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**Report following the analysis and evaluation of evidence submitted by Stanton Bridge 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.**

Stanton Bridge Primary School is a popular and successful primary school with 448 pupils on roll (ages 3-11). The school has a clear vision 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, Stanton Bridge Primary School's vision is centred around developing a thirst for learning via a clear belief: 'Crossing the Bridge to Success'. This permeates learning throughout the school (including professional learning). Reflection is held in high esteem and the school's mission is 'Inspiring Excellence through Reflective Practice'. Clear values align with this and include Relationships, Equality, Care, Thinking Flexibly and Listening. This is testimony to the school's commitment to holistic lifelong learning. The school is situated in a transient population with a 63% stability percentage for 2023. Achievement is impressive and there has been a marked improvement in attendance figures since embedding Thinking School elements. The Headteacher and her senior team are highly experienced in terms of Thinking School developments and champion a whole school approach to the leadership and teaching of thinking. Stanton Bridge Primary School's curriculum is clearly mapped and underpinned by research that embraces the Science of Learning. The composition of the Drive Team is exceptional and is expertly led by the Headteacher and Drive Team Lead (Assistant Headteacher). The Drive Team have clear distributed roles spanning whole school commitment, tools and strategies, Thinking Skills, collaboration / networking, reflective questioning (embracing Bloom's Taxonomy), and environment. This leadership structure is a model of outstanding practice. Together, these elements act to 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.<sup>1</sup>

Pupil progression through phases has high priority at Stanton Bridge Primary School. The school's Thinking School journey started in earnest in 2021 as a response to developing a more metacognitive approach to learning and teaching. The aim was to operationalise the belief that all pupils can achieve. Since then, Stanton Bridge Primary School has gone from strength to strength with its work surrounding metacognitive development. A number of foci have been skilfully introduced and embedded including Thinking Frames, Higher-Order

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<sup>1</sup> Reflective Proforma and Evidence Document

Questioning, Habits of Mind and Thinking Routines. The alignment of metacognitive strategies with Rosenshine's principles is particularly innovative and impactful. This is illustrative of the school's commitment to foster creative deep thinking for all pupils.<sup>2</sup> A significant factor underpinning the high impact of the Drive Team is the full and inspirational support provided by the Headteacher and Drive Team Lead. Indeed, the Headteacher has made Thinking School developments a school-wide priority. Active Trustee support is also prominent in the development process. Trustees receive regular specific updates in relation to Thinking School Developments. These factors combine to create consistency of approaches via clear and collaborative leadership.<sup>3</sup>

Stanton Primary 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. There is a clear 'House of Values' that centre on character, Competence and Connectedness. Underpinning this provision is a fully inclusive pastoral care provision embracing children, parents, staff and the community. This has the school's values firmly at its core.<sup>4</sup>

### **Evidence Base**

Thinking Schools @Exeter received the school's submission for accreditation from Sofina Islam OBE (Headteacher) and Emma Good (Thinking Skills Coordinator / Assistant Headteacher) 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 specifically since 2021 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 evidence document, all of which are clearly linked to the 15 criteria and accreditation rubric. This structure is consistently applied and is a particular strength. The evidence on the school's website includes visual information relating to how Stanton Bridge Primary School teaches thinking. The website also includes key indicators of meta-cognitive approaches in the classroom. These include sharing of thinking tools, higher order questioning, clear curriculum links and pupils tackling tasks independently. As such, there is a clear aim to make thinking visible. The school has linked this well to the science of learning.

### **Thinking School Ethos and Culture**

From the evidence presented, it is clear that Thinking Skills are embedded within the culture of Stanton Bridge Primary School. 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.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> Ibid

<sup>3</sup> Ibid

<sup>4</sup> School's Website, Reflective Proforma and Evidence Document

<sup>5</sup> Ibid

Stanton Bridge Primary School has a prominent and visible thinking culture, and this is due to the excellent organisational structure and visual presentation. The school's website and illustrative materials exemplify the prominence of a Thinking Culture. High quality communications with parents ensure that the thinking partnership between the school and parents is strong. Indeed, the school has introduced Pupil Meta-coaches who present Thinking School developments to staff, Trustees and parents. Assemblies and other public forums provide rich opportunities to share children's thinking successes. 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.<sup>6</sup> Stanton Bridge Primary School has forged a number of partnerships underpinned by a Thinking Schools focus. The outstanding collaboration enables best practice to permeate throughout wider school community. Specific examples of partnership work include the leadership of a Thinking School webinar relating to embedding metacognitive approaches. Through its connections with a wide range of stakeholders, Stanton Bridge Primary School 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.<sup>7</sup>

### **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 and inclusive Drive Team structure stands as a model of excellent practice. Indeed, the Drive Team is comprised of members of SLT, experienced teachers, early career teachers and teaching assistants. The collaborative and integrated leadership model includes exemplary external support via a consultant who is highly experienced and trained in metacognitive approaches to educational provision. The Drive Team Lead also provided exemplary support and feedback based on a comprehensive audit of the key accreditation elements. Indeed, coaching approaches are used extensively for communications with staff.<sup>8</sup> The Trustees 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. Trustees are regularly kept up to date about the school's approaches to cognitive education through thorough reports and Trustee training sessions. This stands as a model of excellent practice. Feedback indicates a positive shift in pupils' thinking skills together with whole school development as a Thinking School.<sup>9</sup>

The Headteacher provides exemplary and inspirational leadership to support the Drive Team. Modelling and communication are 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

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<sup>6</sup> Ibid

<sup>7</sup> Ibid

<sup>8</sup> Ibid

<sup>9</sup> Ibid

acted upon.<sup>10</sup> There is ample evidence to indicate that Stanton Bridge Primary School is receptive to change and innovation. The development of cognitive approaches has been part of the school's vision and drive for improvement for a 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.<sup>11</sup> 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, higher-order questioning and thinking routines.<sup>12</sup>

There is a specific organic development 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.<sup>13</sup> 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 Stanton Bridge Primary School. Indeed, thinking serves as a 'golden thread' throughout the school. The school's Learning and Teaching approach is built on evidence-based cognitive principles from the Science of Learning, embracing elements such as cognitive load, motivation, deliberate practice and memory / schema development. Planning and Drive Team meetings provide an effective springboard for action in order that all lessons include thinking skills. For example, Thinking Frames are fully embedded including the application of the Reflective Lens. Of particular note, is the integration of Thinking Tools with Rosenshine's Principles, Assessment for Learning, and Dynamic Assessment (with real-time feedback). Excellent support and resources ensure that staff and pupils develop thinking approaches effectively. This is largely due to a 'keep it simple and clear' approach. In this regard, the Drive Team meetings 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 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.<sup>14</sup>

The school's pedagogical approach is informed by clear development planning and CPD underpinned by a firm foundation of research and evidence. This sound research evidence base 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. These elements, combined with Stanton Bridge Primary

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<sup>10</sup>Ibid

<sup>11</sup> Ibid

<sup>12</sup> Ibid

<sup>13</sup> Reflective Proforma, School Website and Evidence Document

<sup>14</sup> Ibid

School'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.<sup>15</sup>

The school has heavily invested in dispositional development and children get recognition for exhibiting effective learning habits. Other learning and teaching developments have included the inclusion of Thinking Routines. The 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. 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. Stanton Bridge Primary School has clear evidence of developing learning and teaching and the appreciation of elements such as the Science of Learning has shifted practice from a teaching approach to a pedagogical culture.<sup>16</sup>

## **Training**

The inspirational and values-led Headteacher has fully embraced cognitive education and has ensured that finance and resources are geared towards high quality training for all staff. Trustees fully endorse this line of school development. The Drive Team are well versed in the theory, application and assessment of cognitive education and psychological well-being. The Drive Team is highly experienced due to maintaining a healthy stability in terms of its composition. The highly trained Thinking Schools co-ordinator and Drive Team have undoubtedly influenced the focus on establishing a common thinking language and approach across the curriculum.<sup>17</sup> 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. Webinars and online resources have had a focus on building cultures of thinking, and this is a clear example of Stanton Bridge Primary School's commitment to being a flag ship Thinking School. There is a clear overview of staff training charting professional development activities relating to Thinking Schools and more widely. The integrated and collaborative approach is exceptional. Stanton Bridge Primary School has aligned training with their core aspiration to take a whole-school approach to the teaching of thinking. The SPARE model is closely aligned to the implementation process, which is further aligned to the School Development cycle. There is a cycle of lesson study in place that has had a recent focus on higher-order questioning linked to Bloom's Taxonomy. The responsive and adaptive nature of this is exceptional. The Drive Team have received training provided by high quality consultancy and this has been expertly cascaded. Weekly staff meetings are dedicated to metacognition and Trustee meetings also have this as an integral focus. 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 collaboratively and to provide

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<sup>15</sup> Ibid

<sup>16</sup> Ibid

<sup>17</sup> Reflective Proforma, School Website and Evidence Document

mutual support through the development of thinking generally and through particular foci. Good practice is shared widely, and lesson observations are used supportively to evaluate and share good practice in a climate of mutual aspiration. Moving forward, this would benefit from the further extension of practitioner research to embrace the SPARE model of evaluative action research and the Drive Team are well placed to lead on this aspect.<sup>18</sup>

### **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. These include observations, classroom artefacts and Thinking and Learning Surveys. Questionnaires are integral to assessment practice. The development of Metacognition Rubrics is an outstanding innovation and helps to scaffold metacognitive growth. Reflection is integral to the assessment process of the school and peer / self-assessment are key elements. Indeed, the pupil voice is a very strong feature at Stanton Bridge Primary School. Dynamic Assessment and Real-Time Feedback are routine features of teaching and are particularly impactful. Assessments indicate largely high cognitive and self-perception development together with signposting strategies for further improvement. Outcomes for key areas are high and Stanton Bridge Primary School is working hard to secure exceptional standards despite the challenges presented as a result of the pandemic. Stanton Bridge Primary School demonstrates excellent use of qualitative and quantitative indicators, and this is an example of exemplary practice. Stanton Bridge Primary School also 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.<sup>19</sup>

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.<sup>20</sup> There is qualitative data from a range of sources about how the development of learning behaviours are associated with positive outcomes for pupils and are associated with academic outcomes and improved motivation.

The excellent pupil progress results indicate impressive achievement 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.<sup>21</sup>

### **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,

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<sup>18</sup> Ibid

<sup>19</sup> Ibid

<sup>20</sup> Reflective Pro-forma, School Website and Evidence Document

<sup>21</sup> Ibid

strategies and learning behaviours. Stanton Bridge Primary School makes excellent integral use of the SPARE model of Illuminative Evaluation, and outcomes from baseline surveys inform the content of the P (Plan) phase which leads to actions and subsequent evaluations. As a result, quantitative and qualitative data relating to thinking, attitudes and behaviour are integrated as part of the evaluative process. These evaluations are exemplary and draw on a judicious range of indicators including observations and informal dialogue with children and staff. These evaluations also feed into the excellent school development cycle so that a clear developmental direction is charted. Staff are fully involved in the collation of data and peer observations are particularly impactful in terms of evaluating pedagogy. Of particular note, is the highly effective use of baseline audits, an excellent feature, that allow a variety of lenses (staff, pupils and parents) to be utilised in order to chart metacognitive growth. 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. There is a genuine feel that 'this is the way we do things around here', and this is clear evidence of the drive to create a culture of thinking. The development plan is an organic collaborative, document the voices of the entire school community features 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 all evaluative elements is a model of exemplary practice. It is clear that Stanton Bridge Primary School is well placed for future Advanced Accreditation, and this reflects the ongoing ambition to develop an exceptional whole school approach to the teaching of thinking.

## **Ownership**

There is no doubt that Stanton Bridge Primary School 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. 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. Indeed, recent Consultant feedback is clear that a common language for thinking and Thinking Tools and strategies has been established across the school. Together, these elements combine to effectively promote the educational growth of all children by providing them with excellent support and ownership over their own development.

Stanton Bridge Primary School is an inspirational learning community school that celebrates diversity and places the individual needs of children at the heart of everything it does. Leadership is exceptional at all levels and the Headteacher is an exemplary role model. The Drive Team model is outstanding and blends individual talent with distributed responsibility. The school is relentless in its commitment to its core values. Developments are evidence

informed and contextually implemented. Thinking thrives because reflection and aspiration are integral drivers. Creativity and innovation are the foundation of Stanton Bridge Primary School. Human elements thrive as a result of the school's thinking culture where people look after one another. As a result, the whole school community flourishes in a climate of trust and support. This is high-quality educational provision at its best and all children achieve the highest holistic standards. Stanton Bridge Primary School is an exceptional and inspirational example of a visionary, inspirationally led Thinking School where holistic lifelong learning takes priority.

## **Conclusion**

The range of evidence submitted undoubtedly indicates that Stanton Bridge 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 July 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 exemplary 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:

- Continue to 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, 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.
- 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 (ideally 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.
- Move from evaluation to evaluative research to further foster the development of staff as researching professionals. To gain accreditation as an Advanced Thinking School, 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 evaluative research at all levels of leadership and classroom practice.

- Consider the use of five key questions for evaluative purposes: What works best? For whom? Under what circumstances? How? Why? These can feed into the 'E' of the SPARE model of evaluative research.
- Use the criteria of an Advanced Thinking School to frame future developments in order to deepen and extend the understanding and expertise of Stanton Bridge Primary School. 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.
- Consider aligning the Thinking Routines rubric (already aligned to Bloom's Taxonomy) with lesson objectives to aid targeted planning and teaching / learning.



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**On behalf of the University of Exeter, UK**

**July 2024**