfer of skills and strategies.

Evidence will include decisions taken to adopt a wide range of cognitive, tools, strategies and resources, abandoning some, targeting specific use of others and searching for evidence of effectiveness.

13. There are regular opportunities for staff to discuss the process of cognitive education and how it can be maintained and improved.

Evidence of any staff discussions and action taken will be needed.

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Ownership

14. Cognitive tools, strategies and resources, have been creatively adapted to meet the needs of the learning community. This may include the development of new cognitive tools, strategies and resources.

Evidence will include materials and/or video clips demonstrating these innovations shared on the web in a way that is useful for others.

School Ethos

15. The school conveys a positive, caring and creative atmosphere to all stakeholders and visitors, demonstrating that careful thought has been put into its organisational structure and visual presentation.

Evidence should include displays of pupil/student work representing examples of how specific cognitive, tools, strategies and resources have been employed. Other evidence might include photographs, reminders in posters and other displays of the importance and application of different kinds of thinking.