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**Report following the analysis and evaluation of evidence submitted by Šiauliai kindergarten
“Pasaka” 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.

Šiauliai kindergarten “Pasaka” (SKP) is a popular and successful Kindergarten. 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 pupils regardless of starting points. Indeed, SKP has aligned Emotion Recognition with metacognitive developments. Specifically, the school’s vision is one of a school of thought, actively and constantly seeking 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 Director 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 Organisations’ is highly effective and impactful due to the collaborative nature of the partnership. SKP’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 SKP. The school’s Thinking School journey started in earnest in 2015 when the school embarked on its developmental trajectory in partnership with highly qualified expert lecturers. From 2019-2022 (in cooperation with ‘Thinking Organisations’ – a high quality training provider), SKP took part in an ESFA funded project to develop children’s learning competencies using Habits of Mind. This included visits to UK Thinking Schools. Indeed, the development of high-quality Thinking Habits underpins the work of the entire learning community. Since then, SKP has gone from strength to strength with its work surrounding metacognitive development. A number of foci have been skilfully introduced and embedded such as Thinking Maps, Thinking Hats, Questioning Keys, Thinking Habits (Habits of Mind) and Higher-Order Questioning (based on Bloom’s Taxonomy). Of particular note is the effective integration of these elements and their

¹ Reflective Proforma, Evidence Links and School’s Website

alignment with emotional wellbeing. This is illustrative of the school's commitment to foster deep thinking and holistic development for all pupils.²

SKP 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 Director. Indeed, the Director has taken on the role of Thinking Skills Coordinator. These factors combine to create consistency of approaches via clear and collaborative leadership.³

Pupils at SKP have an history of excellent educational provision. This is extremely impressive given the full commitment to total inclusivity. 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 such as the development of psychological wellbeing and dispositional growth. 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 Neringa Baršauskienė (Director and Thinking Skills Coordinator) 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 2015 when the focus moved towards Thinking Schools 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, Questioning Keys, Habits of Mind and Higher-Order Questioning. 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 SKP. 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 lecturers and consultants add significant value to Thinking Schools developments.⁵

SKP 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 SKP such that it forms the spine of everything the school aspires to achieve. Sharing of best practice flourishes. Indeed, parents are fully involved in the practical support of

² Ibid

³ Ibid

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

⁵ Ibid

Thinking Schools developments and encouraged to share in their children's thinking successes. They also get an opportunity to actually see their child's work and get a high level of support in order to add value to the educational provision through 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

SKP 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. Through its connections with these stakeholders, SKP 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 Director 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. 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 SKP 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 district/municipality. 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 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

⁶ Ibid

⁷ Ibid

⁸ Ibid

⁹ Ibid

¹⁰ Ibid

¹¹ Ibid

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 SKP. 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 'Childhood Curriculum' has been developed by the school community and is based firmly on the development of a culture of thinking. A range of cognitive tools are routinely used as part of the educational provision. For example, Thinking Maps are fully embedded including the highly effective application of the Frame of Reference 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, the ESFA project has been instrumental in this respect and SKP has developed their own bespoke Thinking Habits tools. These have a clear focus such as 'Impulsivity Management', 'Persistence' and 'Empathetic and Sincere Listening'. Excellent support and resources ensures that staff and pupils 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 pupils 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. These elements, combined with SKP'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

SKP'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

¹² Reflective Proforma School's Website and Evidence Links

¹³ Ibid

¹⁴

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. SKP 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 Director and her team are well versed in the theory, application and assessment of cognitive education and psychological well-being. 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. The Thinking Schools training itinerary can be systematically traced from its origin in 2015 to the current focus on learning and teaching strategies that build connection. 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 Director and her team are well placed to lead on this aspect.¹⁷

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 typically focus on 18 domains including the ability to learn, creativity and problem-solving. Pupil's Thinking Habits development is judiciously monitored and tracked via a highly innovative and effective 'Stair Step' approach and children use Thinking Hats for self-assessment. These aspects add value to the range of complimentary forms of assessment. Indeed, assessment tasks themselves typically involve thinking tools. Assessments indicate that children are eager to learn. However, SKP is keen to further develop children's ability to hypothesise and draw conclusions. SKP demonstrates excellent use of qualitative indicators, particularly observation and classroom artefacts. Again this is an example of excellent practice. SKP demonstrates a healthy 'data informed' (rather than data

¹⁵ Ibid

¹⁶ Reflective Proforma, School's Website and Evidence Links

¹⁷ Ibid

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 pupil 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 pupil 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 pupils' meta-cognition and the transfer of skills, strategies and learning behaviours. This makes some 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 Director 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. 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 collaborative nature of lesson observation is a model of excellent practice.

Ownership

There is no doubt that SKP 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 brilliantly. 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.

¹⁸ Ibid

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

²⁰ Ibid

SKP is a wonderful and inspirational 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 exceptional. SKP places a high premium on teaching aligned to care and all children are valued. The collaboration with parents is exceptional and the school and parents work as highly effective educators. Collaboration with expert training providers and lecturers is excellent. 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 Šiauliai kindergarten “Pasaka” 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 January 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 ‘pupil voice’ in terms of Thinking School developments. This might involve developing a Pupil Drive Team as children move through the school.

- SKP 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 SKP. 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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