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Report following the analysis and evaluation of evidence submitted by Broadhurst Primary School for the purpose of accreditation as a Thinking School by Thinking Schools @Exeter, School of Education, University of Exeter, UK.

Starting point: the school context.

Broadhurst Primary School (BPS) is a popular and successful primary school with 425 students on roll (ages 5-12). The school has a clear vision and mission outlining its beliefs and how to achieve them. The overarching focus is on lifelong learning and holistic growth for all students regardless of starting points. Indeed, BPS has aligned its vision and mission to this and seeks to be a leading Thinking School that delivers a progressive and holistic educational experience for all students. Specifically, the school's vision is one of a Thinking School that actively and constantly seeks to develop a learning community where every individual is open to change. Creativity, responsibility and self-regulation are clearly valued. The operationalised mission is to provide high-quality modern education and care services that meet the inclusive needs of all children in a safe and caring environment. The Headteacher and Drive Team are highly experienced in terms of Thinking School developments having acquired high-quality training and professional development in the field of metacognitive pedagogy. The training partnership with 'Thinking Matters' is highly effective and impactful due to the collaborative nature of the partnership. This partnership has been in place for over three years. Prior to this, BPS aligned its practice to other high quality training providers with an initial focus on Thinking Maps and Growth Mindset development. BPS's curriculum is clearly mapped and underpinned by appropriate research that embraces knowledge / skills, learning habits and thinking tools. Together, these act to further operationalise the school's mission and include the recognition of close links between emotional wellbeing and academic achievement, encouragement of ambition, curiosity, positivity and resilience and parental engagement.¹

Pupil progression through phases has high priority at BPS. The school's Thinking School journey started several years ago, and the accreditation focus began in earnest in 2021. Since then, BPS has gone from strength to strength with its work surrounding metacognitive development. Since the initial introduction of Thinking Maps and Thinking Hats, a number of foci have been judiciously and skilfully introduced and embedded such as Habits of Mind, Visible Thinking Routines and Higher-Order Questioning (based on Bloom's Taxonomy). Of particular note is the effective integration of these elements and their alignment with the

¹ Reflective Proforma, Evidence Wheel and School's Website

school's vision and mission. This is illustrative of the school's commitment to foster deep thinking and holistic development for all students.²

BPS has a highly effective and well led Drive Team. A significant factor underpinning the high impact of the Drive Team is the inspirational and fully committed support of the school's Headteacher. Indeed, the Headteacher is actively involved with Drive Team developments on a weekly basis works closely with the excellent Thinking Skills Coordinator. These factors combine to create consistency of approaches via clear and collaborative leadership.³

Students at BPS have an history of excellent educational provision. This is extremely impressive given the full commitment to total inclusivity via child-centred pedagogy. The school is relentless in pursuing high standards of achievement. However, it is lifelong holistic learning that is placed at the core of the educational provision at the school and not just the end result. Subject specific learning sits alongside wider dimensions clearly illustrated in the school's values. Indeed, elements such as child-centred, caring, nurturing, community, togetherness, collaboration, global citizenship and sustainability feature prominently. Underpinning this provision is a fully inclusive pastoral care and SEN provision embracing children, parents, staff and the community.⁴

Evidence Base

Thinking Schools @Exeter received the school's submission for accreditation from Angela Warwick and Loukia Dokakis (Headteacher and Thinking Skills Coordinator respectively) evidencing the history of the school's cognitive education development journey and the work that the school had undertaken stemming back to its origin and also specifically since 2021 when the focus moved towards Thinking Schools accreditation and embedding metacognitive strategies for learning. The evidence for accreditation is skilfully woven into the reflective proforma and includes links to a comprehensive base of evidence. The evidence includes an overall development structure embracing Thinking Maps, Thinking Hats, Habits of Mind, Visible Thinking Routines and Higher-Order Questioning (based on Bloom's Taxonomy). Within each of these domains there is ample explanatory information and exemplar materials linked to the school's curriculum policy and development planning.

Thinking School Ethos and Culture

From the evidence presented, it is clear that Thinking Skills are embedded within the culture of BPS. Curriculum policy documents and plans clearly map out a thinking strategy that subsequently feed into teaching strategies, and so moves thinking approaches from policy to practice. Pivotal to this is the high premium placed on sharing of best practice across the school to include all staff. The strong links with expert consultants add significant value to Thinking Schools developments.⁵

² Ibid

³ Ibid

⁴ School's Website, Reflective Proforma and Evidence Wheel.

⁵ Ibid

BPS has a prominent and visible thinking culture and this is due to the excellent organisational structure and visual presentation. Indeed, the Thinking Schools culture is prominent in all aspects of BPS such that it forms the spine of everything the school aspires to achieve. Sharing of best practice flourishes. Indeed, a range of stakeholders are fully involved in the practical support of Thinking Schools developments and encouraged to share in children's thinking successes. For example, parents are fully engaged in Thinking Schools developments via 'Meet the Teacher' events. Student-led conferences provide a wonderful show case platform where parents actively engage with thinking tools so that they can support their children's home-learning. The high premium placed on celebration and displays further strengthen the Thinking School ethos and culture. As a consequence of these actions, the whole learning community is equipped to support children's learning.⁶

BPS has forged a number of partnerships underpinned by a Thinking Schools focus. The outstanding collaboration enables best practice to permeate throughout partner schools and also more widely. BPS hosts visits from teachers from nearby schools and also hosts an annual High School Fair in order to promote the Thinking Schools approach. Through its connections with these stakeholders, BPS conveys a positive, caring and creative atmosphere, demonstrating that careful thought has been put into its organisational structure and visual presentation. This is clearly evidenced.⁷

Senior Management and Whole School Commitment

The Headteacher is high profile and gives full commitment to both the Thinking School ethos and the implementation of the cognitive development agenda. This has cascaded to leadership throughout the school and the strong leadership structure, together with the Drive Team, stands as a model of excellent practice. Of particular note is the full support for developing as a Thinking School provided by the entire learning community. The collaborative and integrated leadership model is excellent.⁸

The Drive Team is comprised of a rich blend of staff and is very well structured and led. The composition of the Drive Team has changed over recent years, but the quality of leadership has remained high. Communication throughout the school is excellent as are planning processes including meetings and subsequent developmental actions. Together, these aspects ensure that there is continued dialogue about Thinking Skills so that specific areas of development can be identified and acted upon.⁹

There is ample evidence to indicate that BPS is receptive to change and innovation. The extensive opportunities provided for dissemination of practice includes a wide range of stakeholders both within the school and also within the locality. The development of cognitive approaches has been part of the school's vision and drive for improvement for a significant number of years in response to ensuring that the school had an explicit vision based upon inclusive educational values that would serve as the foundation for a strategic

⁶ Ibid

⁷ Ibid

⁸ Ibid

⁹ Ibid

move forward.¹⁰ A range of ways of scaffolding effective thinking and learning skills have been incorporated into all aspects of the school as appropriate spanning visual tools, thinking dispositions, questioning for enquiry and emotional development.¹¹

There is a specific organic action plan designed to secure the wide-spread use of thinking tools across the school. The range of cognitive developments indicates that plans are aspirational and designed to empower children to progressively take ownership of their cognitive development.¹² Also, plans and CPD provision dovetail well and provide a clear mechanism for ongoing development.

Learning and Teaching

It is clear, from the documentation provided, that Thinking Skills are embedded within the culture of BPS. Indeed, feedback evidence views thinking as a 'golden thread' throughout the school. There is a strong emphasis on stimulating children's learning and the learning of teachers. Levels of collaboration between teachers, children and parents are high. Indeed, the 'BPS Learner Profile' has been developed by the school community and is based firmly on the development of a culture of thinking. Initially underpinned by Habits of Mind principles, this has been further developed to include Bloom's Taxonomy, Thinking Frames and Visible Thinking Routines. Termly CPD ensures that these creative innovations are operationalised to the highest standards. A range of cognitive tools are routinely used as part of the educational provision. For example, Thinking Maps / Thinking Frames are fully embedded including the highly effective application of the Frame of Reference / Reflective Lens where children reflect on how they know what they know, how further information might help, and the degree of importance of the topic. Further, Thinking Hats are used for reflection throughout the school and dispositional development is an intrinsic focus. Indeed, Lesson observation protocols also make effective use of thinking tools. Excellent support and resources ensures that staff and students develop thinking approaches effectively. This is largely due to a 'keep it simple and clear' approach. In this regard, developments focus on what works best, for whom and how. This, aligned to excellent leadership and communication, ensures that good practice is shared judiciously with all staff to develop their classroom impact. There is a universal staff belief in the importance of taking a whole school approach to the teaching of thinking and that all students are capable of making progress. This further supports the school's commitment to cognitive education. This clearly demonstrates how it is one of the school's main aims.¹³

The school's pedagogical approach is informed by ongoing CPD based on the development and sharing of best practice in the field of metacognitive pedagogy. There is a sound evidence base underpinning this which has allowed learning and teaching to move forward with purpose, coherence and impact. The emphasis placed on the learning environment is also clearly illustrated in the evidence provided by the school. Indeed, displays are exceptional.

¹⁰ Ibid

¹¹ Ibid

¹² Reflective Proforma School's Website and Evidence Wheel

¹³ Ibid

These elements, combined with BPS's commitment to the development of well-being, have resulted in learning and teaching that is focused on the holistic development of every child.¹⁴

BPS's aim is to develop a learning approach where higher order thinking qualities are not only nurtured but are also given the practical opportunities to flourish. Effective use of displays enriches the learning environment by encouraging a common language for learning and fostering self-regulation of thinking and learning. Of particular note is the interactive quality of displays where children are encouraged to interact with the content by selecting a particular focus for their learning. Personalised learning flourishes and children undertake individualised tasks on a daily basis. Where feasible, the school has personalised and contextualised visual displays to aid consistency, recognition and application of Thinking Skills. Children are encouraged to strive for high standards through displays of high-quality pieces of work. BPS has clear evidence of developing learning and teaching and the widespread appreciation of metacognitive elements has shifted practice from a teaching approach to a pedagogical culture.¹⁵

Training

The Headteacher and her team are well versed in the theory, application and assessment of cognitive education and holistic educational provision. This highly trained team has undoubtedly influenced the focus on establishing a common thinking language and approach across the curriculum.¹⁶ There is an ongoing and differentiated training programme in place, aimed at the development of expertise in a range of cognitive tools, strategies and resources for established and newly appointed staff. There is a well-developed cycle of lesson study in place and teachers collaborate by observing pedagogy with a view to refining their practice. Of particular note is the innovative and integrated inclusion of students, staff and parents in this process. The Thinking Schools training itinerary can be systematically traced from its origin to the current focus on learning and teaching strategies that integrate thinking tools and dispositional development. Specifically, the pedagogical shift has embraced 'how to think'. This renewed vision has a firm theoretical foundation built on Bloom's Taxonomy. There is ample provision for staff to trial and extend approaches to the teaching of thinking and mentoring plays an intrinsic part of professional development. Parents are fully informed of the Thinking Schools ethos, which features prominently on the website and in the school's communications. Staff are encouraged to work collaboratively with parents and partner schools. Good practice is shared widely, and lesson observations are used extensively to evaluate and share good practice in a climate of mutual support. Moving forward, this would benefit from the further extension of a practitioner research to embrace the SPARE model of evaluative action research and the Headteacher and her team are well placed to lead on this aspect.¹⁷

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¹⁵ Ibid

¹⁶ Reflective Proforma, School's Website and Evidence Wheel

¹⁷ Ibid

Assessment and Outcomes

Alternative and complimentary forms of assessment spanning the formative, summative and ipsative domains are routinely used to examine the development of cognitive skills, and how these are related to learning outcomes in the wider sense have been implemented. Assessments specifically include student surveys, report cards, CAT Tests and SNAP Questionnaire (self-esteem section). Students' Thinking Habits development is judiciously monitored and tracked, and these aspects add value to the range of complimentary forms of assessment. Indeed, assessment tasks themselves typically involve thinking tools. Assessments indicate growth in student confidence and that children are eager to learn. Students are particularly confident in terms of their understanding and application of Thinking Hats and Thinking Maps / Frames. However, BPS is keen to further develop students' understanding and application of other metacognitive elements such as Visible Thinking Routines. BPS demonstrates excellent use of qualitative indicators, particularly observation and classroom artefacts. Again, this is an example of excellent practice. BPS demonstrates a healthy 'data informed' (rather than data led) approach to assessment to avoid assessment becoming the master of the curriculum rather than the servant.¹⁸

The school is clear that the focus on cognitive development through a whole school consistent approach to learning has improved children's attitudes, improved their enjoyment, developed their independence, contributed to high quality teaching and led to better student progress.¹⁹ There is a wealth of qualitative and quantitative data relating to how the development of thinking habits is contributing effectively to the holistic learning of all children.

The excellent student progress indicates impressive educational growth. The school's own internal analysis and presentation of these outcomes reflect a positive achievement trend and demonstrates transparency and aspiration for further improvement.²⁰

Evaluation of Programmes

There is a continual review of the range of cognitive tools, strategies and resources employed, with specific reference to their impact on students' meta-cognition and the transfer of skills, strategies and learning behaviours. This makes use of the SPARE wheel model of illuminative evaluation on which the Thinking School approach is based. The SPARE model would benefit from wider dissemination at all levels (from leadership to individual teachers) in order to further foster a 'researching professional' culture. Through a collaborative approach to leadership, the Headteacher and her team have established a culture of thinking and school improvement built on regular opportunities for staff to discuss the process and efficacy of cognitive education and how it can be maintained and improved. BPS makes use of the Thinking as an Organisational Culture questionnaire and parent surveys. Outcomes are evaluated and acted upon. For example, a new platform is being introduced in order to further enhance communication between parents and teachers. The school is also looking to

¹⁸ Ibid

¹⁹ Reflective Pro-forma, School's Website and Evidence Wheel

²⁰ Ibid

further develop the Board's / Council's involvement in Thinking Schools approaches. There is a genuine feel that 'this is the way we do things around here'. The school development plan is an organic collaborative document, and all staff feature prominently in the evaluative process. There is a clear evaluative focus on developing the transfer of thinking skills and strategies and the school is highly ambitious to maximise the efficacy of its educational provision.

Ownership

There is no doubt that BPS has made a full commitment to developing and embedding cognitive education throughout the school. From the initial introduction of cognitive tools and practices, the school has carefully and judiciously expanded their repertoire of cognitive pedagogy in a progressive and evidence-informed manner. There is evidence that the school is beginning to distil and integrate these practices both in how they are used together and in the way they have become part of the thinking culture throughout the school and across roles and ages. Through the careful and progressive introduction of cognitive tools and CPD geared towards developing teachers as skilled mediators of learning, linked to the school's vision and values, the school has laid a strong foundation that ensures the whole school approach to the teaching of thinking flourishes.

BPS is a wonderful child-centred educational community. The school leaves nothing to chance, and developments are carefully sourced and resourced. The school has built and nurtured its core values so that they permeate throughout the entire school and beyond. Staff and children think deeply about what they do, and levels of collaboration are excellent. BPS places a high premium on teaching aligned to care and all children are valued. The collaboration with parents is an area of continuous growth and the school and parents work as highly effective educators. Collaboration with expert training providers is excellent and BPS is an exceptional example of integrating 'internal' school improvement mechanisms with 'external' high quality training. As a result of this high-quality educational provision, all children achieve the highest holistic standards. This has not been at the expense of psychological well-being and the school community interact such that emotional development flourishes.

Conclusion

The range of evidence submitted undoubtedly indicates that Broadhurst Primary School meets the criteria set by Thinking Schools @Exeter as a Thinking School and demonstrates a true commitment to the continued development of a whole school approach to the teaching of thinking. I therefore recommend that accreditation be awarded until February 2027.

I would like to thank the school for the clear and judicious evidence base, clearly organised around the evaluation rubric, that provided the lens through which the excellent practice could be viewed.

Further Recommendations

I conclude my evaluation with some suggestions as to how the school could continue to develop as a Thinking School to inform a development visit to aid action planning. This might include:

- Further develop and maintain staff development through ongoing external and internal training geared towards rationalising what works best by fine-tuning the already best practice. This combination of training will secure a balance of internal self-improvement with an external freshness and perspective. This requires getting underneath cognitive tools and dispositional development to identify the underlying meta-cognitive processes that enhance children's learning and thinking.
- Further integrate thinking processes with questioning, visual tools, dispositional development, deliberate practice routines (geared towards further developing Growth Mindset), assessment of process, assessment of product, evaluation of process and evaluation of product. This could take the form of an overview for how these elements are integrated. This would enable teachers and leaders to have a clear picture of metacognitive development as a whole.
- Consider further extension of the 'student voice' in terms of Thinking School developments. This might involve developing a Pupil Drive Team as children move through the school.
- BPS may want to consider the use of the Myself as a Learner Scale (MALS) to further add to the already well-developed assessment processes as this has the added quality of 'norms' in order to benchmark cognitive development outcomes.
- Further extend lesson observations to include key indicators of learning and thinking processes. These need to be simple, clearly observable and made explicit to all staff. The work of Project Zero (Harvard University) is a particularly useful source in this respect. These indicators of thinking development can be utilised both formatively (ideal in 'real time') in order for teachers to provide feedback at the point of need, and summatively so that teachers and leaders can monitor and evaluate impact.
- Continue to develop the school website in terms of illustrating Thinking School developments and resources.
- Use the criteria of an Advanced Thinking School to frame future developments, in order to deepen and extend the understanding and expertise of BPS. In particular, the extension of practitioner research through wider dissemination of the SPARE model of illuminative evaluation may provide a vehicle for further contextualising cognitive approaches to find out what works best, for whom and how.



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