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**Report following the analysis and evaluation of evidence submitted by Barton Manor 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.**

Barton Manor School is a highly inclusive, innovative, child-centred, thinking-orientated, holistically motivated, and family embracing school with 600 students on roll (ages 11-15). The school is situated as a member of the highly successful Barton Court Academy Trust and, although a relatively new school (opening in 2022) has already established itself as a pivotal member of the Thinking School community. Judged by Ofsted (2025) as Outstanding for Personal Development and Leadership/Management, Barton Manor School has made its stance clear in terms of the embedding of the highest standards of lifelong learning experiences. Barton Manor School is totally committed to developing a whole school approach to the teaching of thinking in a responsive and adaptive manner. As such, the school is positioned as one of the new pivotal core members of the international Thinking School community. The school's vision and values are captured by a clear vision of 'Aspire, Believe, Achieve'. This is wonderfully illustrated by Barton Manor School's explicit Mission Statement that has the provision of a state-of-the-art learning environment, innovative curriculum principles, community orientation, moral purpose, independent and collaborative thinking, and futureproofing at its core. The aim is to develop holistic life-long learners that can respond and adapt in an ever-changing world. The school's illustration of its vision and mission is that of nurturing a teaching and learning community where the holistic uniqueness and dignity of every person is recognised and celebrated. This clearly demonstrates Barton Manor School's focus on child-centred learning. The core mission is operationalised via an innovative holistic core curriculum.<sup>1</sup> Barton Manor School has pursued its Thinking School development with determination, creativity, innovation, and care. This has subsequently secured exceptional and sustained development due to its unswerving devotion to inclusion and the embracement of diversity. This has been achieved via its visionary holistic curriculum that is supplemented by the aspiration for all children to realise the school's mission by embracing the learning qualities of the school's insightful and pedagogic practice. 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 mission to a metacognitive developmental process via careful attention to holistic lifelong learning, Barton Manor School has ensured that the Thinking

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

School approach is an integral and secure part of the learning culture of the entire school. Barton Manor School achieves excellent holistic student outcomes as demonstrated by a wealth of robust indicators. In addition to working towards being a Thinking School, Barton Manor School holds high-quality charter marks such as the Artsmark Silver Award and National Nurture Accreditation. This is indicative of an educational provision that serves the wider needs of all students. Indeed, the educational provision extends students' learning and understanding via an imaginative focus on real-life application and collaborative learning. Barton Manor 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 students through its curriculum, pastoral system, and enrichment offering. Barton Manor School has created a wonderfully welcoming and inclusive atmosphere where thinking and learning are not only nurtured but also thrive.<sup>2</sup>

Barton Manor School's cognitive education development journey has moved forward with innovation, creativity, care, and purpose. Subsequently, a clear thread of training has been in place. Parents and carers form an exceptional partnership with Barton Manor 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 students as confident, creative, adaptable, and resilient thinkers so that they become committed holistic lifelong learners.<sup>4</sup> Barton Manor School has embedded thinking and metacognitive approaches in all aspects of school life in order to ensure that its mission is 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 'external' high-quality consultancy and training is exceptional and fully embraces core educational principles and contextual individuality.<sup>5</sup>

## **Evidence Base**

Thinking Schools @Exeter received the school's submission for accreditation from Aimee Bourner (Thinking School Coordinator and Assistant Headteacher) evidencing the history of the school's cognitive education development journey and the work that the school has undertaken since the journey began. 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. This structure is consistently applied and is a particular strength of the school. The evidence on the school's website includes visual information relating to how Barton Manor School not only teaches thinking, but also how the school has developed this aspect as part of its educational culture. The website also includes key indicators of metacognitive approaches in the classroom. This includes innovative and integrated elements such as Thinking Maps, Thinking Hats, Habits of Mind, Thinkers' Keys, CoRT Lessons, Philosophy for Children (P4C), Higher-Order Thinking (based on Bloom's

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<sup>2</sup> Ibid

<sup>3</sup> Digital evidence

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

<sup>5</sup> Ibid

Taxonomy), and Q-Matrix Questioning. As such, there is a clear aim to make thinking and learning visible. Barton Manor School has linked this well to its mission.

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

From the evidence presented, it is clear that Thinking Skills are embedded within the culture of Barton Manor School. Curriculum policy documents and plans clearly map out a thinking strategy that subsequently feed into teaching strategies, and so moves thinking approaches from policy to practice. Pivotal to this is the high premium placed on sharing of best practice across the school to include all staff. The focus and attention given to reflection and professional inquiry is an excellent example of the school's pursuit of criticality, creativity, and innovation.<sup>6</sup>

Barton Manor School has a prominent and visible thinking culture, and this is due to the excellent organisational structure and visual presentation. The school's website and illustrative materials exemplify the prominence of a thinking culture. High quality communications with parents ensure that the thinking partnership between the school and parents is strong. Indeed, parents receive comprehensive information about 'being' a Thinking School and also get a wealth of support in order to encourage the application of Thinking Skills. Assemblies and other public forums provide rich opportunities to share children's thinking successes. The high premium placed on celebration and displays further strengthen the Thinking School ethos and culture. As a consequence of these actions, the whole learning community is equipped to support children's learning.<sup>7</sup> Barton Manor School has forged a number of partnerships underpinned by a Thinking School focus within the local community, Thinking School community and more widely. Teachers regularly collaborate with other schools and lead on pedagogical aspects. Barton Manor School also benefits from high-quality consultancy/training support in order to keep a 'fresh' perspective in relation to its developmental trajectory. The excellent collaboration enables best practice to permeate throughout the wider school community. Through its connections with a wide range of stakeholders, Barton Manor School conveys a positive, caring and creative atmosphere, demonstrating that careful thought has been put into its organisational structure and visual presentation. This is clearly evidenced.<sup>8</sup>

### **Senior Management and Whole School Commitment**

The CEO/Executive Headteacher, Headteacher, Assistant Headteacher (Teaching and Learning/Thinking School Coordinator), and Drive Team 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 and the strong and developmental structure stands as a model of excellent practice. Indeed, the Thinking Drive Team is comprised of a rich blend of expertise and influence. There is a clear focus on professional growth that feeds into the impactful School Development Plan. The Drive Team provide exemplary support and feedback based on a comprehensive audit of the key accreditation elements. These are

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<sup>6</sup> Ibid

<sup>7</sup> Ibid

<sup>8</sup> Ibid

evidenced fully, and this is also a model of exemplary practice.<sup>9</sup> Governors are regularly kept up to date about the school's approaches to cognitive education through thorough reports and visits. Feedback indicates a positive shift in students' thinking skills together with whole school development as a Thinking School.<sup>10</sup>

The CEO/Executive Headteacher, Headteacher and leaders throughout the school provide exemplary leadership to support the school's commitment to developing a whole school approach to the teaching of thinking. Modelling and coaching are key features of Barton Manor School's pedagogic practice, and 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.<sup>11</sup> There is ample evidence to indicate that Barton Manor School is receptive to change and innovation. The development of cognitive approaches has been and intrinsic part of the school's vision and drive for improvement in response to ensuring that the school has an explicit mission based upon inclusive and holistic educational values. The application for accreditation has reinforced this commitment. In this way, Barton Manor School has retained its unique characteristics whilst also embracing change and innovation.

There is a specific organic School Development Plan designed to secure the wide-spread use of Thinking Tools across the school. The range of cognitive developments indicates that plans are aspirational and designed to empower children to progressively take ownership of their cognitive development.<sup>12</sup> Also, plans and CPD provision dovetail well and provide a clear mechanism for ongoing development.

## **Learning and Teaching**

It is clear, from the documentation provided, that Thinking Skills are embedded within the culture of Barton Manor School. Indeed, thinking serves as a 'golden thread' throughout the daily practice of the school. The school's Learning and Teaching approach is built on evidence-based metacognitive principles spanning Thinking Maps, Thinking Hats, Habits of Mind, Thinkers' Keys, CoRT Thinking Lessons, Q-Matrix Questioning Techniques, Philosophy for Children (P4C), and Higher Order Questioning (based on Bloom's Taxonomy). These elements are explicitly shared with all students and are also adapted to suit the particular learning context of Barton Manor School. For example, a number of metacognitive elements have been adapted to include the school's own particular foci. The integration of elements in the exceptional Learning to Learn Programme and Brilliant Club are excellent examples of Barton Manor School's innovative application of its pedagogic vision. Assemblies and public forums reinforce these elements which also feature prominently in the school's achievement system. Indeed, displays reinforce key metacognitive elements in order to stimulate the application of strategies for reflection and self-regulation. All students receive specific training in the use and application of cognitive tools. Reflection, peer assessment, and self-assessment are

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<sup>9</sup> Ibid

<sup>10</sup> Ibid

<sup>11</sup> Ibid

<sup>12</sup> Reflective Proforma, School Website and Evidence Links

intrinsic to the school's thinking, teaching, and learning developments. This compliments other reflective processes such as staff self-reflections on the implementation of the school's thinking culture. In this regard, there is a clear reflective focus on what works best, for whom and how. Indeed, Thinking Hats are used effectively for pastoral student reflection. 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 students are capable of making progress. This further supports the school's commitment to cognitive education. This clearly demonstrates how it is one of Barton Manor School's main aims.<sup>13</sup>

Barton Manor 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 holistic curriculum and learning environment is also clearly illustrated in the evidence provided by the school. The holistic approach to curriculum design is an excellent platform for promoting interleaving and 'range' in terms of students' wider learning. These elements, combined with Barton Manor School's commitment to the nurturing of personal development and well-being, have resulted in learning and teaching that is focused on the holistic development of every child.<sup>14</sup>

There is a real sense of staff adopting the role of Cognitive Coach and being Reflective Practitioners. The Student Voice is exceptionally strong and leadership elements such as House Captain, Form Captain, and Student Drive Team reinforce this. 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 via ongoing collaborative dialogue. 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. Barton Manor School has clear evidence of developing learning and teaching and the appreciation of wider elements via the exceptional curriculum provision. This has shifted practice from a teaching approach to a pedagogical culture.<sup>15</sup>

## **Training**

The values-led CEO/Executive Headteacher, Headteacher and their 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. All staff are well versed in the theory, application and assessment of cognitive education and psychological well-being. The high-quality training has undoubtedly influenced the focus on

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<sup>13</sup> Ibid

<sup>14</sup> Ibid

<sup>15</sup> Ibid

establishing a common thinking language and approach across the curriculum.<sup>16</sup> There is an ongoing and differentiated training programme in place, aimed at the development of expertise in a range of cognitive tools, strategies and resources for established and newly appointed staff. The Drive Team members provide excellent distributed support throughout the school by acting as Thinking School Lead Practitioners. The school's approach to CPD is one of professional growth and elements such as Instructional Coaching allow experienced staff to share their expertise with newer staff. 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. There is a clear appreciation of the voice of students. Indeed, students are highly influential due to the collaborative culture of the entire school. Parents are fully informed of the Thinking School ethos, which features prominently on the website, in parental workshops 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 via elements such as the BCAT Trust Library and learning walks are used supportively to evaluate and share good practice in a climate of mutual aspiration. The Trust Leadership Programme embraces National Professional Qualifications (NPQs) and NACE Training. The integrated training approach extends the reach of professional growth, and this has done much to significantly refine the school's thinking culture. Indeed, the school's approach to professional growth is based on a culture of inquiry that draws on current research. The innovative application of the Monitoring and Evaluation of Teaching and Learning (METAL) approach is highly impactful in terms of establishing a bedrock for school improvement. The SPARE model of illuminative evaluative research is wonderfully aligned to this. Partnership with high-quality external training/consultancy is also outstanding in terms of impact.

### **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 robust quantitative measures. Reflection is integral to the assessment process at Barton Manor School and the voices of staff and students are integral. Reflection is aligned closely to peer and self-assessment. The school's use of the Common Mark Book (CMB), including subsequent evaluative analysis, is excellent. This takes a baseline and follow-up approach and is highly effective in terms of illustrating rates of growth and future avenues for development. Reflection has been skilfully woven into the application of a range of feedback surveys and progression in the use of a range of cognitive tools other metacognitive elements are routinely explored. Outcomes are used very effectively to promote learning gains and assessments feed into targeted interventions and support for students. Barton Manor School adopts an iterative approach to assessment in order to promote continuous evolution. Assessments indicate largely high cognitive and self-perception development together with signposting strategies for further improvement. Assessment outcomes across a range of indicators show impressive growth over the Thinking Schools implementation period indicating that Barton Manor School is a

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<sup>16</sup> Reflective Proforma, School Website and Evidence Links

supportive and attractive place to learn. Barton Manor School demonstrates excellent complimentary 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. Assessment at Barton Manor School certainly puts the needs of children first.<sup>17</sup>

The school is clear that the focus on cognitive development through a whole school consistent approach to learning has improved children's attitudes, improved their enjoyment, developed their independence, contributed to high quality teaching, and led to better student progress.<sup>18</sup> There is qualitative data from a range of sources about how the development of learning behaviours is associated with positive outcomes for students and excellent intrinsic motivation.

The outstanding holistic student growth indicates impressive impact. The school's own internal analysis and presentation of these outcomes is exceptional and reflects a positive achievement trend together with aspiration for further improvement.<sup>19</sup>

### **Evaluation of Programmes**

There is a continual review of the range of cognitive tools, strategies and resources employed, with specific reference to their impact on students' meta-cognition and the transfer of skills, strategies and learning behaviours. Barton Manor School makes exceptionally effective use of the SPARE model of Illuminative Evaluation, creatively aligned to the bespoke METAL model of evaluation, and outcomes from judicious assessments inform school developments via the excellent School Development Plan process. 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 learning walks, questionnaires, work scrutinies, and student feedback. The insightful and creative use of this rich source of evaluative evidence is outstanding. Evaluations also feed into the excellent inquiry-based school professional growth 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 the Student Voice in the evaluation process. Again, the reflective element is highly effective in this respect. There is a strong collaborative approach to leadership. The inclusion of excellent training/consultancy input and external experts are good examples of this. As such, Barton Manor 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. Indeed, the Cycle of Lesson Study is exemplary in this respect and is wonderfully aligned to the METAL process. Foci such as Assessment for Learning (AFL), Inclusive Practice, and Metacognition reflect Barton Manor School's commitment to integrating pedagogic elements. Features such as Instructional Coaching, Departmental Discourse, Termly Professional Learning Foci, Feedback, and

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<sup>17</sup> Ibid

<sup>18</sup> Reflective Pro-forma, School Website and Evidence Links

<sup>19</sup> Ibid

Facilitation of Action Plans allow a rich balance of flexibility to flourish. 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. Development plans are organic and collaborative where the voices of the entire school community feature prominently in the evaluative process. There is a clear evaluative focus on developing the transfer of Thinking Skills and strategies and the collaborative nature of all evaluative elements is a model of exemplary practice. As a committed, forward thinking, and fully inclusive school, Barton Manor School is well placed for future Advanced Accreditation, and this reflects the ongoing ambition to develop an exceptional whole school approach to the teaching of thinking.

## **Ownership**

There is no doubt that Barton Manor School has made a full commitment to developing and embedding cognitive education throughout the school. Indeed, the school is rightly proud of its success in terms of embedding initiatives and retaining authenticity and inclusivity. There is evidence that the school has distilled and integrated 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 Cognitive Educators, learning is mediated wonderfully. This is clearly linked to the school's mission. Barton Manor 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 part of the school's developmental journey since the school opened in 2022. The training/consultancy influence has been exceptional and has allowed consistency and individual creativity to flourish due to a high premium placed on the educational context. 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.

Barton Manor School is a lifelong learning focused, child-centred, family orientated, creative, and innovative educational community totally committed to embracing diversity in its quest to promote outstanding holistic educational provision. As such, Barton Manor School places the individual needs and wellbeing of children at the heart of everything it does. Moreover, the school provides a fully engaging and reflective educational experience by ensuring that students develop their curiosity about the world. Students not only know *what* is expected of them, but also understand the *why* elements of their learning. Barton Manor School is led with drive, commitment, compassion, aspiration, and care at every level and there is an unswerving commitment to preserve the school's values and mission. Thinking flourishes at Barton Manor School because the school truly lives up to its mission of 'Aspire, Believe, Achieve'. The uniqueness and dignity of every person is recognised and respected. As such, development of cultural capital and strong child-centred family values feature prominently in the work of the school. Barton Manor School is a highly aspirational, responsive, adaptive, and creative Thinking School where no stone is left unturned in its quest for fully inclusive holistic lifelong educational provision. Exceptional leadership, teaching, and support have the individual needs of every child at its core so that students are fully engaged to become holistic

lifelong learners. In the context of the international Thinking School community, Barton Manor School is a truly inspirational world-class Thinking School.

## **Conclusion**

The range of evidence submitted undoubtedly indicates that Barton Manor 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 May 2029. I would like to thank the school for the comprehensive and judicious evidence base, clearly organised around the evaluation rubric, that provided the lens through which the exceptional 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.
- 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.
- Continue to 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.
- 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 Barton Manor School.
- Consider further developing and aligning Thinking Routines (already aligned to Bloom's Taxonomy) with lesson 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.



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