

Report by Judith Kleine Staarman on the application for re-accreditation of East Sheen Primary School to become an accredited Thinking School by Thinking Schools @Exeter, University of Exeter.

Starting point: the school context

East Sheen Primary School is a community school situated in the London Borough of Richmond upon Thames. It serves a very diverse socio-economic area and there are a large number of pupils in the school for whom English is an additional language. The school has recently expanded to a 3-form entry school, and currently has 580 pupils on roll. It is a high-achieving school, with excellent Ofsted inspection reports and a clear vision to become an environmentally intelligent school. The school's ethos emphasizes the development of curiosity, collaboration, creativity and resilience in children, so that they become key contributors to the wider world.

Evidence Base

The University of Exeter received the school's submission from the Thinking Skills Co-ordinators, Carla Hunter and Maddie Jensen, evidencing the school's continued work towards meeting the accreditation criteria. This was accompanied by separate messages from the Head Teacher and the Thinking School Coordinator which outlined the work that the school had undertaken since first becoming a Thinking Skills School in 2017.

For the current accreditation, an extensive portfolio of evidence is provided, including examples of children's work, videos of assemblies, school improvement reports, lesson

observation forms, communications to parents, evidence of evaluations and planning and outcomes of staff training and research.

Thinking School Ethos and culture

From the evidence presented, it is clear that East Sheen Primary School is a welcoming and inclusive school, with a strong and sustained Thinking School ethos throughout the school. The school is a dynamic, yet caring learning community, and has a clear identity and a strong vision for moving forward. The thinking ethos is evident throughout the school, from assemblies and displays to curriculum information for all subject areas on the school's website. Displays around the school are used to reinforce key skills and attitudes and celebrate the thinking process of pupils.

East Sheen Primary School has a strong sense of community and they strongly carry out the Thinking School ethos in all communications, to parents and to the wider community. Parents continue to join in with many aspects of school life and they are kept informed about the thinking curriculum, including during the Covid lockdown and both parents and children are highly positive about the school.

Staff consistently use Thinking Tools such as thinking maps and thinking hats in their lessons, as well as in development and INSET meetings, and they reinforced the use of Thinking Tools in their remote learning lessons during the Covid lockdown. As a consequence of the consistent focus on Thinking, pupils are very articulate in their use of a common language associated with thinking skills.

Senior Management and Whole School Commitment

The head teacher with the governing body, have continued to make a formal commitment to being a Thinking School as part of its development priorities. They view Teaching Thinking as instrumental to school life, to not only in terms of raising standards of teaching and learning,

and subsequently enhancing the academic results of the school, but also as an important part of the development of children's wellbeing. There is a strong commitment to nurturing children who are curious, collaborative, creative and resilient, who are able to understand complex issues and think critically.

Governors are actively involved in the life of the school and set very high expectations for school performance. They are very supportive of the Thinking Schools ethos and approaches and are kept well-informed about the school's approaches to teaching thinking via learning walks, reports, the website and lesson observations. These are reported back to the whole governing body as part of their on-going cycle of monitoring.

There is strong evidence to indicate that East Sheen Primary School is receptive to new developments and initiatives, and new approaches are carefully considered and evaluated. The development of Teaching Thinking has been an important part of the school vision and drive for improvement since Carla Hunter began leading the school's journey to become a Thinking School in 2013. She immediately received the full support of the School Leadership Team and this support has continued after the initial accreditation as a Thinking School in 2017. Since the accreditation, the school has worked further to fully embed the consistent use of Thinking Tools throughout the school, and to ensure that a common language of thinking is used throughout the school. The evidence clearly demonstrates that teachers and pupils use the thinking tools confidently and flexibly in each year group and in all subject areas.

Learning and Teaching

The evidence presented provides a clear indication that the school has fully embraced and embedded Thinking Tools in their practice. Visual displays and signposting are used throughout the school and student work demonstrates extensive use of Thinking Hats and Thinking Maps, which clearly functions as a common 'visual language' for teachers and pupils. The children and teachers are confidently using Thinking Maps, Thinking Hats and Habits of

Mind throughout their practice and evidence suggests that both adults and children are very familiar with the tools and associated language, and they are used consistently and flexibly to support thinking and learning. Teachers and children commented that they would not be able to “revert back to teaching without the use of thinking tools” ¹

The wealth of evidence of student work comprehensively demonstrates that the Thinking Tools that are currently used in the school, are firmly embedded into the school’s teaching, learning and evaluation practices. Children and teachers are very familiar with the tools and strategies and use them confidently and in a range of ways to support and scaffold their thinking and learning. Classroom displays are used effectively to demonstrate thinking and children are proud when their thinking is displayed in class.²

The school has recently moved to a three-form entry, with associated building work and draws pupils from an increasingly wide range of socio-economic backgrounds. An important and continuing focus for the school is maximising progress and attainment for each individual child and Thinking School methodologies are used throughout. Thinking Hats are clearly understood by staff and pupils and they continue to be used extensively and effectively throughout the school as a tool to support and help pupils to articulate their thoughts. The hats are used effectively in displays, which help pupils to articulate their thoughts and ideas from various points of view. In addition, there is a strong emphasis on developing pupils’ dispositions to learning and the Habits of Mind approach is now fully embedded into the curriculum. Pupils are effectively using self-evaluation to evaluate their learning behaviours and Habits of Mind planners are used in each year group. There is evidence of children having good ‘meta-awareness’ of thinking, through having regular conversations ‘about thinking’.

¹ Carla Hunter. Thinking School Coordinator

² 2021 Reflective Proforma

Since the school's initial accreditation in 2017, continuous evaluation has taken place of the Thinking Skills approaches that are being used and of how they are being used, and a full curriculum review has taken/ is taking place, with the aim of creating an 'environmentally intelligent school', which introduces children in debates about the environment and sustainability. This new vision for the school allows for the exploration of key environmental issues throughout the curriculum and has strong links with the overall Thinking Schools Ethos (i.e. 'a learning community in which students and staff think reflectively, critically and creatively within a meaningful curriculum'). Approaches such as Six Hats for Thinking and Thinking Maps help pupils develop key problem-solving skills, and additionally, the school might consider other approaches to develop critical and reflective thinking, such as Philosophy for Children or Dialogic Teaching.

Training

There is an extensive and planned programme of training available for staff, including specific Thinking School training for new staff, in which they are introduced to the Thinking Tools and the school's guiding principles. Spark trainers have led sessions on curriculum development and memory and cognition. The Thinking Schools coordinators have attended relevant conferences and they both lead CPD meetings for other staff.

Supply staff are also well informed about the school's approach and comment on the strength of Thinking Skills, while new applicants have expressed a keen interest in the Thinking Schools approach. Parents are fully informed of the Thinking Schools ethos, which features prominently on the website and in the school's wonderful virtual tour for prospective parents. Staff is encouraged to work together and to provide mutual support through the Faculties, in which good practice is shared. Lesson observations are used extensively to evaluate and share good practice.

The school has set clear targets for all staff in the performance management process, and this include thinking objectives. There is a programme of evaluation of staff training and there are

formal and informal opportunities for staff to evaluate and reflect on the tools used. The school has received a number of visitors over the years, specifically to observe the Thinking School practices, both from local schools and from abroad. In addition, the school featured in an edition of Teach Primary Magazine, focusing specifically on the Thinking School approach.

Assessment & Outcomes

After their initial accreditation, the school has consistently evaluated the approach and found that it had helped to develop a sense of community, through the common framework and common language. Lesson observations have indicated that pupils are supported in their learning through their use of Thinking Tools, which provide a familiar framework to learn, question and reflect. The school's recent progress data demonstrates that children have made excellent progress in both KS1 and KS2 in Reading, Writing and Maths. It is obviously difficult to establish a causal relationship between the Thinking Schools approach and the excellent progress data. However, it is clear that the development of thinking skills is helping the school to meet the individual needs of a very diverse cohort of pupils, and that the school is continuing to be a high achieving school, in which pupils make excellent progress. The quantitative improvement data is corroborated with qualitative data from a range of stakeholders about how the teaching and learning approaches used in the school relate positively to the academic attainment and wellbeing of pupils. Staff have commented on the ability of pupils to reflect on their own thinking and learning, their attitudes to learning and to articulate their thoughts.

The school maintains a strong focus on inclusion and wellbeing (which seems particularly relevant during the Covid pandemic) and the Thinking Schools framework and ethos are actively used to help support the school as a diverse but coherent learning community, that includes pupils, staff, parents and governors. The school might want to consider gaining (further) qualitative and quantitative data regarding pupil's attitudes to learning, wellbeing, motivation or resilience, which could help create stronger evaluative links between the Thinking School approaches used in the school and pupils' wellbeing and development. It

might also help to identify areas of strength and weaknesses in terms of strategies to enhance pupil wellbeing.

Members of the Pupil Leadership team have undertaken learning walks with members of the Senior Leadership team and governors to monitor the impact of the use of the thinking tools, in particular Habits of Mind. Children throughout the school understood the meaning of the habits and teachers referred to the relevance of particular habits in their lessons. Children all displayed learning behaviour that is associated with a Growth Mindset, and were happy to contribute to discussions and work collaboratively.

Conclusion

The wide range of evidence submitted confirms that East Sheen Primary School continues to meet the criteria set by Thinking Schools @Exeter as a Thinking School. In some areas, the school fulfils the criteria very strongly, while in others, the school exceeds the Level 1 criteria. I therefore recommend that accreditation be awarded until May 2024.

I would like to thank the Head Teacher and both Thinking School leads for submitting such a comprehensive evidence base, and for giving their time in, what must be a particularly difficult and incredibly busy period for the school. It is very clear that East Sheen Primary School is a Thinking School in every respect, and that Thinking is at the heart of all teaching and learning that takes place in the school. Staff and pupils can be rightly proud of their school community.

Further Recommendations

I would like to conclude this evaluation with some ways in which the school might continue to develop their practice as they move forward. This might include:

- An exploration of dialogic approaches to teaching and learning, which might be a new (but very related to what the school is already doing) avenue to develop, linking firmly with ideas around sustainability, equality and inclusion. There is good evidence that

dialogic approaches to education can further improve children's attainment in English, Maths and Science³, but through its basis in democratic values and reasoned argument, it tends to promote wider and deeper thinking and learning amongst pupils and can help bridge differences, by its underpinnings in tolerance, empathy and inclusion;

- To develop clearer and more systematic processes of evaluation of pupil self-perceptions, metacognition, and well-being, by systematically collecting qualitative and quantitative data, which might then be easier to correlate with achievement and progress measures.
- To further consider adapting or developing the tools the school currently uses, so as to increase the sense of ownership of pupils and staff and to further develop and carry out the 'East Sheen Primary School approach to thinking'.
- To use the criteria of an Advanced Thinking School to frame future developments, to deepen, expand and disseminate the significant understanding and expertise of East Sheen Primary School, and, to gain Advanced Thinking School accreditation.



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³ See <https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/ED581114.pdf>