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Report following the analysis and evaluation of evidence submitted by Ashgrove Primary School for the purpose of 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 accreditation as a level 1 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 accreditation as an Advanced Thinking School from Ashgrove Primary 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, Principal 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

Ashgrove Primary School is an exceptionally inclusive, forward thinking, innovative, highly ambitious, and fully supportive primary school with 378 pupils on roll (ages 4-11). The school is situated as long-standing influential member of the highly successful Thinking Schools Network (TSN). Indeed, Ashgrove Primary School is a TSN Hub School in recognition of its influential Thinking School profile. Context is key at Ashgrove Primary School and developments are unwaveringly mindful of this. Developments are bespoke and responsive to the changing needs of the school. Ashgrove Primary School is totally committed to developing a whole school approach to the teaching of thinking in a responsive and adaptive manner. As such, Ashgrove Primary School is positioned as one of the key influential members of the international Thinking School community. The school's values are captured by a clear Core Values Statement: 'Learning, Caring, Growing Stronger Together; Connection before Correction'. Indeed, life chances are truly transformed such that pupils develop their cultural capital. This is wonderfully operationalised by Ashgrove Primary School's pedagogic approach. This clearly demonstrates Ashgrove Primary School's focus on child-centred learning. Specifically, the Core Values are operationalised via the Thinking Toolkit comprised of Thinking Frames, Thinking Hats, Habits of Mind, Kagan Structures, Philosophy for Children (P4C), Mindset Mascots, and Thinking Routines. The innovative application of hand signals in relation to Thinking Frames is exceptional. Through skilful application, children are nurtured

and guided to try hard in every endeavour such that life-chances are transformed.¹ Ashgrove Primary School has sustained its Thinking School development with determination, creativity, innovation, 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 comprised of a rich offering that integrates metacognitive elements with other aspects such as Literacy, Numeracy, Mental Maths Support, STEM, and Forest/Eco Schools. This is illustrative of an exceptionally adaptive and 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, Ashgrove Primary School has ensured that the Thinking School approach is an integral and secure part of the learning culture of the entire school. Ashgrove Primary School achieves excellent holistic pupil outcomes as demonstrated by a wealth of robust indicators. This is indicative of an educational provision that serves the wider needs of all pupils. In addition to pursuing its Thinking School journey (originally awarded Level 1 Accreditation in 2024 following the instigation of high-quality consultancy training and support in 2021), Ashgrove Primary School holds the prestigious UNICEF Rights Respecting School Gold Award. Indeed, the educational provision extends pupils' learning and understanding via an imaginative focus on real-life application. Ashgrove Primary 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. It is no coincidence that achievement, behaviour, and attendance figures are excellent indicating that Ashgrove Primary School is a wonderfully inviting place to learn.²

Ashgrove Primary School's cognitive education development journey has moved forward with ambition, innovation, creativity, care, and rigour since its previous accreditation. Subsequently, a clear thread of training has been in place. Parents and carers form an

¹ School's website, reflective proforma and digital evidence

² Ibid

exceptional partnership with Ashgrove Primary School in terms of the teaching, learning, and support provision.³ 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 reflective, confident, creative, adaptable, and resilient thinkers so that they become committed lifelong learners.⁴ Ashgrove Primary School has embedded thinking and metacognitive approaches in all aspects of school life in order to ensure that its Core Values Statement of ‘Learning, Caring, Growing Stronger Together; Connection before Correction’ is a visible 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 TSN and ‘external’ quality assurance is exceptional and fully embraces core educational principles and contextual individuality.⁵

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. Ashgrove Primary School has undoubtedly made the shift from being a Thinking School to being an influential leader in the field of metacognition. 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, Book Looks, Newsletters, News Articles, Drop-ins, staff feedback, and the Pupil Voice interact to spread the Thinking School approaches widely. Indeed, the Pupil Focus Group approach is an excellent example of the high premium placed on the inclusion of pupils in the leadership and dissemination process. Parents and support staff are fully included via a range of engagement opportunities. As such, the whole school community receive a wealth of information illustrating Thinking School developments and how Thinking Tools feed into the development of key learning behaviours. Wide training and collaboration events are supplemented by wider contributions such as regional and national Metacognitive Meets and conferences. Ashgrove Primary school not only participates in a rich range of conferences, but also leads and hosts them. The hosting of the Research-Informed Conference in 2025 is

³ Digital evidence

⁴ School’s website, reflective proforma and digital evidence

⁵ Ibid

an excellent example of this. On an international level, Ashgrove Primary School has established links with colleagues from a range of contexts via the use of a variety of social global platforms. 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 Principal, Vice Principal/Thinking School Coordinator and Drive Team are highly influential and champion many creative curriculum and assessment innovations. Conference presentation inputs are regular aspects contributing to the professional growth of Ashgrove Primary School's staff. These elements are wonderfully cascaded to staff throughout the school and has resulted in high-quality partnerships. As such, there is a clear whole school understanding of children's learning progress in both qualitative and quantitative domains.

Ashgrove Primary 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 TSN's Hub Schools, Ashgrove Primary School is highly influential locally, regionally, nationally, and internationally. This is achieved via the excellent collaborative structure and approach which makes excellent use of expansive networking. As a result, it is clear that Ashgrove Primary 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. Pupils are pivotal to disseminating best practice. Judicious timelines ensure that the process of dissemination is planned and actioned effectively. Conferences, festivals and associated workshops further add to the school's process of dissemination.⁶

⁶ 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 involving a rich blend of foci related to integrating a range of metacognitive and wider pedagogic practices. Many staff are engaged in formal programmes along with associated projects. The associated projects skilfully weave together a host of impactful educational initiatives. All projects are of exceptional high-quality and are incredibly impactful in terms of inclusive learning. Indeed, the Vice Principal's Research Synopsis on Whole School Assessment is an excellent example of the school applying the concept and construct of Researching Professionals. Evaluative practices at Ashgrove Primary School utilise a range of data collection tools including Thinking Tools audits, learning walks, focused staff meetings, and pupil/teacher reflections. The recent Cycle of Lesson Study has moved to a Collaborative Professional Dialogue model with a clear focus on the 'why' elements of pedagogy. The recent cycle relating to Assessment Strategies in ICT and Digital Learning is an excellent example of Ashgrove Primary School's drive for continuous professional growth.

The focus on actioning the recommendations from the previous accreditation (integration of thinking processes, strengthened quantitative analysis, development of Evaluative Research, and application of Level 2 criteria), has built upon the expertise of staff across the entire school. Core evaluations are insightfully led by leaders throughout the school. The proactive involvement of pupils via Pupil Focus Group Interviews in the evaluative process ensures that Evaluative Research has an inductive as well as deductive dimension. Evaluative Research at Ashgrove Primary 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. Together, all elements

do 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.⁷

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 Ashgrove Primary School and ongoing reflective practice is part of the school's educational culture. The rich curriculum anchors 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.⁸

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-TSN communications stand as a model of Professional Growth excellence on a school wide level. Thinking School

⁷ Reflective Proforma and digital evidence

⁸ Ibid

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, discuss and observe lessons conducted by lead practitioners within the school, TSN network, and the wider educational community. There is a clear change management plan, and the use of reflective elements are 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. Staff are supported wonderfully to maximise their Professional Growth. The Drive Team are extremely influential in the pursuit of Professional Growth for all staff. A number of staff are pursuing formal recognition of this via professional qualifications. Excellent resources are supplemented by expert consultancy and QA support so all staff can see how they might apply what they have learned in their own classrooms. 'Outside' expert input is judiciously integrated, and pupil feedback plays an intrinsic part in development planning. 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, 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 via the TSN support is highly influential in terms

of promoting professional dialogue and development, iterative reflection, skill mastery, and collaboration.⁹

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, the Thinking Toolkit is exceptional in terms of fully integrating all learning, thinking and reflection skills. Coaching secures excellent operationalisation of this ambitious pedagogy and there is a real sense of what an effective learner looks like. This provides a wonderful platform for children to explore and reflect on what it means to be an effective learner. Intrinsic to this, the Pupil Voice is also exceptional in terms of inclusion, individualisation, and differentiation. Indeed, Pupil Focus Groups is one of many examples of how the school embraces this. Ashgrove Primary School is fully committed to child-centred education. 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 by 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. Ashgrove Primary School has a collaborative and family orientated approach where diversity, nurture, inspiration, inclusion,

⁹ Ibid

and ambition flourish in harmony. Indeed, parents and carers are highly supportive and appreciative of the school in this respect.¹⁰

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 excellent at Ashgrove Primary School. They clearly integrate a range of Thinking Tools and approaches with self/peer reflections. For example, pupil reflections are sought via Pupil Focus Groups so that self-regulation thrives. The school has a long-standing expertise in the use of MALS to supplement a range of quantitative and qualitative data sources geared towards pupil and staff reflections. The inclusion of Effect Sizes is an exceptional addition to the quantitative dimension. Ashgrove Primary School adopts a baseline and follow-up approach with MALS and subsequent analyses are exceptional. 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, Habits of Mind, Thinking Routines, and Q-Matrix Questioning are all 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

¹⁰ Ibid

supported well by the school and add significant value to the educational provision at Ashgrove Primary School. Achievement, attendance and behaviour are excellent indicating that the exceptional collaborative partnerships are highly impactful. Assessment at Ashgrove Primary School is wonderfully aligned to the school's inclusive culture and adds significant value to the holistic educational growth of the children. Assessment at Ashgrove Primary School certainly puts children first.

Points for further consideration

Ashgrove Primary School has responded brilliantly to the points for further consideration suggested in the previous accreditation report. The developments relating to Evaluative Research, integration of thinking processes and wider pedagogic elements, strengthening of quantitative data analysis, and application of Level 2 criteria are good examples of this. 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.
- 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 extend international influence via adding to the global platforms and publication lines already in place.
- Explore ways of capturing the already developed excellent Pupil Voice via qualitative approaches such as Reflective Journals.

Outcome

The thorough evidence provided by Ashgrove Primary School clearly reflects that the school is a Thinking School in which Thinking Skills are at the heart of school life. Ashgrove Primary School has taken a wonderfully inclusive and evidence informed holistic educational growth stance in relation to its entire provision. This provision goes beyond knowledge and metacognition to fully embrace dispositional development, wellbeing and different ways of thinking. Indeed, the Being Well Doing Well Programme is just one example of how Ashgrove Primary School embraces holistic lifelong learning. The school's broad and balanced curriculum services this well. For example, via the exceptional curriculum designed to empower range and excellence, Ashgrove Primary School fully embraces individuality and diversity such that the needs of all pupils are fully integrated. In so doing, Ashgrove Primary School is an inspirational and exceptional influence of metacognitive educational excellence. In the context of the international Thinking School community, this places Ashgrove Primary School as both world class, in terms of its pedagogic excellence, but also world leading as a transformative holistic educational leader and influencer. By living up to its Core Values of 'Learning, Caring, Growing Stronger Together; Connection before Correction', learning and thinking are really brought to life such that life-chances and cultural capital are transformed. Ashgrove Primary School's Thinking School approach is part of the entire school culture, and it has been a pleasure to review the inspirational, creative, innovative, inclusive, transformative, influential, and child-centred practice undertaken by this World Class and World Leading Advanced Thinking School. In conclusion, the application has provided rich and extensive evidence for Advanced Accreditation, and I therefore recommend that accreditation as an Advanced Thinking School be awarded until May 2029. Congratulations to Ashgrove Primary School for this truly unique, inspiring, and exceptional achievement!



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