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

Starting point: the school context.

East Sheen Primary School (ESPS) is a popular and highly successful coeducational primary school with 572 pupils ages 4-11 on roll. The school has a clear vision outlining its beliefs and how to achieve them. The overarching focus is on learning and growing as a collaborative community. Specifically, four key elements serve to operationalise this vision; 'Happy – Curious – Resilient – Kind'. ESPS's curriculum is clearly mapped and underpinned by an explicit focus on the development of thinking. Specifically, this involves a balance of Thinking Tools (Thinking Maps and Thinking Hats) and dispositional development foci (Habits of Mind). First accredited as a Thinking School in 2017, ESPS gained re-accreditation in 2021 and has worked tirelessly to continuously develop their metacognitive pedagogy. For example, ESPS is further developing dialogic opportunities for pupils in lessons. It is clear that these elements are fully embedded throughout the school. Thinking Skills at ESPS are built on a clear and firm foundation of dispositional development and include elements such as curiosity, empathy, ambition, resilience, focus, good judgement, initiative, risk-taking, and flexibility of mind. New curriculum foci embrace these elements, and the highly innovative environmental provision is a wonderful example of this. Here, pupils are encouraged to take their learning beyond the constraints of the classroom through a contextual thematic approach rooted firmly in the community. Within the metacognitive domain, ESPS clearly has a focus on wider dimensions. ESPS keeps abreast of research and evidence and this acts to operationalise the school's mission in a coherent and informed manner. For example, the school is adapting its pedagogy to embrace developments in memory science. There is a clear and explicit recognition of close links between emotional wellbeing and academic achievement. Indeed, the school has achieved the 'Wellbeing Award for Schools' and has worked on the introduction of 'Mindfulness'. The 'All are Leaders' ethos permeates throughout the educational provision at ESPS.¹

Pupil progression through phases has high priority at ESPS and the school is relentless in its pursuit of exceptional standards aligned to wider educational growth. This is captured well in the school's most recent Ofsted inspection report (2023) where ESPS was judged as 'Outstanding' in all categories. It is clear that continuity and progression underpin ambitious plans. Mental health and psychological wellbeing have a high profile at the school and there

¹ School's Website, Reflective Pro-forma and Digital Portfolio

are strong support structures in place. In addition to this provision, ESPS has a rich extra-curricular offering designed to build children's cultural capital.² This would strongly suggest that ESPS is an attractive place for children to learn.³ The school began its Thinking School journey in many years ago. Since then, ESPS has gone from strength to strength with its work surrounding metacognitive development and additional foci have been skilfully introduced and embedded.⁴

The Pupil Leadership Team and Governors have been actively involved in shaping the values of ESPS. This values-based focus has done much to create a firm foundation for developing holistic lifelong learners. The school's values fully reflect the Thinking Schools approach and have kindness, forgiveness, collaboration, listening, honesty and high aspiration at the core. This has created an ethos where children develop metacognitive skills in alignment with independence, self-regulation, perseverance and initiative. ESPS has a highly effective and well led Drive Team. A significant factor underpinning the high impact of the Drive Team is the full and inspirational support provided by the Headteacher. In addition, the full inclusion of the pupil voice adds significant value to the learning environment. These factors combine to create consistency of approaches via clear and collaborative leadership.⁵

Evidence Base

Thinking Schools @Exeter received the school's submission for accreditation from Harry Page and Victoria Strang (Headteacher and Thinking Skills Coordinator respectively) evidencing the school's cognitive education development journey and the work that the school had undertaken stemming back to its origin and also specifically since 2017 when the focus moved towards further embedding metacognitive strategies for learning.⁶ The evidence for accreditation is skilfully woven into the reflective proforma and captured brilliantly in the school's Digital Portfolio.⁷ This structure is a model of excellent practice. The evidence on the school's website includes an overall curriculum development structure together with a separate (but aligned) Thinking Curriculum referencing core elements. In addition, the school's thinking approach is illustrated by a wealth of related resources that outline how specific tools map onto key thinking processes. Within each of these domains there is ample explanatory information and exemplar materials linked to the school's curriculum policy and development planning.⁸

Thinking School Ethos and Culture

From the evidence presented, it is clear that Thinking Skills are embedded within the culture of ESPS. 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

² Ibid

³ School's Website and Digital Portfolio

⁴ Ibid

⁵ Reflective Proforma and School's Website

⁶ Reflective Proforma

⁷ School's Website

⁸ Digital Portfolio and School's Website

practice. This has a rich blend of elements. Pivotal to this is the high premium placed on sharing of best practice across the school to include all staff.⁹

The school provides parents with clear and helpful information relating to the thinking curriculum through documentation, presentations, school website, and parents' evenings. Of particular note is the public emphasis placed by the Headteacher on holistic lifelong learning. This has done much to ensure that metacognitive developments are fully embraced by the parent community. Indeed, the school's core vision of developing happy, curious, resilient and kind individuals is a clear and unique selling point in this respect with holistic lifelong learning at the core. Pupils work in partnership with parents and the community in order to undertake collaborative learning opportunities. The PTA is very active and serves to enable regular dialogue to thrive. As a consequence of these actions, parents are well equipped to support their children's learning fully.¹⁰

ESPS continues to forge partnerships underpinned by a Thinking Schools focus and is actively seeking to extend this via networking with like-minded schools. Various open days are used to great effect in order to illustrate the school's metacognitive pedagogy widely and the school has extended its reach to include dissemination of metacognitive approaches throughout the entire local and extended community. In addition, the Thinking Schools Coordinator has been instrumental in hosting visits from overseas visitors. Displays around the school are of exceptional quality and provide a rich source of celebratory illustration for Thinking Schools and tools. Governors provide exemplary support and challenge via rigorous analyses of Thinking Schools developments. They work in close partnership with staff, pupils and the local community. For example, the pupil leadership team (PLT) work with Governors via learning walks geared towards maintaining the Thinking Schools momentum. Through its connections with these stakeholders, ESPS conveys a positive, caring and creative atmosphere, demonstrating that careful thought has been put into its organisational structure and visual presentation. Indeed, feedback is wonderfully positive and indicates extremely high satisfaction in relation to the holistic qualities of ESPS pupils.¹¹

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 is evidenced in school improvement planning documentations, development reports, newsletters, school communications, school website, parent presentations and meeting agendas/minutes. This whole school commitment has galvanised ESPS's development.¹²

The Governing Body are not only fully supportive of the school's commitment to cognitive education, but also demonstrate a good understanding of how this approach enables children to think through their curriculum in order to bring learning to life. Governors are kept up to

⁹ Reflective Proforma, Digital Portfolio and School's Website

¹⁰ Ibid

¹¹ Ibid

¹² Ibid

date about the school's approaches to cognitive education, particularly through implementation monitoring activities. Governor partnership with the Drive team, PLT and local community secures their active and informed role. Feedback indicates that children not only develop their learning significantly, but also their capacity to think independently and develop their opinions leading to positive mental health and wellbeing. This is an impressive positive shift in pupils' holistic educational growth springing from ESPS's whole school development as a Thinking School.¹³

The Drive Team has evolved significantly over the years and includes a rich blend of staff. The full integration of the pupil body in the leadership of school developments is a model of exceptional leadership practice. This structure, together with the excellent leadership of the Drive Team Lead, has had a significant influence on the school's positive development as a Thinking School. Of particular note is the high active profile of The Drive Team. Staff lead on training activities and Governors are fully involved, including research and development elements. The clear distributed responsibilities have secured coherence and stands as a model for other schools to emulate. Together, these aspects ensure that there is continued dialogue about Thinking Skills so that specific areas of development can be identified and acted upon.¹⁴

There is ample evidence to indicate that ESPS is receptive to change and innovation. The development of cognitive approaches has been part of the school's vision and drive for improvement for many years in response to ensuring that the school has an explicit vision based upon inclusive educational values that would serve as the foundation for a strategic move forward.¹⁵ An impressive range of cognitive approaches have been incorporated into all aspects of the school as appropriate spanning thinking tools, thinking dispositions, reflective tools and self-regulatory elements. The recent focus on the science of memory is testament to the school's ongoing drive for metacognitive development.¹⁶

There is an organic Thinking Action Plan (aligned to whole-school development planning) by which the agreed cognitive tools, strategies and resources are being implemented and taught across the school. The range of cognitive developments indicates that plans are aspirational, designed to empower children to progressively take ownership of their cognitive development. Plans clearly set out the developmental agenda with the overarching current focus being to further develop learning and wellbeing.¹⁷ Also, plans and CPD provision dovetail well and provide a clear mechanism for ongoing development.

¹³ Digital Portfolio

¹⁴ Ibid

¹⁵ Ibid

¹⁶ Ibid

¹⁷ Ibid

Learning and Teaching

It is clear, from the documentation provided, that Thinking Skills are embedded within the culture of ESPS. Planning and Drive Team meetings provide an effective springboard for action in order that lessons include thinking skills. This is largely due to a 'keep it simple and focussed' approach. In this regard, developments typically 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 that all pupils are capable of making progress and this further supports the school's commitment to cognitive education. This clearly demonstrates how it is one of the school's main aims.¹⁸

The school's pedagogical approach is informed by ongoing CPD which has the core elements of metacognition and learning science as its foundation. This sound research evidence base has allowed learning and teaching to move forward with purpose and coherence. The emphasis placed on the learning environment is also clearly illustrated in the evidence provided by the school. These elements, combined with ESPS's commitment to the development of psychological well-being, have resulted in learning and teaching that is focused on the holistic development of every child. The alignment of Thinking Schools and the Wellbeing Award for Schools accreditations are prime examples of how this is an integral part of the educational provision at ESPS.¹⁹

ESPS has worked hard to develop a common thinking language that is appropriate to both age and stage. Pupils are routinely engaged in metacognitive talk. Indeed, dialogic talk now flourishes as a result of the school taking on board recommendations from the previous Thinking Schools accreditation. The pupil voice is integral to every stage of school development, and this serves to embed the Thinking School approach across the school. The aim is to develop a learning approach where higher order thinking qualities are not only nurtured but in a way that allows wider opportunities to flourish. The extended curriculum (including ecological awareness) is an exceptional development and promotes, challenge, high aspiration and self-regulatory thinking. 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. Where feasible, the school has personalised and contextualised visual displays and thinking tools 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. ESPS has clear evidence of developing learning and teaching and the current focus on developing aspirational independent learners reflects an unswerving commitment to carefully embed metacognitive approaches within lessons to encourage children to increasingly move out of their learning comfort zone. This is an interesting area for continued development, perhaps through formalising some of the successful tools and dispositional approaches to embrace thinking routines into self-regulatory strategies for moving out of a 'I am stuck' moment.²⁰

¹⁸ Ibid

¹⁹ Ibid

²⁰ Ibid

Training

The Drive Team are well versed in the theory, application and assessment of metacognitive education and psychological well-being. The highly trained Drive Team has undoubtedly influenced the focus on establishing a common thinking language and approach across the curriculum.²¹ There is an ongoing 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 cycle of lesson study in place that has evolved over time. The recent focus on dialogic approaches linked to Rosenshine's Principles of Instruction has been particularly impactful and has stimulated further development of collaborative talk. Learning walks involve staff, pupils, Governors and a range of stakeholders. This is illustrative of ESPS's collaborative open-door philosophy. ESPS places a high premium on professional reflection and this dovetails well with the Thinking Curriculum. The peer observation model has created a very supportive lesson study climate that has undoubtedly fostered creative and innovative practice. There is ample provision for staff to trial and extend approaches to the teaching of thinking. 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 together and to provide mutual support through the development of thinking generally and also through subject contexts. 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 further developing a practitioner research approach to data collection, analysis and application and the Drive Team are well placed to lead on this aspect on this aspect. This would fit well with the focus on becoming a reflective practitioner.²²

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. The aim is to enable pupils to assess themselves as learners. The two main alternative and complimentary assessments (WebQuest for Habits of Mind, and MALS) are excellent examples and outcome/impact indicators point to increased levels of pupil self-efficacy, self-motivation and autonomy. Assessments indicate largely high cognitive and self-perception development together with signposting strategies for further improvement. ESPS demonstrates excellent use of qualitative indicators, particularly classroom artefacts and again this is an example of excellent practice. Subject specific outcomes and progress assessments align well with this and serve as a model of exemplary multi-method assessment practice. Indeed, attainment and progress are excellent and rightly celebrated in the school's most recent Ofsted report (2023). ESPS 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.²³

²¹ Digital Portfolio, Reflective proforma and School's Website

²² Ibid

²³ Ibid

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 pupil progress.²⁴ There is qualitative data and quantitative data to support this indicating that the development of learning behaviours are associated with positive outcomes for pupils and are associated with academic outcomes and improved motivation.

The evidence provided indicates impressive achievement growth. The school's own internal analysis and presentation of these outcomes reflect a positive achievement trend together with dispositional and psychological wellbeing growth. The use of a wide range of child-centred indicators has ensured that pupils have a voice in this process. Indeed, an exceptionally high premium is placed on student voice across the school.²⁵

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 pupils' meta-cognition and the transfer of skills, strategies and learning behaviours. All staff undertake self-evaluation routinely. The collaborative nature of evaluative practice at ESPS is exceptional and involves a rich blend of stakeholders including the Headship Team, Governors, parents, pupils (PLT) and staff. The SPARE model would benefit from continued dissemination at all levels (from leadership to individual teachers) to further develop a 'researching professional' culture. Through a collaborative approach to leadership, the Drive 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. Evaluation is based upon the implications of change and includes a judicious blend of approaches and dimensions. Personal reflections are encouraged and captured via a wealth of self-report inventories. Together, these provide an excellent mechanism for gathering, analysing, and summarising evaluations. Pupil and staff feedback relating to Thinking Skills is placed at high premium and is a real evaluative strength. Pupils are integral to the evaluation process at ESPS and regular reflection opportunities are provided. Again, this is a model of excellent practice. ESPS has a real thinking culture across the school. There is a genuine feel that 'this is the way we do things around here'.

Ownership

There is absolutely no doubt that ESPS has made a full commitment to developing and embedding cognitive education and associated Thinking Schools approaches throughout the school. From the initial introduction of cognitive tools and practices, the school has expanded their repertoire of cognitive pedagogy and demonstrate a wide range of practice geared towards the development of thinking. There is evidence that the school is committed to distilling and integrating 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

²⁴ Ibid

²⁵ Ibid

ages. Collaboration is a high priority for the school, and it leaves no stone unturned. The focus on social, emotional, psychological, and physical dimensions is testimony to this. Through the careful and progressive introduction of cognitive tools and CPD geared towards developing teachers as 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. The vision for ongoing change has been expertly developed and operationalised via a clear roadmap for delivery, agreed with a range of stakeholders. Progression processes are highly effective and visual displays exemplary. ESPS is already a truly inspirational educational community. It places thinking and wellbeing central to all that it plans and implements. It celebrates diversity and rises to every challenge. As such, it stands as an exceptional example for others to aspire to due to its drive for holistic educational provision geared toward the development of lifelong learners. Indeed, learning flourishes here. The future for ESPS is exciting as it moves into its next stage of development and the school is poised to be a world-class educational establishment. As such, Advanced Thinking School accreditation is well within its grasp.

Conclusion

The huge range of evidence submitted undoubtedly indicates that ESPS meets the criteria set by Thinking Schools @Exeter as a Thinking School and demonstrates an unswerving commitment to the continued development of a whole school approach to the teaching of thinking. It has been a privilege to undertake this evaluation. I therefore recommend that re-accreditation be awarded until March 2027.

I would like to thank the school for the clear and judicious evidence base, expertly 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 and possibly inform a development workshop to further aid action planning. This might include:

- Further develop and maintain staff development through ongoing external and internal training geared towards rationalising what works best, for whom and how, 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, assessment of process, assessment of product, evaluation of process and evaluation of product. This would benefit from an

overview for how these elements are integrated and could build on the ESPS models already in place and act as a means of providing a concise overview.

- Focus lesson observations on 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.
- Add the internal use of effect sizes at an individual teacher, team and whole school level to further strengthen the quantitative robustness of data in order to supplement high quality qualitative data. This will allow impact comparisons of meta-cognitive strategies and feedback with the work of The Sutton Trust and John Hattie.
- Consider the introduction of reflective thinking journals for pupils and staff in order to add further to the high-quality assessment and evaluation practices.
- Further develop evaluative research to continue the development of staff as researching professionals. To gain accreditation as an Advanced Thinking School (a suggested next step), researching professionals are expected to offer articles relating to best practice to publications such as the school's magazine, local newspapers, the school website and professional publications. Other forums where impact can be made public are leader/teacher learning communities and action research seminars. The SPARE model of evaluative action research is a useful framework through which to apply this at all levels of leadership and classroom practice.
- Consider further developing the Thinking Schools menu on the school's website in order to capture the rich range of resources and developments.
- Use the criteria of an Advanced Thinking School to frame future developments to deepen and extend the understanding and expertise of ESPS. 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. ESPS is well placed to be a Gold Standard centre of excellence for the teaching of thinking and radiate best practice out to a wider educational audience. The pursuit of Advanced Accreditation would support this vision.



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