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Report following the analysis and evaluation of evidence submitted by The Charles Dickens 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 students 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 students 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 The Charles Dickens School in the form of a Reflective Proforma with evidence links, 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 students' work, examples of displays and posters, relevant sections of the school improvement plan, Headteacher reports, photographs, newsletters, project plans, 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

The Charles Dickens School is an exceptionally inclusive, forward thinking, innovative, highly ambitious, and fully supportive secondary school with 1,100 students on roll (ages 11-16). The school is situated within the highly successful Barton Court Academy Trust (BCAT) and is an influential member of the highly successful Thinking Schools Network (TSN). Context is key at The Charles Dickens School and developments are unswervingly mindful of this. Developments are bespoke and responsive to the changing needs of the school. The Charles Dickens School is totally committed to developing a whole school approach to the teaching of thinking in a responsive and adaptive manner. As such, The Charles Dickens School is positioned as one of the key influential members of the international Thinking School community. The school's CARE Values (Compassion, Aspiration, Resilience, Enthusiasm) are captured by a clear motto: 'Expect, Believe, Achieve'. Indeed, life chances are truly transformed such that students develop their cultural capital. This is wonderfully operationalised by The Charles Dickens School's pedagogic approach. This clearly demonstrates The Charles Dickens School's focus on child-centred learning. Specifically, the CARE Values are operationalised via the Thinking Toolkit comprised of Thinking Maps, Thinking Hats, Habits of Mind, CoRT Thinking, Philosophy for Children (P4C), Higher-Order Questioning based on Bloom's Taxonomy, and Thinking Routines. Through skilful application, children are nurtured and guided to try hard in every endeavour such that life-chances are

transformed.[1] The Charles Dickens School has sustained its Thinking School development with determination, creativity, innovation, and care. This has subsequently secured excellent 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 Character Education. Indeed, The Charles Dickens School holds the Association for Character Education Award. 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 values to a metacognitive developmental process via careful attention to holistic lifelong learning, The Charles Dickens School has ensured that the Thinking School approach is an integral and secure part of the learning culture of the entire school. The Charles Dickens School achieves excellent holistic student outcomes as demonstrated by a wealth of robust indicators. This is indicative of an educational provision that serves the wider needs of all students. In addition to pursuing its Thinking School journey (originally awarded Level 1 Accreditation in 2022), The Charles Dickens School holds a wealth of other prestigious accreditations. Indeed, the educational provision extends students' learning and understanding via an imaginative focus on real-life application. The Charles Dickens 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 indicating that The Charles Dickens School is a wonderfully inviting place to learn.[2]

The Charles Dickens 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 exceptional partnership with The Charles Dickens School in terms of the teaching, learning,

[1] School's website, reflective proforma and digital evidence
[2] Ibid

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 students as reflective, confident, creative, adaptable, and resilient thinkers so that they become committed lifelong learners.[4] The Charles Dickens School has embedded thinking and metacognitive approaches in all aspects of school life in order to ensure that its CARE Values motto of 'Expect, Believe, Achieve' 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.[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. The Charles Dickens 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, student work analysis, Newsletters, News Articles, Drop-ins, staff feedback, and the Student Voice interact to spread the Thinking School approaches widely. Indeed, the Student Voice is particularly strong at The Charles Dickens School as a result of the innovative formation of the Student Learning Council and the Student Drive Team. These are excellent examples of the high premium placed on the inclusion of students 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 events. The Charles Dickens School not only participates in a rich range of conferences, but also leads and hosts them. On an international level, The Charles Dickens School has established links with colleagues from a range of contexts via hosting international visits and associated discourse. This input provides other

[3] Digital evidence
[4] School's website, reflective proforma and digital evidence
[5] Ibid

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 Executive Headteacher, Headteacher, Thinking School Coordinator/Drive Team Lead and Drive Team are highly influential and champion many creative curriculum and assessment innovations. Conference presentations and webinar inputs are regular aspects contributing to the professional growth of The Charles Dicken's 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.

The Charles Dickens 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 established schools in the Thinking Schools Network (TSN), The Charles Dickens 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 The Charles Dickens 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. Students are pivotal to disseminating best practice. Judicious timelines ensure that the process of dissemination is planned and actioned effectively. Conferences, and associated follow up work, 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 students. Evaluative Research is intrinsic to the working practices of the school. For example, staff are involved in a range of professional growth foci involving a rich blend of foci related to integrating a range of metacognitive and wider pedagogic practices. The associated developmental work skilfully weaves together a host of impactful educational initiatives. All innovations and developments are of excellent quality and are impactful in terms of inclusive learning. Evaluative practices at The Charles Dickens School utilise a range of data collection tools including Thinking Tools audits, learning walks, focused staff meetings, and student/teacher reflections. The recent Cycle of Lesson Study has moved to a collaborative model with a clear focus on the 'why' elements of pedagogy. The recent cycle relating to Thinking Routines and students recording their own learning is an excellent example of The Charles Dickens School's drive for continuous professional growth.

The focus on actioning the recommendations from the previous accreditation, 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 students via the Student Learning Council and Student Drive Team in the evaluative process ensures that Evaluative Research has an inductive as well as deductive dimension. Evaluative Research at The Charles Dickens 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 evidence based. This is an excellent example of the school's commitment to developing practitioner research. 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 students 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 student progress, providing further evidence of the ongoing evaluation of Thinking Skills approaches throughout the school. It is important to note in this respect, that students 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 The Charles Dickens 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 effective Professional Growth 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

[7] Reflective Proforma and digital evidence
[8] Ibid

pedagogy. This is wonderfully supplemented by the provision of opportunities to shadow, discuss and observe lessons conducted by lead practitioners within the school, trust, 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 well to maximise their Professional Growth. The Drive Team are extremely influential in the pursuit of Professional Growth for all staff. Excellent resources are supplemented by consultancy and QA support so all staff can see how they might apply what they have learned in their own classrooms. Expert input is judiciously integrated, and student 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. Indeed, The Charles Dickens School has worked extremely closely and effectively with another school in the BCAT family such that this school recently gain Level 1 Thinking School Accreditation. 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.[9]

[9] Ibid

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 students' approaches to problem-solving. Through thorough and on-going dialogue with students, teachers are able to mediate learning such that learning is geared towards the needs of all students at an individual level, regardless of starting point or specific barriers to learning. A range of Thinking Tools are scaffolded to serve the varying needs of all students. For example, the Thinking Toolkit (Thinking Maps, Thinking Hats, Habits of Mind, CoRT Thinking, Philosophy for Children, Bloom's Taxonomy, and Thinking Routines) is excellent in terms of fully integrating all learning, thinking and reflection skills. Coaching secures 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 Student Voice is also excellent in terms of inclusion, individualisation, and differentiation. The Charles Dickens 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 students 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 students are supported fully based on individual needs. The Charles Dickens School has a collaborative and family orientated approach where diversity, nurture, inspiration, character development, inclusion, and ambition flourish in harmony. Indeed, parents and carers are highly supportive and appreciative of the school in this respect.[10]

[10] Ibid

Whole School assessment

This aspect of the accreditation relates to students' 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 The Charles Dickens School. They clearly integrate a range of Thinking Tools and approaches with self/peer reflections. For example, student reflections are sought so that self-regulation thrives. The Charles Dickens School adopts a baseline and follow-up approach to assessment and subsequent analyses are excellent. 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 Student 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 Maps, Thinking Hats, Habits of Mind, Thinking Routines, CoRT Thinking, Bloom's Taxonomy, and Philosophy for Children 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. Students 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 student 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 The Charles Dickens School. Assessment at The Charles Dickens School is wonderfully aligned to the school's inclusive culture and adds significant value to the holistic educational growth of the children. Assessment at The Charles Dickens School certainly puts children first.

Points for further consideration

The Charles Dickens School has responded brilliantly to the points for further consideration suggested in the previous accreditation report. The developments relating to integration of thinking processes and wider pedagogic elements together with 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 global platforms and publication lines.
- Explore ways of capturing the already developed excellent Student Voice via qualitative approaches such as Reflective Journals.

Outcome

The evidence provided by The Charles Dickens School clearly reflects that the school is a Thinking School in which Thinking Skills are at the heart of school life. The Charles Dickens School has taken an 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, character education, wellbeing and different ways of thinking. Indeed, the Character Education Programme is just one example of how The Charles Dickens 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. The Charles Dickens School fully embraces individuality and diversity such that the needs of all students are fully integrated. In so doing, The Charles Dickens School is an influential source of metacognitive educational excellence. In the context of the international Thinking School community, this places The Charles Dickens School as both first class, in terms of its pedagogic excellence, but also highly influential as a transformative holistic educational leader. By living up to its CARE Values of 'Compassion, Aspiration, Resilience, Enthusiasm', learning and thinking are really brought to life such that life-chances and cultural capital are transformed. The Charles Dickens School's Thinking School approach is part of the entire school culture, and it has been a pleasure to review the creative, innovative, inclusive, influential, and child-centred practice undertaken by this first-class 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 October 2029. Congratulations to The Charles Dickens School for this truly exceptional achievement!



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