

The Effects of becoming a Thinking School: Ofsted and Estyn evidence

Outstanding overall quality of education

Beechwood Primary School provides an outstanding quality of education. Its identity as a 'Thinking School' is at the heart of its work, whether it is encouraging children to think about others or to think things out for themselves. (Beechwood Primary)

A unique ethos of aspiration, reflection and improvement permeates the school at all levels. Staff and pupils complete independent research and reflective learning journals that lead to high quality teaching and learning throughout the school. Everyone is seen to learn together. One parent summarises what many say, 'I feel my child is receiving a very special opportunity to learn about real life skills, values, how to think and question effectively and how to prepare for a happy and successful life.' (Charles Kingsley Primary)

Ditton Primary is very proud of its 'Thinking School' status and this underpins every aspect of the school's work. The excellent progress made by pupils in developing their thinking skills has a marked effect on their personal development and the standards they attain. (Spinney Avenue Primary)

This outstandingly successful school fully meets the aims of its challenging mission statement by being a 'creative and thinking school' and giving each pupil a 'unique educational experience'. (St Michael's RC Primary)

The good and improving curriculum has been subject to a major review recently that highlighted the need to introduce a greater emphasis on thinking and learning skills. (Oakwood Park Grammar)

The school is one of two schools in Cardiff and joint first in Wales to be awarded the Thinking Skills Award by the University of Exeter. It helps pupils to understand how to learn through a strategy known as "thinking maps". This works well. Its programme of Philosophy for Children (P4C) is also highly successful in encouraging pupils to look carefully at how they learn as well as what they learn. (Christ the King Primary)

Across the school pupils' problem solving skills, creative skills, their willingness to work with others and their awareness of how to improve their own learning and performance all have many outstanding features. (Monnow Primary)

Standards

Good emphasis on the development of pupils' thinking skills and upon the use of questions to act as someone who seeks to understand (philosopher) is having a good effect on every pupil's learning, especially in science and in problem solving activities in mathematics. (Woodnewton Learning Community)

An outstanding feature is the focus on 'thinking skills' across the school. This plays a significant role in teaching pupils how to learn effectively. It is an important factor in the good progress they make and in their preparation for secondary school and later life. (St Mary's Primary)

The leadership of the headteacher and senior team is very strong, setting a clear vision for high standards in teaching and learning and promoting ways of raising achievement still further, such as the 'thinking skills' programme. (St Mary's Primary)

Teaching is outstanding because staff know exactly how to help pupils develop thinking skills and reach their full potential in their learning (St Michael's Primary)

The school's exceptional performance stems from a strong and sustained culture of successful learning, which is focused on developing the thinking skills and confidence of each individual pupil and matching work accordingly. (St Michael's Primary)

Recently introduced learning styles such as the introduction of the teaching of philosophy and making the school into a 'thinking school' are well received by the children. They are having a very positive impact on the standards which children achieve. (Whiteheath Infants)

Teaching and learning are outstanding. This is because teachers plan sessions and activities very well and incorporate a variety of learning styles, such as the teaching of thinking skills and philosophy, encouraging children to make decisions for themselves. (Whiteheath Infants)

The learning ethos is strong. The school has rightly placed an emphasis in the curriculum on developing pupils' speaking, listening and thinking skills. This is helping pupils to understand what they are learning, to make outstanding progress and raise standards. (Whiteheath Infants)

By Year 6, the school's focus on thinking skills is well established and pupils draw on this approach to get started on their work, even if they're sometimes not wholly clear about what they have to do. The impact of the approach, together with the many opportunities pupils have to write at length in a wide range of styles, ensures that they produce writing to a consistently high standard. (Charles Kingsley Primary)

Independent Learning and Ownership/Voice

The use of secure subject knowledge and questioning is outstanding to extend pupils' subject vocabulary, to develop their higher order thinking skills and to help them work out solutions for themselves. Pupils are helped to think like dance choreographers, mathematicians or artists and become independent learners swiftly. (Charles Kingsley Primary)

Pupils enjoy working independently, and respond well to teachers' questions, particularly where these really probe their thinking and understanding. (Elvetham Heath Primary)

At the heart of this thinking and learning community are the pupils who are given every opportunity to plan and direct their own learning in many different subjects. (Ernehale Infants)

Thinking skills are at the centre of all learning experiences and, consequently, pupils take a significant role in being responsible for their own learning. Their very positive attitudes and insight into their own styles of learning have created highly motivated, independent and resilient learners. (Ernehale Infants)

Pupils use their initiative in lessons, for instance when one suggested using a computer to create mind maps. With a time target set, pupils swiftly worked together and not only produced mind maps but learnt to enter text into bubbles. (Roxton Lower School)

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Often in lessons, very good use is made of group work and discussion to help secure students' understanding and develop their independent thinking skills. (Colchester High)

The increasing level of personalisation of the curriculum helps promote the excellent development of students as independent learners. Some initiatives are highly imaginative such as the creation and recent completion of the 'mschool', housing mathematics, music and the mind, in the form of creative and critical thinking. (Colchester High)

Students learn well when teachers encourage them to think for themselves and they thrive on a variety of activities that capture and keep their interest. (Oakwood Park Grammar)

The use of strategies to develop thinking is outstanding. Teachers' questioning is highly skilled. Teachers' use of strategies such as *Q Matrix* and *Bloom's taxonomy* ensure high levels of questioning. Through strategies, such as "no-hands-up", pupils' interest and motivation is sustained. Questioning allows teachers to ascertain prior knowledge and also develops pupils' higher order thinking. Through strategies such as *Habits of Mind* pupils become more independent in their learning and surer of how to improve the way they work. Also, more able children become more challenged in their learning. (Christ the King Primary)

Collaborative Approach

They say that one of the things they really like about the school is the school motto, 'Think for yourself, care for others', which they feel is what they are encouraged to do every day. They particularly enjoy exploring ideas for themselves and sharing their ideas with others. (Beechwood Primary)

In the best lessons tasks are challenging and active, providing pupils with real problems to solve, many opportunities to develop their thinking skills, and excellent opportunities for them to work collaboratively. (Cuffley Primary)

Morale is high and teamwork is a strength, with excellent opportunities to work collaboratively. For example, the lead professional for developing the school as a thinking community has provided invaluable support and inspiration for all staff. (Ernehale Infants)

Reflective Thinking/ Enquiry Approach

Being part of a community which encourages enquiry skills has enabled pupils to discuss, debate and question their teachers and each other. Consequently, pupils not only have well-developed speaking and listening skills but are also able to reflect, to make connections in their learning and to think through the consequences of their behaviour and that of others. (Ernehale Infants)

Philosophy sessions are popular and provide pupils with further strategies to help them in both their learning and personal development. (Spinney Avenue Primary)

Clubs include different sports and foreign languages, as well as philosophy for children and parents. Weekly philosophy lessons play a crucial part in extending the creative and enquiry skills of pupils. (St Michael's Primary)

The recently introduced work on the study of philosophy is giving children confidence to express themselves verbally and to ask more profound questions such as 'why?' and 'how?' and to try to answer them. This is a very mature attitude for children of this age. (Whiteheath Infants)

Questioning skills

Teachers and teaching assistants use questioning very well to guide children in their discussions, and by the time they leave the school, children are very effective, independent learners. (Beechwood Primary)

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Effective questioning techniques ensured that all were suitably challenged and encouraged to develop their thinking skills. (Holy Trinity College)

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Assessment

The use of different 'hats' to assess their own and others' work is highly effective in the older pupils' classes (Elvetham Heath Primary)

The school accurately assesses pupils' attainment across all areas of mathematics and uses its assessment of using and applying mathematics well to identify how effective it has been in teaching for understanding, in conjunction with its aims as a 'Thinking School.' (Burraton Primary)

The best lessons reflect the school's emphasis on encouraging students to assess their own and each other's work and think for themselves. (St Robert of Newminster High)

Thinking skills support pupils' understanding of the purpose of assessment. Pupils are adept at assessing how well they and their peers have done in their work and they strive to identify the next steps in their learning. (Christ the King Primary)

Thinking Skills Expertise

In these lessons, teachers demonstrate strong subject knowledge and use their well-honed questioning skills to encourage pupils to reflect and reform their thinking, in response to both the teacher and other pupils. Another significant aspect of this excellent teaching is the high quality thinking time given to allow pupils to think for themselves or to discuss in pairs their ideas before responding to questions. For example, in one lesson pupils were answering questions on data handling. When discussing the teacher's question, without any prompting, one pupil said 'I am going to put on my white hat because this is my thinking hat and I can focus on the data and find things out from it'. (Ernehale Infants)

We were immensely impressed by your very mature thinking skills. (Ernehale Infants)

Good emphasis on the development of pupils' thinking skills and upon the use of questions to act as someone who seeks to understand (philosopher) is having a good effect on every pupil's learning, especially in science and in problem solving activities in mathematics. (Woodnewton Learning Community)

An outstanding feature is the focus on 'thinking skills' across the school. This plays a significant role in teaching pupils how to learn effectively. It is an important factor in the good progress they make and in their preparation for secondary school and later life. (St Mary's RC Junior)

The school's exceptional performance stems from a strong and sustained culture of successful learning, which is focused on developing the thinking skills and confidence of each individual pupil and matching work accordingly. (St Michael's RC Primary)

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Vocational provision has expanded, both on and off site, and citizenship as well as thinking skills is well embedded at both key stages, an improvement since the last inspection. (Avonbourne School)

Staff Professional Development

Morale is high and teamwork is a strength, with excellent opportunities to work collaboratively. For example, the lead professional for developing the school as a thinking community has provided invaluable support and inspiration for all staff. (Ernehale Infants)

Training as part of the 'Thinking School' initiative has influenced the way in which mathematics is taught with a greater emphasis on improving understanding. (Burraton Primary)

There are good opportunities to share best teaching practice across subjects, such as the school's annual 'Thinking Fair' event, which focuses on how to add zest to lessons. (Colchester High)

Teachers have a high degree of subject knowledge and through their commitment to personal and whole school professional development have an excellent understanding of how pupils' learning styles differ and how important it is that their teaching styles reflect this. (Christ the King Primary)

Innovative Practice

Through the expertise of many members of staff, the school demonstrates dedication to remain at the forefront of educational developments. For example, the development of pupils' thinking and philosophy skills has had a significant effect upon their decision-making skills. (Woodnewton Learning Community)

Cross-curricular

Learning is organised into themed areas which encourage thinking skills and opportunities for pupils to develop their learning across a range of integrated subjects. (Ernehale Infants)

Creative Thinking

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The increasing level of personalisation of the curriculum helps promote the excellent development of students as independent learners. Some initiatives are highly imaginative such as the creation and recent completion of the 'mschool', housing mathematics, music and the mind, in the form of creative and critical thinking. (Colchester High)

Critical Thinking

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Pupils have a very good understanding of the ways in which they think. They know, for example, that metacognition involves thinking about their thinking and they employ this strategy in lessons. Their ideas often have intellectual rigour. They sustain debate and justify their arguments convincingly. (Christ the King Primary)

Teachers provide pupils with good opportunities to develop their skills in critical analysis and critical thinking. (Christ the King Primary)

Mathematics

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Metacognition

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Schools Inspected (Ofsted unless stated otherwise)

Beechwood Primary, Runcorn – Full Inspection 18/3/08

Charles Kingsley Primary, Hampshire – Full Inspection 2/3/11

Cuffley Primary, Hertfordshire – Full Inspection 30/9/08

Elvetham Heath, Fleet, Hampshire: Full Inspection 10/3/10

Ernehale Infants, Nottingham: Full Inspection 6/5/10

Roxton Lower School, Bedford – Full Inspection 16/4/08

Spinney Avenue Primary, Widnes – Full Inspection 3/10/07

Woodnewton Learning Community, Corby, Northants: Full inspection 12/9/07

St Mary's RC Junior, Carshalton: Full Inspection 1/11/07

St Michael's RC Primary, Esh: Full Inspection 8/3/07

Whiteheath Infants: Full inspection 11/5/07

Burraton: Maths Subject Inspection 18/6/09

Charles Kingsley: English subject inspection 2/11/08

Avonbourne School, Bournemouth: Full Inspection 12/1/10

Colchester High School for Girls, Colchester – Full Inspection 21/1/09

Holy Trinity Catholic Media Arts College: Full Inspection 13/7/09

Oakwood Park Grammar School, Maidstone – Full Inspection 19/11/08

St Robert of Newminster, Catholic, Sunderland – Full Inspection 10/5/07

Christ the King Primary, Cardiff – Short Inspection 8/10/2008 (Estyn Inspection)

Monnow Primary – Full inspection 18/1/10 (Estyn Inspection)