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**Report following the analysis and evaluation of evidence submitted by Orley Farm School for the purpose of re-accreditation as a Thinking School by Thinking Schools @Exeter, School of Education, University of Exeter, UK.**

**Starting point: the school context.**

Orley Farm School is a highly ambitious, collaborative, innovative, child-centred, and family orientated preparatory school with 460 pupils on roll (ages 4-13). The school is part is situated as a key member of the highly successful Thinking Schools Network (TSN). Orley Farm School has a history of Thinking School development (originally being accredited as a Level 1 Thinking School in 2023) and is totally committed to developing a whole school approach to the teaching of thinking in a responsive and adaptive manner. As such, Orley Farm School is positioned as a valuable member of the international Thinking School community. The school's aims and values are captured by a clear motto of 'Building a Foundation for Excellence and Integrity'. This is wonderfully illustrated by Orley Farm School's explicit aims, built on the three pillars of pastoral life, academic life, and life beyond. The school's values capture this wonderfully and include:

- Treat others as they expect to be treated (Forgive, Share, Listen)
- Be honest with ourselves and others (Be kind and helpful, do our best to be our best selves.

The school's mission is clearly that of nurturing a teaching and learning community where the uniqueness and dignity of every person is recognised and celebrated. This demonstrates Orley Farm School's focus on child-centred learning. The main aims are operationalised via a holistic core curriculum.[1] Orley Farm School has pursued its Thinking School development with determination, creativity, innovation, and care. This has subsequently secured excellent development due to its unswerving devotion to inclusion and the embracement of excellence for all. This has been achieved via a visionary curriculum that is supplemented by the aspiration for all children to realise the school's aims and values by embracing the learning qualities of the school's insightful and rich curriculum offer. This is illustrative of an exceptionally ambitious school where every individual is encouraged to achieve excellence via the pursuit of a rich and full educational experience.

In aligning the school's aims and values to a metacognitive developmental process via careful attention to holistic lifelong learning, Orley Farm School has ensured that the Thinking School approach is an integral and secure part of the learning culture of the entire school. Orley Farm School achieves excellent holistic pupil outcomes as demonstrated by a wealth of robust

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

indicators. 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 and collaborative learning. Orley Farm 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. Orley Farm School has created a wonderfully welcoming, happy and inclusive atmosphere where thinking and learning are not only nurtured but also thrive.[2]

Orley Farm 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 Orley Farm 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 confident, creative, adaptable, and resilient thinkers so that they become committed lifelong learners.[4] Orley Farm School has embedded thinking and metacognitive approaches in all aspects of school life in order to ensure that its aims and values 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 the TSN and 'external' high-quality input is excellent and fully embraces core educational principles and contextual individuality.[5]

**Evidence Base**

Thinking Schools @Exeter received the school's submission for accreditation from Mrs Samantha Loubon (Thinking School Coordinator/Deputy 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 information relating to how Orley Farm School has developed thinking as part of its educational culture. As such, there is a clear aim to make thinking and learning visible. Orley Farm School has linked this well to its aims and values.

**Thinking School Ethos and Culture**

From the evidence presented, it is clear that Thinking Skills are embedded within the culture of Orley Farm 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

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

professional inquiry is an excellent example of the school's pursuit of criticality, creativity, and innovation.[6]

Orley Farm School has a prominent and visible thinking culture, and this is due to the excellent organisational structure and visual presentation. The school's 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 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.[7] Orley Farm 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. Orley Farm School also benefits from high-quality consultant 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, Orley Farm School coveys a positive, caring and creative atmosphere, demonstrating that careful thought has been put into its organisational structure and visual presentation. This is clearly evidenced.[8]

**Senior Management and Whole School Commitment**

The Headmaster 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 Drive Team is comprised of a rich blend of expertise and influence and is actively led by the Thinking School Coordinator/Deputy Headteacher. There is a clear focus on professional growth that feeds into the impactful School Development Plan. The Drive Team provides exemplary support and feedback based on a comprehensive audit of the key accreditation elements. These are evidenced fully, and this is also a model of exemplary practice.[9] Governors are regularly kept up to date about the school's approaches to cognitive education through thorough reports and Governor visits. Feedback indicates a positive shift in pupils' thinking skills together with whole school development as a Thinking School.[10]

The Headmaster, Thinking School Coordinator/Deputy Headteacher, Drive Team, 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 Orley Farm School's pedagogic practice, and communications are excellent as are planning processes including meetings and subsequent developmental actions. Together,

[6] Ibid
[7] Ibid
[8] Ibid
[9] Ibid
[10] Ibid

these aspects ensure that there is continued dialogue about Thinking Skills so that specific areas of development can be identified and acted upon.[11] There is ample evidence to indicate that Orley Farm School is receptive to change and innovation. The development of cognitive approaches has been part of the school's aims and values for a number of years in response to ensuring that the school has an explicit vision based upon inclusive and holistic educational values. The application for re-accreditation has reinforced this commitment. In this way, Orley Farm 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.[12] 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 Orley Farm 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 retrieval, reflection, self-assessment, independent study, explicit metacognitive language, memory, motivation, mind-mapping, mnemonics, loci, image chains, and The Science of Learning. These elements are explicitly shared with all pupils and are also adapted to suit the particular learning context of Orley Farm School. For example, a number of metacognitive elements have been adapted to include the school's own particular foci. The integration of elements is an exceptional illustration of Orley Farm School's application of its pedagogic aims and values. Assemblies 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 pupils receive specific training in the use and application of cognitive tools. Reflection, peer assessment, and self-assessment are 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. This, aligned to excellent leadership and communication, ensures that good practice is shared judiciously with all staff to develop their classroom impact. There is a universal staff belief in the importance of taking a whole school approach to the teaching of thinking and that all pupils are capable of making progress. This further supports the school's commitment to cognitive education. This clearly demonstrates how it is one of Orley Farm School's main aims.[13]

Orley Farm 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

[11] Ibid
[12] Reflective Proforma, School Website and Evidence Links
[13] Ibid

and impact. The emphasis placed on the curriculum and learning environment is also clearly illustrated in the evidence provided by the school. The Collaborative Learning approach to curriculum design is an excellent platform for promoting interleaving and 'range' in terms of pupils' wider learning. The QUEST Programme is an excellent example of innovative practice where pupils are empowered through independent research via the development of critical thinking skills, deeper knowledge, and self-led learning. These elements, combined with Orley Farm 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.[14]

There is a real sense of staff adopting the role of Cognitive Coach and being Reflective Practitioners. The aim is clearly to develop a learning approach where higher order thinking qualities are not only nurtured but are also given the practical opportunities to flourish. Effective use of displays enriches the learning environment by encouraging a common language for learning and fostering self-regulation of thinking and learning. Where feasible, the school has personalised and contextualised visual displays to aid consistency, recognition and application of Thinking Skills. Children are encouraged to strive for high standards through displays of high-quality pieces of work. Orley Farm 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.[15]

**Training**

The values-led Headmaster and his team have fully embraced cognitive education and have ensured that finance and resources are geared towards high quality training for all staff. Indeed, the Headmaster and his team provide exceptional holistic leadership. 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 establishing a common thinking language and approach across the curriculum.[16] 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 Collaborative Learning Communities (CLCs) approach is outstanding and is research driven. 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 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 pupils. Indeed, pupils are highly influential due to the collaborative culture of the entire school. Parents are fully informed of the Thinking School ethos, which features in the school's communications. Staff are encouraged to work collaboratively and to provide mutual support through the development of thinking generally and through particular foci. Good practice is shared widely and learning walks are used

[14] Ibid
[15] Ibid
[16] Reflective Proforma, School Website and Evidence Links

supportively to evaluate and share good practice in a climate of mutual aspiration. The integrated training approach extends the reach of professional growth, and this has done much to significantly 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 and external experts. The partnership with high-quality external consultancy is highly impactful. Moving forward, this would benefit from the further extension of practitioner research and the Drive Team are well placed to lead on this aspect.

**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 Orley Farm School and the voices of staff and pupils are integral. Reflection is aligned closely to peer and self-assessment and the school's application of a range of assessment practices, including subsequent 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 wide range of metacognitive elements are routinely explored. Outcomes are used very effectively to promote learning gains and assessments feed into targeted interventions and support for pupils. 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 Orley Farm School is a supportive and attractive place to learn. Orley Farm 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 Orley Farm School certainly puts the needs of children first.[17]

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

The outstanding holistic pupil growth indicates impressive impact. The school's own internal analysis and presentation of these outcomes is excellent and reflects a positive achievement trend together with aspiration for further improvement.[19]

[17] Ibid
[18] Reflective Pro-forma, School Website and Evidence Links
[19] Ibid

**Evaluation of Programmes**

There is a continual review of the range of cognitive tools, strategies and resources employed, with specific reference to their impact on pupils' metacognition and the transfer of skills, strategies and learning behaviours. Orley Farm School makes implicit use of the SPARE model of Illuminative 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 sampling, and pupil 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. The use of Collaborative Learning Communities (CLCs) is an excellent innovation in this respect. Of particular note, is the highly effective use of the Pupil Voice in the evaluation process. A range of pupil forums have been established to facilitate this such as Student Council Form Reps, Wellbeing Ambassadors, Eco Team, Changemakers, Library Monitors, Digital Ambassadors, and Sports Council. Again, the reflective element is highly effective in this respect. There is a strong a collaborative approach to leadership. The inclusion of excellent consultancy input and external experts are good examples of this. As such, Orley Farm 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 practitioner research driven Cycle of Lesson Study is exemplary in this respect and has had a focus on a range of foci such as Questioning, Thinking Routines, Retrieval Practice, and Formative Assessment. 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 ambitious school, Orley Farm 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 Orley Farm 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 Coaches, learning is mediated wonderfully. This is clearly linked to the school's aims and values. Orley Farm 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 for a number of years. The external consultancy influence has been impactful 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.

Orley Farm School is a focused, child-centred, family orientated, creative, and innovative educational community totally committed to embracing diversity in its quest to promote outstanding holistic educational provision. The Headmaster and his team have secured exceptional holistic educational development throughout the entire school community. As such, Orley Farm 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 pupils develop their curiosity about the world. Pupils not only know *what* is expected of them, but also understand the *why* elements of their learning. Orley Farm School is led with purpose, commitment, compassion, aspiration, and care at every level and there is an unswerving commitment to preserve the school's aims and values. Thinking flourishes at Orley Farm School because the school truly lives up to its motto of 'Building a Foundation for Excellence and Integrity'. 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. Orley Farm School is a highly responsive, adaptive, embedding, excellence-seeking, and creative Thinking School where no stone is left unturned in its quest for fully inclusive holistic educational provision. Exceptional leadership, teaching, and support have the individual needs of every child at its core so that pupils are fully engaged to become holistic lifelong learners. Orley Farm School is a truly first-class Thinking School.

**Conclusion**

The range of evidence submitted undoubtedly indicates that Orley Farm 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 re-accreditation be awarded until October 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 excellent 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.
- Further extend lesson observations to include key indicators of learning and thinking processes. 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.
- Further consider the use of five key questions for evaluative purposes: What works best? For whom? Under what circumstances? How? Why? This could fit into the 'E' of the SPARE Model of Illuminative Evaluation.
- Use the criteria of an Advanced Thinking School to frame future developments in order to deepen and extend the understanding and expertise of Orley Farm 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.
- Further develop the prominence of the Thinking School approach on the school website.



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**On behalf of the University of Exeter, UK, October 2026**