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Report following the analysis and evaluation of evidence submitted by Saint Marie's Catholic 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.

Saint Marie's Catholic Primary School (St. Marie's) is a small, family-orientated, high-achieving, ambitious, and fully inclusive Voluntary Aided primary school with 202 pupils on roll (ages 4-11). The school is rightly proud of being values-led and this is very much a core part of its educational provision. Indeed, St. Marie's has a clear mission of 'Learning through Faith, Love and Respect' and how this is key to the provision of opportunity to create resilient learners with a love of challenge. This goes beyond policy and is explicitly operationalised via taught provision that has core aims and objectives. The overarching focus is on lifelong learning and holistic growth for all pupils regardless of starting points. This has six core principles as the foundation and includes:

- Fostering spiritual and moral development
- Provision of a welcoming, happy, and safe environment
- Provision of a stimulating learning environment
- Fostering independent learning
- The development of positive relationships throughout the entire learning community
- The provision of high-quality leadership at every level.

This permeates learning throughout the school (including professional learning). Reflection is held in high esteem and the recent introduction of the My Reflective Self Journal is illustrative of the high premium St. Marie's places on the Pupil Voice. Developments in achievement (academic and wider personal development) are impressive and show an alignment with embedding Thinking School elements. The Headteacher and her team are fully versed in terms of Thinking School developments and champion a whole school approach to the leadership and teaching of thinking. St. Marie's curriculum is clearly mapped and underpinned by research that embraces the Science of Learning. The explicit linkage and integration of Thinking Frames, Thinking Hats, Bloom's Taxonomy (linked to higher-order thinking), Thinking Routines (Think-Pair-Share), Question Matrices, Mind Maps, Brain House concepts, Dual Coding, and Rosenshine's Principles is an excellent example of this. The composition of the Drive Team is excellent and is collaboratively led. Personal development is an exceptional dimension at St. Marie's and the Wellbeing Warriors element is just one example of excellent practice in this area. Together, these integrated elements act to operationalise the school's vision 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 St. Marie's and curriculum planning via Intent-Implementation-Impact is consistently operationalised. The school's Thinking School journey started a number of years ago and intensified in 2020 with the support of high-quality consultancy. Developments have been purposeful and impactful. A number of foci have been skilfully introduced, integrated, and embedded. This is illustrative of the school's commitment to foster and creative deep thinking for all pupils.² A significant factor underpinning the high impact of the Drive Team is the full support of the Headteacher, SLT and Drive Team members. Active Governor support is also prominent in the development process and there is a clear and unwavering thread of commitment to developing as a Thinking School. Governors receive regular specific updates in relation to Thinking School Developments and undertake school visits. Indeed, St. Marie's has a dedicated Drive Team member on the Governing Body. These factors combine to create consistency of approaches via clear and collaborative leadership.³

St. Marie's is relentless in pursuing high standards of achievement. However, it is inclusive lifelong holistic learning that is placed at the core of the educational provision at the school and not just the end result. Highly respected charter marks such as Dyslexia Friendly School, Emotionally Friendly School, and Tourettes Friendly School reflect St. Marie's adaptive approach towards education for all. Subject specific learning sits alongside wider dimensions such as the development of psychological wellbeing and dispositional growth. 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, families, staff and the community. This has the school's values firmly at its core.⁴

Evidence Base

Thinking Schools @Exeter received the school's submission for accreditation from Mrs Faye Jackson (Headteacher) and Mrs Nicola Bunting (Deputy 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 2020 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 clearly linked to the 15 criteria and accreditation rubric. The evidence on the school's website includes visual information relating to how St. Marie's 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. Thinking tools play an integral part across the school and feature in elements such as pupil Knowledge

¹ Reflective Proforma and Evidence Links

² Ibid

³ Ibid

⁴ School Website, Reflective Proforma and Evidence Links

Organisers. As such, there is a clear aim to make thinking and learning visible. The school has linked this well to its ethos and curriculum intent.

Thinking School Ethos and Culture

From the evidence presented, it is clear that Thinking Skills are embedded within the culture of St. Marie's. 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

St. Marie's 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. Assemblies and other public forums provide rich opportunities to share children's thinking successes. Indeed, assemblies have actually involved pupils modelling thinking tools such as Thinking Frames. The high premium placed on celebration and displays further strengthen the Thinking School ethos and culture. Displays typically focus on learning and do not over-stimulate. Instead, they promote curiosity through targeted hooks and prompts. As a consequence of these actions, the whole learning community is equipped to support children's learning.⁶ St. Marie's has forged a number of partnerships underpinned by a Thinking Schools focus within Thinking Schools Community and more widely. Teachers regularly collaborate with other schools and lead on pedagogical elements via events such as hosting the Thinking Matters Northwest meeting. As an Early Excellence Partnership School and member of The Prince's Trust Institute, St. Marie's networks with other schools and also delivers CPD. The excellent collaboration enables best practice to permeate throughout wider school community. Through its connections with a wide range of stakeholders, St. Marie's conveys a positive, caring and creative atmosphere, demonstrating that careful thought has been put into its organisational structure and visual presentation. This is clearly evidenced.⁷

Senior Management and Whole School Commitment

The Headteacher, SLT and Drive Team give full commitment to both the Thinking School ethos and the implementation of the metacognitive development agenda. This has cascaded to leadership throughout the school and the strong and developmental structure stands as a model of excellent practice. There is a clear focus on professional growth and a rich blend of CPD elements serve to operationalise the comprehensive and impactful School Development Plans. Indeed, these plans have a clear focus on Intent, Implementation, and Impact together with close alignment to developing as a Thinking School. The Drive Team provides exemplary support and feedback based on a comprehensive audit of the key accreditation elements.⁸ Governors are regularly kept up to date about the school's approaches to cognitive education

⁵ Ibid

⁶ Ibid

⁷ Ibid

⁸ Ibid

through thorough reports and Thinking School Governor monitoring visits. Feedback indicates a positive shift in pupils' thinking skills together with whole school development as a Thinking School.⁹

The Headteacher and SLT provide exemplary leadership to support the school's commitment to developing a whole school approach to the teaching of thinking. Modelling is a key feature of leadership and pedagogic practice. Communications 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 St. Marie's is receptive to change and innovation. The development of cognitive approaches has been part of the school's vision and drive for improvement in response to ensuring that the school has an explicit developmental trajectory based upon inclusive and holistic educational values. In this way, St. Marie's has retained its unique characteristics whilst also embracing change and innovation.

There are integrated School Development Plans 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.¹¹ 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 St. Marie's. Indeed, thinking serves as a 'golden thread' throughout the whole school. For example, Pupil Voice is prominent in learning walks and Bloom's Taxonomy is intrinsic to planning processes. The school's Learning and Teaching approach is built on evidence-based metacognitive principles. Quality First Teaching is aligned well to the use of thinking tools and LUCID RECALL further enhances information processing together with schema development. These principles are explicitly shared with all pupils via assemblies featuring illustrative modelling of key aspects. Lessons have been adapted to include scaffolding and all pupils receive specific training in the use and application of cognitive tools such as Thinking Frames, Thinking Hats, and Mind Maps. Of particular note, is the integration of thinking tools with Dual Coding, Rosenshine's Principles, and other facets such as Knowledge Organisers. The My Reflective Self Journal is an excellent innovation and this compliments other reflective processes such as staff self-reflections on the implementation of Thinking School approaches. In this regard, there is a clear reflective 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

⁹ Ibid

¹⁰ Ibid

¹¹ Reflective Proforma, School Website and Evidence Links

school's commitment to cognitive education and clearly demonstrates how it is one of the school's main aims.¹²

St. Marie'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 St. Marie's commitment to the development of personal development and wellbeing, have resulted in learning and teaching that is focused on the holistic development of every child.¹³

The school has heavily invested in dispositional development and children get recognition for exhibiting positive learning behaviours. There is a real sense of integrating metacognitive strategies with other elements. Colour semantics are used to develop speech and language. This is supplemented by other strategies linked to the development of phonics and maths. 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 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. St. Marie's has clear evidence of developing learning and teaching and the appreciation of wider elements such as Outdoor Learning. This has shifted practice from a teaching approach to a pedagogical culture.¹⁴

Training

The values-led Headteacher and her team have fully embraced metacognitive 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. All staff are well versed in the theory, application and assessment of metacognitive education and psychological wellbeing. The high-quality training has undoubtedly influenced the focus on establishing a common thinking language and approach across the curriculum.¹⁵ 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. This makes excellent use of reflection via processes such as self-report inventories. Excellent external consultancy support further adds to the rich blend of training and development. The school's approach to CPD is one of professional growth. Learning walks feed into this process and staff are supported to pursue professional qualifications such as NPQHT, NPQSL, NPQML, and SENDCO AWARD. 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 exemplary. St. Marie's has aligned training with their core aspiration

¹² Ibid

¹³ Ibid

¹⁴ Ibid

¹⁵ Reflective Proforma, School Website and Evidence Links

to take a whole school approach to the teaching of thinking. There is a clear appreciation of the Pupil Voice, and there is a real sense of staff and pupils working in partnership to maximise school development impact. 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 mutual support through the development of thinking generally and through particular foci. Good practice is shared widely and learning walks are used supportively to evaluate and share good practice in a climate of mutual aspiration. The integrated training approach extends the reach of professional growth, and this has done much to significantly further increase the momentum of training impact. 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. Indeed, the Plan, Action and Reaction elements of the SPARE model map well with the Intent, Implementation and Impact structures already in place.¹⁶

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. These include observations, classroom artefacts and the excellent My Reflective Self Journal. Reflection is integral to the assessment process at St. Marie's and the voices of staff and pupils are integral. Reflection is aligned closely to peer and self-assessment. Success criteria is routinely shared with pupils and assessments feed into targeted interventions and support. PASS and WELLCOM data are used judiciously, and Bell Curve analysis of NFER tests are undertaken by all staff and Governors. Pupil View baseline data further adds to the rich blend of assessment practices and allows pupils to review and reflect on themselves as a learner. Assessments indicate largely high metacognitive and self-perception development together with exceptional and wide-reaching achievement in key areas. Attendance and behaviour figures are also exceptional indicating that St. Marie's is a supportive and attractive place to learn. St. Marie's demonstrates excellent use of qualitative and quantitative indicators, and this is an example of excellent practice. St. Marie's 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.¹⁷

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.¹⁸ There is qualitative data from a range of sources about how the development of learning behaviours is associated with positive outcomes for pupils and exceptional behaviour/motivation.

¹⁶ Ibid

¹⁷ Ibid

¹⁸ Reflective Pro-forma, School Website and Evidence Links

The excellent holistic pupil growth indicates impressive impact. The school's own internal analysis and presentation of these outcomes reflect an extremely positive achievement trend and demonstrates transparency and aspiration for further improvement.¹⁹

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' metacognition and the transfer of skills, strategies and learning behaviours. St. Marie's 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 are excellent and draw on a range of indicators including Governor Reports, Teacher Self-Assessment, and Learning Walks. 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 PASS and WELLCOM data aligned to qualitative evaluative data via questionnaires, classroom artefacts, and observations. There is a clear professional dialogue process, and the Pupil Voice is once again integral to evaluation elements. There is a strong collaborative approach to leadership. The high-quality external consultancy reviews are good examples of this. As such, St. Marie's has established a culture of thinking and school improvement built on regular opportunities for staff to discuss the process and efficacy of metacognitive 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. 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. St. Marie's is certainly well-placed for future Advanced Accreditation, and this reflects the ongoing ambition to develop an exceptional whole school approach to the teaching of thinking. The school's networking and leadership input in the wider educational community is an excellent example of looking ahead to Advanced Accreditation.

Ownership

There is no doubt that St. Marie's 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 metacognitive pedagogy. There is evidence that St. Marie's is 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 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, St. Marie's has laid a strong foundation that ensures the whole school approach to the teaching of thinking

¹⁹ Ibid

flourishes. Indeed, progress in developing a whole school approach to the teaching of thinking has been purposeful, child-centred, and insightful. 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.

St. Marie's is a responsive, adaptive and highly ambitious educational community that leaves no stone unturned in its pursuit of holistic educational development. It places the individual needs of children at the heart of everything it does. St. Marie's is judiciously led at every level and there is an unswerving commitment to preserve the school's vision and values. The whole learning community thinks deeply about what it does, and wide collaboration is the norm. Developments are evidence-informed, innovative and implemented with caring professionalism. Thinking thrives because reflection, self-evaluation and aspiration are integral drivers. As a result, high holistic achievement flourishes in a climate of interactions based on mutual respect and empathy. External evaluation is welcomed and responded to with purpose and vigour. In the context of the international Thinking School community, St. Marie's is a world-class beacon of holistic educational excellence and as such the school is well-placed to be a core hub for other educationalists to learn from.

Conclusion

The range of evidence submitted undoubtedly indicates that St. Marie's Catholic Primary School meets the criteria set by Thinking Schools @Exeter as a Thinking School and demonstrates a true commitment to the continued development of a whole school approach to the teaching of thinking. I therefore recommend that accreditation be awarded until February 2028.

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 metacognitive 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. Indeed, the Plan, Action and Reaction elements of the SPARE model map well with the Intent, Implementation and Impact structure already in place.
- 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 St. Marie's Catholic Primary School.
- Consider further developing and aligning Thinking Routines (already aligned to Bloom's Taxonomy) with lesson objectives (and examination Assessment Objectives) to aid targeted planning and teaching/learning.
- 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. This could build on the already established excellent provision.



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