



School of Education  
Faculty of Humanities, Arts and Social Sciences  
St Luke's Campus  
EXETER EX1 1TE  
UK

Email [dave.walters@groundedpractice.co.uk](mailto:dave.walters@groundedpractice.co.uk)  
Web <https://education.exeter.ac.uk/>

**Report following the analysis and evaluation of evidence submitted by Stanley Park Infants' School for the purpose of re-accreditation as an Advanced Thinking School by Thinking Schools @Exeter, School of Education, University of Exeter, UK.**

**Evidence base**

The criteria for accreditation as an Advanced Thinking School starts from the assumption that all the criteria for the first level of accreditation by Thinking Schools@Exeter continue to be met within the ongoing practices of the school community. The second level of evaluation further assumes that the original criteria for recognition as a Thinking School have now become so embedded that staff and pupils have developed a deeper understanding of the principles of cognitive education and its impact on both their individual learning and its potential contribution to society. Much of the evidence referenced in this report reflects the significant and sustained progress the school has made in its on-going journey as a thinking and learning community and follows on from the previous re-accreditation as a level 2 Thinking School.

The focus for this second level of evaluation turns towards the presentation of evidence as to how the school has moved forward in seeking to achieve those aims. Evidence has been sought on teaching (and support) staff's developing skills as practitioners; their impact on the overall development of the pupils beyond their technical skills in the use of the tools; and their continuing impact on the community of the whole school and beyond. Five key areas for accreditation as an Advanced Thinking School have been assessed: Dissemination of Practice; Evaluative Research; Professional Development; Differentiation; and Whole School Assessment.

The University of Exeter received the school's submission for re-accreditation as an Advanced Thinking School from Stanley Park Infants' School in the form of a Reflective Proforma with evidence links, extensively illustrating the continuing work the school is undertaking as a level 1 Thinking School together with how it has continued to move forward as a level 2 Thinking School. School evidence includes pupils' work, examples of displays and posters, relevant sections of the school improvement plan, Headteacher reports, photographs, newsletters, project plans, video evidence, Drive Team documentation, action plans, learning walk observations, and other data. From the evidence provided, it is clear that the school more than exceeds the Level 1 Thinking School criteria, and the focus of this report will be on continued development of the school on the basis of the level 2 criteria.

### **Starting point: the school context**

Stanley Park Infants' School is a forward thinking, innovative, and highly successful primary school with 296 pupils on roll (ages 3-7). The school is situated as an influential member of the highly successful Cirrus Primary Academy Trust, and International Thinking School Network. The school has a long history of Thinking School development and is totally committed to developing a whole school approach to the teaching of thinking in a responsive and adaptive manner. As such, Stanley Park Infants' School is positioned as one of the key members of the international Thinking School community. The school's vision and values are captured by a clear mission to value everyone as individuals such that they are encouraged to respect each other. This is wonderfully illustrated by Stanley Park Infants' School's 'Pupil Choices':

- Listen for learning
- Use gentle hands and feet
- Do the right thing
- Work as a team and respect others
- Be polite and honest
- Take pride in our school.

This clearly demonstrates Stanley Park Infants' School's focus on child-centred learning. The core values of inclusion, independence, and aspiration are operationalised via children trying

hard in every endeavour such that life-chances are transformed.<sup>1</sup> Stanley Park Infants' School has sustained its Thinking School development with purpose, innovation, drive, and care. This has subsequently secured exceptional further development due to its unswerving devotion to inclusion and the embracement of diversity. This has been achieved via a visionary curriculum that is supplemented by the Cirrus Primary Academy Trust Pupil Charter. This is illustrative of an exceptionally inclusive school where every individual is encouraged to achieve excellence via the pursuit of a rich and full educational experience.

In aligning the school's ethos and values to a metacognitive developmental process via careful attention to holistic lifelong learning, Stanley Park Infants' School has ensured that the Thinking School approach is an integral and secure part of the learning culture of the entire school. Stanley Park Infants' School achieves excellent holistic pupil outcomes as demonstrated by a wealth of robust indicators. In addition to being an Advanced Thinking School, Stanley Park Infants' School holds the Endurio Award (in recognition of excellence in creating a supportive learning community), the Inclusion Quality Mark (in recognition of outstanding commitment to inclusive best practice), The School Mental Health Award (in recognition of excellence in embracing mental health principles in educational provision), and the runner-up English Speaking Union Award (in recognition of high-quality commitment to the development of Oracy). The latter is part of an on-going Action Research Programme. This is indicative of an educational provision that serves the wider needs of all pupils. Indeed, the educational provision extends pupils' learning and understanding via an imaginative focus on real-life application. Stanley Park Infants' School is rated 'Good' by its most recent Ofsted report which celebrated the schools' personal development provision, rating it as 'Outstanding'. Stanley Park Infants' School is clearly a school that prides itself in achieving and maintaining the highest educational standards via a 'human' and fully inclusive provision. For example, the school has an excellent reputation for fully supporting pupils through its curriculum, pastoral system, and enrichment offering. As such, Stanley Park Infants' School has created a wonderfully welcoming and inclusive atmosphere where learning is not only nurtured but also thrives.<sup>2</sup>

---

<sup>1</sup> School's website, reflective proforma and digital evidence

<sup>2</sup> Ibid

Stanley Park Infants' School's cognitive education development journey has moved forward with innovation, forward-thought, creativity, care, and purpose since its previous re-accreditation. Subsequently, a clear thread of training has been in place. Parents and carers form an exceptional partnership with Stanley Park Infants' School in terms of the teaching, learning, and support provision.<sup>3</sup> There is a strong sense of the 'why' and 'how' elements of pedagogy being pivotal to the work of the school. With reference to this, the school seeks to prepare pupils as confident, creative, adaptable, and resilient happy thinkers so that they become committed lifelong learners.<sup>4</sup> Stanley Park Infants' School has embedded thinking and metacognitive approaches in all aspects of school life in order to ensure that its aims and ethos are a reality. High quality CPD has done much to secure a cohesive staff team, and there is a real sense of collaboration at all levels. The support of Cirrus Primary Academy Trust and 'external' metacognitive consultancy is exceptional and fully embraces core educational principles and contextual individuality.<sup>5</sup>

### **Dissemination of practice**

For this area of accreditation, we assess the way in which the school can demonstrate evidence of sharing their Thinking School practice and experiences across subject areas with others. There is extensive evidence of sharing practice within the school, across subjects and teams, with all sections of staff participating in formal and informal staff training events and programmes. Learning walks, drop-ins, staff feedback, and the Pupil Voice interact to spread the Thinking School approaches widely. Parents and support staff are fully included via a range of engagement opportunities such as the Thinking Skills Booklet and Weekly Chit-Chats. As such, parents receive a wealth of information illustrating Thinking School developments and how Thinking Tools feed into the development of key learning behaviours. The adaptation of Guy Claxton's work to create the 'Stanley Park Learning Mind' is particularly innovative and impactful. Trust-wide training and collaboration events are supplemented by wider conference contributions such as International Thinking Skills Blogs (via the influential

---

<sup>3</sup> Digital evidence

<sup>4</sup> School's website, reflective proforma and digital evidence

<sup>5</sup> Ibid

Thinking School Network), hosting visits from a range of schools across the UK, and presentation of approaches to metacognition and Super Learners at the Festival of Metacognition (an international platform for wide dissemination of practice). This input provides other educationalists with first-hand experience of the Thinking School approach geared towards the holistic development of children. As such, there is ample evidence of effective dissemination of tools, but also a focus on personalisation. There is a rich blend of qualitative data that contributes well to the collaborative dissemination of best practice. The Headteacher and Thinking Skills Coordinator are highly influential and champion many creative curriculum and assessment innovations. This is wonderfully cascaded to staff throughout the school and has resulted in high-quality partnership and conference input by Stanley Park Infants' School. As such, there is a clear whole school understanding of children's learning progress in both qualitative and quantitative domains.

Stanley Park Infants' School has a very strong networking structure that has been extremely impactful in terms of providing an excellent vehicle for dissemination of practice. As one of the Thinking School Network's core schools, Stanley Park Infants' School is highly influential locally, regionally, nationally, and internationally. This is achieved via the excellent collaborative structure and approach which makes excellent use of the 'Hub' model. On an international level, Stanley Park Infants' School has made its high-quality research accessible online via Thinking School Network. As a result, it is clear that Stanley Park Infants' School disseminates high impact practice across internal subject areas, the local community, cluster schools, nationally and internationally.

All new staff receive training in theory, pedagogy, and practical approaches relating to Thinking. There is an extensive and innovative range of resources and structures to further support the dissemination of Thinking School approaches and pupils are pivotal to disseminating best practice. Judicious timelines ensure that the process of dissemination is planned and actioned effectively. Conferences and associated workshops further add to the school's process of dissemination.<sup>6</sup>

---

<sup>6</sup> Reflective proforma and digital evidence

## **Evaluative research**

This area of evaluation is particularly concerned with the ways in which staff are seeking evidence of the positive impact and outcomes of the Thinking School approach and how this evidence is used to drive whole school learning and improvement. Based on the evidence of Level 1 and level 2 criteria, there is a continuing and wide-ranging programme of evaluation within the school. This includes specific consideration of the process and impact of initiatives on the learning and development of pupils. Evaluative Research is embedded in the working practices of the school. For example, staff are involved in a range of projects such as the ongoing Action Research inquiry relating to the innovative Thinking Triangle. This skilfully weaves together Talking for Writing, Oracy, and Metacognition. This project is of exceptional high-quality and is incredibly impactful in terms of inclusive learning. Evaluative practices at Stanley Park Infants' School utilise a range of data collection tools including Thinking Tools audits, learning walks, focused staff meetings, and pupil/teacher reflections. Teacher Reflective Journals provide an excellent vehicle for professional inquiry in this respect. The recent Cycle of Lesson Study has had a focus on Oracy and a shared language for talk and thinking. Core evaluations are insightfully led by the Thinking Skills Coordinator/Research and Development Lead in close collaboration with the Headteacher, SLT, and Year Group Leaders. The proactive involvement of pupils in the evaluative process ensures that evaluative research has an inductive as well as deductive dimension.

Evaluative Research at Stanley Park Infants' School has clear, succinct parameters outlining what is being studied, who is being studied, together with associated timeframes. Indeed, the development plans are very much Evaluative Research based. This is an excellent example of the school's commitment to delivering extensive practitioner research excellence. Of particular note, is the explicit use of the SPARE model of Evaluative Research. Together, this has done much to secure an ongoing cycle of Thinking School development. Findings from research have directly influenced the work of staff across the school, and the Cycle of Lesson Study feeds into the process well. This is an excellent example of research informed inquiry. Evidence is presented that demonstrates the ongoing collection of data related to Thinking Skills across the school, in particular with respect to how well Thinking Skills are embedded within the school system and what the impact is on pupils and staff. It is clear that there are

effective strategies in place across subject areas that encourage and support evaluation and reflective practice of learning and teaching approaches and impact.<sup>7</sup>

Thinking Skills and dispositional development are part of ongoing evaluations of pupil progress, providing further evidence of the ongoing evaluation of Thinking Skills approaches throughout the school. It is important to note in this respect, that pupils are routinely consulted about what the Thinking Tools mean to them. The focus on the development of the whole child is a particularly strong aspect of school life at Stanley Park Infants' School and ongoing reflective practice is part of the school's educational culture. The schools Super Learner character model and the trust's Pupil Charter anchor developments so that a coherent 'golden thread' is maintained, and this indicates that the Thinking School approach has a clear drive for impact in relation to positive learning outcomes and behaviours for the whole school community.<sup>8</sup>

### **Professional development**

Evidence of professional development concerns two key issues: technical, in the practical application of a range of thinking tools; and qualitative demonstrated by the quality of staff as mediators.

In terms of technical development, it is clear from the school development planning that new members of staff are routinely training in Thinking Skills. CPD has real sense of professional growth. The highly effective use of a range of professional development forums such as reflective meetings, face-to-face training, learning walks, and the cross-trust communications stand as a model of professional growth excellence on a school wide level. Thinking School principles are fully embedded, and this does much to aid the overall coherence of the pedagogical aims. There is an excellent induction programme in place and ensures that professional development opportunities are consistent and well embedded in the culture of the entire school. New staff are automatically trained in all the Thinking Tools and associated pedagogy. This is wonderfully supplemented by the provision of opportunities to shadow,

---

<sup>7</sup> Reflective Proforma and digital evidence

<sup>8</sup> Ibid

discuss and observe lessons conducted by lead practitioners within the school, trust, and the wider educational community. There is a clear change management plan and the use of Staff Reflective Journals is again highly impactful.

Evaluative research builds individual strengths and areas for development into whole school planning and actions. Staff make explicit use of the Cycle of Lesson Study approach to support the introduction of new ideas based on current research. The Drive Team has regular focussed meetings with clear development action points that further feed into CPD linked to priorities. Stanley Park Infants' School provides a range of innovative bespoke resources for staff in order to operationalise the priorities. The Thinking Triangle provides an excellent vehicle for application in this respect. These excellent resources are supplemented by expert trust and consultancy support so all staff can see how they might apply what they have learned in their own classrooms. Pupil feedback plays an intrinsic part in development planning and is used to further Stanley Park Infants' School's responsive and adaptive approach to educational provision. Indeed, CPD is highly responsive to feedback. For example, supporting the needs of children with a SEND focus has been an integral part of the Cycle of Lesson Study over recent years in response to the previous Thinking School re-accreditation. This has allowed the school to focus not so much on the use of specific Thinking Tools, but to provide a strong background and rationale for ways of thinking across different contexts, subjects, and interdisciplinary areas. This demonstrates an excellent understanding and awareness of thinking as a pedagogic cultural strategy. The curriculum structure is excellent in this respect.

Conference input and associated workshops are well researched and organised such that they provide a wealth of rich and inspirational opportunities for professional growth. There is strong evidence of the continued focus of staff on the development of their own knowledge and understanding of thinking and Thinking Skills approaches in general. Thinking Skills approaches are continually evaluated throughout the school and staff are routinely asked to reflect on their use of Thinking Tools. This again provides strong evidence that the use of Thinking Skills and the language around thinking are strongly embedded within the school, the teaching practice and its overall ethos, such that the school's developmental influence is far reaching and impactful. It is clear from the evidence provided that all staff are immediately made aware of this ethos and practice. Importantly, staff are given the time and resources to



train and to work with colleagues through cycles of lesson observations. The collaborative and team approach to professional growth is highly influential in terms of promoting professional dialogue and development, iterative reflection, skill mastery, and collaboration.<sup>9</sup>

## **Differentiation**

This area of accreditation includes the value of Thinking Tools in the education of specific individuals and groups. This includes a sensitivity to the individual needs of all the children in lessons, and a focus on developing autonomy and individuality in pupils' approaches to problem-solving. Through thorough and on-going dialogue with pupils, teachers are able to mediate learning such that learning is geared towards the needs of all pupils at an individual level, regardless of starting point or specific barriers to learning. A range of Thinking Tools are scaffolded wonderfully to serve the varying needs of all pupils. For example, Thinking Frames are fully embedded across the school and are used to shape pupil's thinking and also reflection skills. The Super Learners initiative is also a wonderful platform for children to explore and reflect on the Stanley Park Learning Mind. Intrinsic to this, the Pupil Voice is exceptional in terms of inclusion, individualisation, and differentiation. Indeed, the School Council is one of many examples of how the school embraces this. Stanley Park Infants' School is fully committed to child-centred education. This is rightly recognised by the school gaining the prestigious Inclusion Quality Mark. The curriculum model of the school adopts a holistic lens where interleaving features in order to develop 'range' and creativity. As such, wider educational provision is excellent such that all children get opportunities to excel in different ways whilst preserving alternative, varying, and diverse outlooks. Progression is clearly mapped via this adaptive and responsive curriculum and all pupils are encouraged to develop individuality and autonomy. Resources are carefully differentiated to enable all children to access tasks and displays are used actively to promote discussion related to the identification of thinking processes. This has further ensured that pupils are supported fully based on individual needs. Stanley Park Infants' School has a collaborative and family orientated approach where diversity, nurture, inspiration, inclusion, and drive flourish in harmony.

---

<sup>9</sup> Ibid

Indeed, parents and carers are highly supportive and appreciative of the school in this respect.<sup>10</sup>

### **Whole School assessment**

This aspect of the accreditation relates to pupils' and teachers' reflections upon their own and others' performance via assessment procedures, as well as critical reflection on Thinking Tools. Assessment developments are exceptional and are cutting-edge at Stanley Park Infants' School. They clearly integrate a range of Thinking Tools and approaches with self/peer reflections. For example, the Pupil Voice and Pupil Questionnaires benefit from the enhanced use of the Reflective Lens, aligned to Thinking Frames. The School has adapted the Myself as a Learner Scale (MALS) to develop a bespoke age-appropriate tool for assessing metacognitive awareness and Thinking Skills. This is used alongside a rich range of other school-developed assessment processes. These have a focus on self-perception as a learner together with the effectiveness of Thinking Skills application. As a result of these aspects, the Pupil Voice thrives through regular self-assessment opportunities. This is an excellent example of how assessment is the servant rather than the master of the curriculum. Assessments again indicate high impact across a wide range of indicators. Thinking Tools such as Thinking Frames, Thinking Hats, and Habits of Mind (via the Super Learners framework) are also used effectively for assessment and evaluation purposes.

Evidence is sought for the reflective processes of staff through the emphasis of developing as a researching professional. Staff approach curriculum developments with evidence informed reflections and align high quality teaching with their own professional growth. Pupils are encouraged to find meaning in a variety of thinking approaches such that they see the relevance and point of developing them. Assessment and evaluative information are shared school-wide to strengthen the consistency of effective teaching and learning strategies. A clear line of pupil feedback has been highly effective in identifying learning needs from the children's perspective. Parents are also involved in the monitoring process. They are supported well by the school and add significant value to the educational provision at Stanley Park Infants' School. Achievement, attendance and behaviour show impressive, continued

---

<sup>10</sup> Ibid

growth indicating that the exceptional collaborative partnerships are highly impactful. Assessment at Stanley Park Infants' School is wonderfully aligned to the school's inclusive culture and adds significant value to the holistic educational growth of the children. Assessment certainly puts children first.

### **Points for further consideration**

Stanley Park Infants' School has responded well to the points for further consideration suggested in the previous re-accreditation report. The developments relating to evaluative research and assessment are good examples of this, as are the developments in curriculum development policy and practice (to include innovative developments to SEND provision). I conclude my evaluation with some suggestions as to how the school could continue to develop as a Thinking School and possibly inform a development workshop to further aid action planning. This might include:

- 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.
- Continue to move from evaluation to Evaluative Research to further foster the development of staff as researching professionals. 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.
- 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.
- 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 provision.
- Further extend international influence via adding to the global platforms already in place.

## **Outcome**

The thorough evidence provided by Stanley Park Infants' School clearly reflects that the school is a Thinking School in which Thinking Skills are at the heart of school life. Stanley Park Infants' School has taken a wonderfully inclusive and innovative holistic educational growth stance in relation to its entire provision. This goes beyond knowledge and metacognition to fully embrace dispositional development and different ways of thinking. The school's broad and balanced curriculum services this well. For example, Stanley Park Infants' School fully embraces individuality and diversity such that the needs of pupils with particular needs and SEND are fully integrated. In so doing, Stanley Park Infants' School is an inspirational beacon of educational excellence. In the context of the international Thinking School community, this places Stanley Park Infants' School as a world-leading holistic educational provider. By living up to its vision and values, learning really is brought to life such that life-chances and cultural capital are transformed. Stanley Park Infants' School's Thinking School approach is part of the entire school culture, and it has been a pleasure to review the inspirational and innovative practice undertaken by this exceptional Advanced Thinking School. In conclusion, the application has provided rich and extensive evidence for re-accreditation, and I therefore recommend that re-accreditation as an Advanced Thinking School be awarded until July 2028. Congratulations to Stanley Park Infants' School for this stunning and awe-inspiring achievement!



**Dr Dave Walters, BA Ed Hons, MPhil Ed, EdD**  
**Thinking Schools Assessor**  
**Grounded Practice Educational Services**

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

**July 2025**