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Report following the analysis and evaluation of evidence submitted by Mount Kelly 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.

Mount Kelly is a popular and forward-thinking independent day and boarding school with approximately 600 pupils on roll (EYFS-A Level). The school is a member of the Cognitive Science Network (CSN), a high-quality training provider specialising in the integration of Cognitive Science with Oracy, SEND, Questioning, Cognitive Load, Feedback, Rosenshine's Principles, Metacognition, Motivation, Retrieval Practice, Growth Mindset, Spacing, Interleaving, and Dual Coding. This reflects the school's unswerving commitment to the ongoing facilitation high-quality teaching aligned to metacognitive strategies. The school is rightly proud of this. Indeed, Mount Kelly has a clear purpose outlining its values and how to achieve them. The overarching focus is on lifelong learning and holistic growth for all pupils regardless of starting points. Mount Kelly's purpose is to deliver a values-led, life-defining educational experience. This has explicit values as the foundation and includes:

- Compassion
- Courage
- Humility
- Respect
- Commitment
- Integrity.

This permeates learning throughout the school (including professional learning). Reflection is held in high esteem and the school's purpose and values are captured by the application of collaborative aspiration. Qualitative and quantitative elements align well, and the Pupil Voice thrives via an expertly led Pupil Leadership provision. The Head Master/Principal of the Foundation and his senior team are fully versed in terms of Thinking School developments and champion a whole school approach to the leadership and teaching of thinking. Mount Kelly's curriculum is clearly mapped and underpinned by research that embraces the science of learning and metacognitive elements. The explicit integration of metacognition with other elements such as Oracy and Feedback reflects the school's wider understanding of the multi-faceted nature of developing a whole school approach to the teaching of thinking. Indeed, the integration of metacognitive elements with wellbeing is also a particular feature. Thinking School developments are expertly coordinated by the Thinking Schools Coordinator/Assistant Head (T&L). Together, these elements act to operationalise the school's purpose/vision and

include the recognition of close links between emotional wellbeing, academic achievement, encouragement of ambition, curiosity, positivity, resilience and parental engagement.¹

Pupil progression through phases has high priority at Mount Kelly. Indeed, the all-through educational vision is a true reality. The school's Thinking School journey started in earnest in 2021 when it pursued its Thinking School vision via high-quality training and consultancy. This has continued to intensify, and developments have been rapid and impactful. A number of foci have been skilfully introduced. This is illustrative of the school's commitment to foster creative deep thinking for all pupils.² A significant factor underpinning the high impact of the Drive Team is the full support of the Head Master/Principal of the Foundation and Thinking Schools Coordinator/Assistant Head. Active and committed Governor support is also prominent in the development process. These factors combine to create consistency of approaches via clear and collaborative leadership.³

Mount Kelly 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. Indeed, the most recent ISI report grades the development of these aspects as excellent. There is a clear belief in wider educational development as the core aim and the value of every contribution that services this. Underpinning this provision is a fully inclusive pastoral care provision embracing children, parents, staff and the community. This has the school's purpose and values firmly at its core.⁴

Evidence Base

Thinking Schools @Exeter received the school's submission for accreditation from Mr Guy Ayling MA (Head Master/Principal of the Foundation) and Mr Alan Johnson (Thinking School Co-ordinator/Assistant Head) evidencing the history of the school's cognitive education development journey and the work that the school has 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 base, all of which are linked to the 15 criteria and accreditation rubric. As such, there is a clear aim to make thinking and learning visible. The school has linked this well to its values and curriculum intent.

¹ Reflective Proforma and Evidence Base

² Ibid

³ Ibid

⁴ School's Website, Reflective Proforma and Evidence Base

Thinking School Ethos and Culture

From the evidence presented, it is clear that Thinking Skills are embedded within the culture of Mount Kelly. 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.⁵

Mount Kelly has a visible thinking culture, and this is due to the excellent organisational structure where metacognitive developments are prioritised. This is captured well in the school's curriculum where the pursuit of lifelong learning is an integral element. Mount Kelly also demonstrates a holistic approach to this where emotional, physical, academic, social, moral, spiritual and cultural development are prioritised. Sports, Science and the Arts add to this rich educational provision. High quality communications with parents ensure that the thinking partnership between the school and parents is strong. 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. Children are explicitly encouraged to become independent learners where the use of metacognitive tools and strategies are the norm. As a consequence of these actions, the whole learning community is equipped to support children's learning.⁶ Mount Kelly has forged a number of partnerships underpinned by a Thinking Schools focus within the wider Thinking Schools community. The excellent collaboration enables best practice to permeate throughout wider school community. Through its connections with a wide range of stakeholders, Mount Kelly 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 Head Master/Principal of the Foundation and Thinking Schools Coordinator (Assistant Head) give full commitment to both the Thinking School ethos and the implementation of the cognitive development agenda. This has cascaded to leadership throughout the school. The Thinking Schools Coordinator (Assistant Head) also provides exemplary support and feedback based on a comprehensive audit of the key accreditation elements.⁸ The Governors 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 regularly kept up to date about the school's approaches to cognitive education through thorough reports and Governor visits. Indeed, the five year strategic plan fully embraces the school's purpose of delivering a values-led and life-defining education. Feedback indicates a positive shift in pupils' thinking skills together with whole school development as a Thinking School.⁹

⁵ Ibid

⁶ Ibid

⁷ Ibid

⁸ Ibid

⁹ Ibid

The Head Master/Principal of the Foundation and his senior team provide exemplary leadership to support the staff as a whole. Staff are fully engaged in developments as a result of this. 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 acted upon.¹⁰ There is ample evidence to indicate that Mount Kelly 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 has an explicit purpose based upon inclusive educational values that would serve as the foundation for a strategic move forward.¹¹ 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, growth mindset and higher-order questioning linked to an enriching holistic curriculum. The Pupil Voice is instrumental in bringing close involvement of parents and carers.¹²

There is a specific organic Strategic 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.¹³ 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 Mount Kelly. Indeed, thinking serves as a 'golden thread' throughout the school. The school's Learning and Teaching approach is built on evidence-based cognitive principles embracing elements drawn from Cognitive Science. Of particular note, is the integration of Thinking Tools with the rich curriculum offer. Mount Kelly has a clear 'Learner Profile' and thinking language. Mount Kelleians are encouraged to take the risk of being more than what they think they are and to show resilience when things go wrong. The Mount Kelly Critical Thinking Policy operationalises this wonderfully and it specifically identifies key 21st century skills such as:

- Collaboration and Communication
- Creativity and Innovation
- Problem-Solving and Decision-Making
- Digital Literacy and Information Fluency
- Flexibility and Adaptability.

Lessons typically follow a structure informed by evidence-based research in the field of Cognitive Science embracing elements such as Cognitive Load and Retrieval Practice. Excellent support and resources ensure that staff and pupils develop thinking approaches effectively. There is a 'keep it simple and clear' approach. This, aligned to excellent leadership and communication, ensures that good practice is shared judiciously with all staff to develop

¹⁰Ibid

¹¹ Ibid

¹² Ibid

¹³ Reflective Proforma, School Website and Evidence Base

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 also clearly demonstrates how it is one of the school's main aims.¹⁴

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 Mount Kelly's commitment to the development of psychological, social and emotional well-being have resulted in learning and teaching that is focused on the holistic development of every child.¹⁵

The school has heavily invested in metacognitive development. The aim is clearly 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. Where feasible, the school has personalised and contextualised visual displays and strategies 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. Mount Kelly has clear evidence of developing learning and teaching and the appreciation of wider elements via the outstanding holistic curriculum it offers. This has shifted practice from a teaching approach to a pedagogical culture.¹⁶

Training

The values-led Head Master/Principal of the Foundation and his team have fully embraced cognitive education and have ensured that finance and resources are geared towards high quality training for all staff. Governors fully endorse this line of school development.¹⁷ 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. The Cycle of Lesson Study is based around the key Critical Thinking elements mentioned earlier. As such, CPD is closely aligned to the Cognitive Science Network. Staff projects feed into the excellent CPD Carousel which in turn follows a 'Teach Meet' style. This makes excellent use of Action Plans and feedback. The school's approach to CPD is one of professional growth. 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 excellent. Mount Kelly has aligned training with their core aspiration to take a whole-school approach to the teaching of thinking and the school community work closely with a high-quality training consultant. The responsive and adaptive nature of this in terms of next steps is excellent. There is ample provision for staff to trial and extend approaches to the teaching of thinking. Parents are fully informed of the Thinking Schools

¹⁴ Ibid

¹⁵ Ibid

¹⁶ Ibid

¹⁷ Reflective Proforma, School Website and Evidence Base

ethos, which features prominently in the school's communications. Staff are encouraged to work collaboratively and to provide mutual support through the development of thinking generally and through particular foci. Good practice is shared widely and observations are used supportively to evaluate and share good practice in a climate of mutual aspiration. The customised training approach extends the reach of professional growth. Moving forward, this would benefit from the further extension of practitioner research to embrace the SPARE model of evaluative action research, and the Thinking Schools Coordinator is well placed to lead on this aspect.¹⁸

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 a range of surveys. This is serviced well via a range of evaluative opportunities including baseline data. Reflection is integral to the assessment process at Mount Kelly, and the voices of staff and pupils are integral. Reflection is aligned closely to peer and self-assessment. Individual and group learning tasks are peer-assessed, for example. In order to facilitate this, pupils are introduced to 'Comparative Judgement' principles via their Critical Thinking lessons. The clear Metacognition/Self-Reflection process is excellent. Having initially focused on the MALS survey, the school has further refined its approach to utilise the PASS assessment survey as this allows a more complete pupil profile to be analysed and acted upon. Assessments indicate largely high cognitive and self-perception development together with signposting strategies for further improvement. Figures and data are impressive over the Thinking Schools implementation period indicating that Mount Kelly is an impactful and attractive place to learn. Achievement outcomes for key areas show an impressive rate of growth. Mount Kelly demonstrates excellent use of qualitative and quantitative indicators, and this is an example of excellent practice. The 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.¹⁹

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

The excellent holistic pupil growth indicates impressive impact. The school's own internal analysis and presentation of these outcomes reflect a positive achievement trend and demonstrates transparency and aspiration for further improvement.²¹

¹⁸ Ibid

¹⁹ Ibid

²⁰ Reflective Pro-forma, School Website and Evidence Base

²¹ Ibid

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. Mount Kelly makes implicit use of the SPARE model of Illuminative Evaluation, and outcomes from judicious assessments inform school developments. As a result, quantitative and qualitative data relating to thinking, attitudes and behaviour are integrated as part of the evaluative process. These evaluations draw on a range of indicators including observations, surveys and CPD Carousel feedback. Staff are fully involved in the collation of data and peer observations are particularly impactful in terms of evaluating pedagogy. Evaluation is informed by CSN elements in order to service the 'how' aspects of developing as a Thinking School. There is a clear message of 'Adapting to Context' in order to ensure that practice meets the needs of all pupils. Of particular note, is the highly effective use of the Pupil Voice in the evaluation process. Through a collaborative approach to leadership, the school has 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 and the voices of the entire school community features prominently in the evaluative process. External reviews further add to the evaluative blend. 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 excellent practice. Mount Kelly is well placed to become an Advanced Thinking School in the future. This reflects the school's ongoing ambition to develop an exceptional whole school approach to the teaching of thinking.

Ownership

There is no doubt that Mount Kelly 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 purpose and values, the school has laid a strong foundation that ensures the whole school approach to the teaching of thinking flourishes. Indeed, progress in developing a whole school approach to the teaching of thinking has been rapid and purposeful since 2021. The external training and support have been excellent and has allowed consistency and individual creativity to flourish. The fusion of Cognitive Science and Thinking Schools represents Mount Kelly's appreciation of the integrated nature of metacognitive development. Together, these elements combine to effectively promote the educational growth of all children and the professional growth of staff by providing them with excellent support and ownership over their own development.

Mount Kelly is a unique school on many levels. The school's approach is one of promoting holistic lifelong learning and the skilful integration of metacognitive approaches with other curricular dimensions is excellent. Mount Kelly truly lives up to its purpose of delivering a values-led and life-defining educational experience. The school's consistent drive for research-informed practice, aligned to 'human' qualities, clearly illustrates that it is a responsive educational community that celebrates compassion, courage, humility, respect, commitment, integrity and psychological wellbeing. It places the individual needs of all children at the heart of everything it does. Leadership is excellent at all levels and the Head Master/Principal of the Foundation and Thinking Schools Coordinator (Assistant Head) are at the heart of this. The school is relentless in its commitment to living its purpose and values. Developments are evidence informed and implemented with drive, purpose and care. External evaluation and support are welcomed and responded to. As a result, the whole school community flourishes in a climate of care, high aspiration, and mutual respect. Mount Kelly is an excellent example of a Thinking School that skilfully blends high academic ambition with full commitment to the wellbeing of its educational community.

Conclusion

The range of evidence submitted undoubtedly indicates that Mount Kelly 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 November 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:

- 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 Mount Kelly. 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 introducing and aligning Thinking Routines (already aligned to Bloom's Taxonomy) with lesson objectives (and exam Assessment Objectives) to aid targeted planning and teaching/learning. This will also help to service the further development of dispositional elements.
- Further consider the place of metacognitive approaches in the curriculum design. For example, research has shown that higher levels of impact occur when a 'blended' approach (separate provision *and* integrated in subjects) is taken.
- Develop the school's website to further reiterate the core position of Thinking Schools in the educational provision and offer.



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