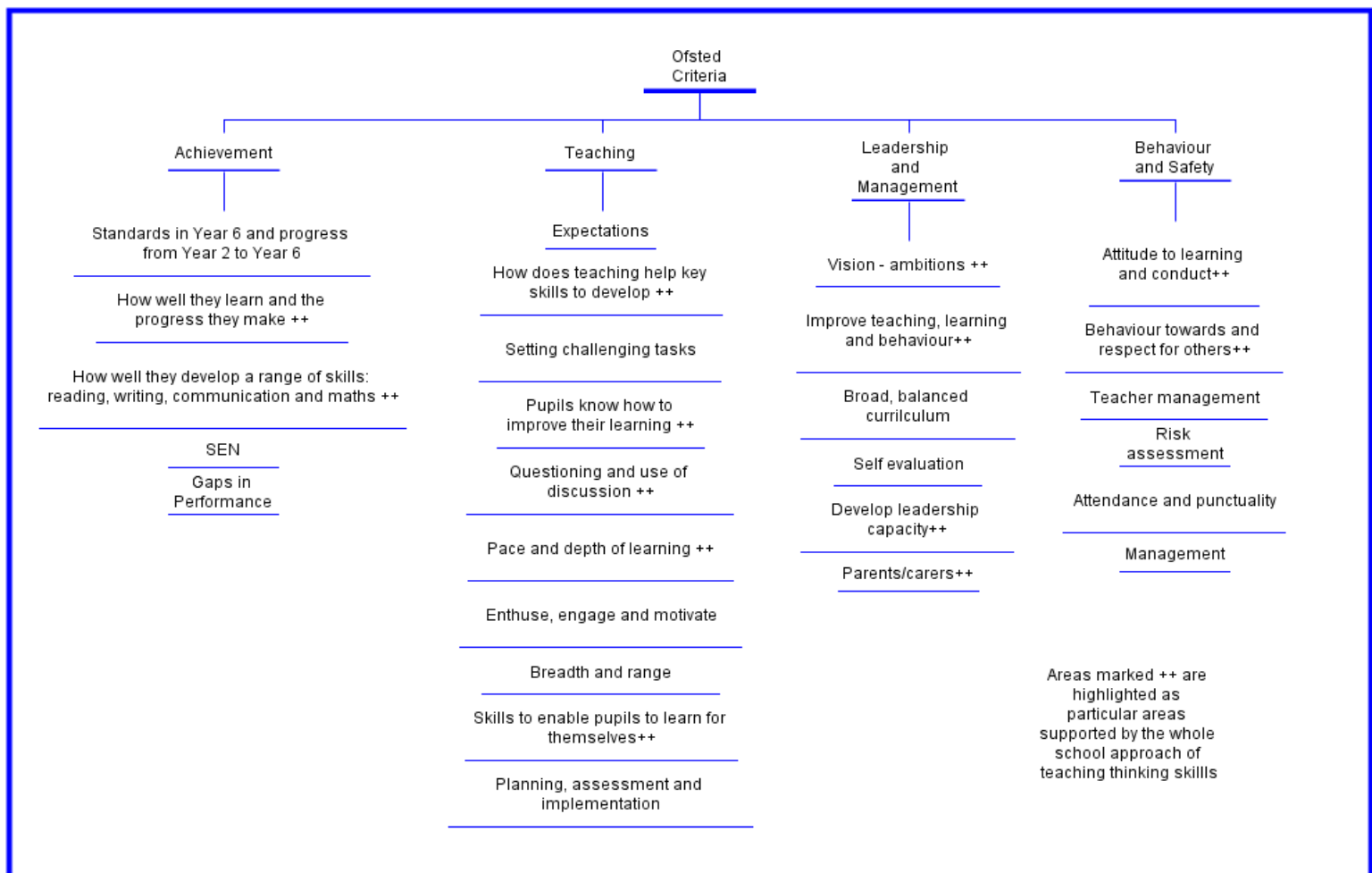


## Ofsted/ Estyn/ ETI Inspections and Thinking Schools

### How does the Thinking School approach meet the new Ofsted Criteria?

As the Thinking School approach is holistic one could argue that the approach when embedded can benefit all areas of the new criteria. For example, a thought–full student will behave towards others with respect. However, in this piece we shall highlight the key areas of the new framework that are most commonly impacted by the teaching of thinking skills. Extracts from published Ofsted (England), Estyn (Wales) and ETI (Northern Ireland) reports within the last two years from accredited Thinking Schools will be quoted as supporting evidence.

Initially let us look at the four areas of the new Ofsted framework: some of the criteria are highlighted with ++ as being particularly supported by the Thinking School approach:



## 1. Achievement

Inspection reports reveal that the Thinking School approach supports children to make good progress and learn effectively, particularly in the key skills of writing, communication and mathematics.

*“Outstanding learning often takes place because teachers challenge students to think independently.”* (Cardinal Newman RC Comprehensive, Luton: Ofsted)

*“There has been an innovative approach to curriculum development since the last inspection. The school is the first in Kent to be awarded 'Thinking School' status and teachers use this approach to learning very effectively in lessons. This has had a particularly positive effect in English, where the structure of 'mapping out' ideas has helped pupils to structure their writing much more effectively.”*

(Kingsdown and Ringwould Primary, Deal: Ofsted)

*“Pupils’ ability to apply their thinking skills and to work independently is extremely well developed throughout the school. Progress in lessons is good throughout the school.”*

(Rhydypenau Primary, Cardiff: Estyn)

*“The children work very well in groups; in all key stages, they share and work through their ideas effectively and are able to select from a range of thinking maps to structure their reasoning in a logical way to develop further their mathematical thinking.”*

(St Macnissi Primary, Northern Ireland: ETI)

## 2. Teaching

The direct and systematic teaching of thinking including questioning skills and collaborative learning approaches significantly contributes evidence to this aspect of an inspection.

*“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.”*

(Charles Kingsley Primary, Hampshire: Ofsted)

Again we identify how a cognitive approach effectively helps the teacher with the delivery of core subjects.

*“This has been enhanced by the whole school focus on developing the children’s thinking skills through the use of ‘thinking maps’ which are used well throughout the school to develop and organise the children’s mathematical and literacy ideas and language.”*

(St Macnissi Primary, Northern Ireland: ETI)

*“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, Hampshire: Ofsted)

*“They apply these skills regularly as they learn in other subjects and demonstrate them both in their written and oral work.”*

(St Benet’s Primary, Ouston: Ofsted)

A central principle in Thinking Schools is the empowerment of learners. The Ofsted criteria identify that learners need to know how to improve. Many of the reflective assessment for learning techniques coupled with strategies like Six Hats provide ways for the pupils to self-evaluate and identify next steps.

*“It is greatly enriched by the school’s involvement with the innovative ‘thinking schools programme’. Techniques acquired through this approach are very well embedded across the school and have a significant impact on pupils’ ability to plan, reflect and solve problems.”*

(St Benet’s Primary, Ouston: Ofsted)

*“The use of different ‘hats’ to assess their own and others’ work is highly effective in the older pupils’ classes”*

(Ernehale Infants, Nottingham: Ofsted)

*It is widely accepted that questioning is a key skill for effective teaching, hence strategies that support teachers’ skills in this area are enhanced by TSI through training in techniques such as the Q Matrix and Bloom’s Revised Taxonomy. Effective and powerful questions develop curiosity and depth to learning, and of course, such questions are not only confined to the teacher in the classroom. 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, Nottingham: Ofsted)

*“Teachers are particularly skilled at asking open and probing questions that challenge pupils to think and explain their ideas”*

(Rhydypenau Primary, Cardiff: Estyn)

*“They elicit thoughtful and exploratory comments from students with probing questions that push them to think more deeply and develop their responses further.”*

(Oakwood Park Grammar School, Maidstone: Ofsted)

Considering questions and answers through the use of discussion in which learners' views are sought may lead to the development of a community of enquiry, a feature of many Thinking Schools.

*"Many teachers are effective in developing student' thinking skills and engaging them fully in discussion."*

(Cardinal Newman RC Comprehensive, Luton: Ofsted)

*"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, Nottingham: Ofsted)

Enquiry is not restricted to one part of the curriculum but can be applied across all subjects.

*"The teachers use skilful questioning techniques that allow the children to think and talk critically and confidently about their mathematical learning."*

(St Macnissi Primary, Northern Ireland: ETI)

Enquiry leads to depth in thinking and learning. Are pace and depth compatible? Thinking strategies support the effective use of time in learning and generate a motivational energy: they do not, however, support mindlessly rushing on to the next learning activity.

*"Well-structured group and pair work enables students to articulate their thinking. For example, in one history lesson observed, every student assumed the role of a citizen in cold war Berlin. They were either supporting communism or capitalism and had to expound their views in a café discussion. This challenging task required students to apply and deepen their previous understanding. They enjoyed the activity and made excellent progress."*

(Oakwood Park Grammar School, Maidstone: Ofsted)

*“The quality of the teaching observed was always good or better with the majority being very good or outstanding. In the best practice observed, the staff engaged very effectively with the children and generated their interest. In these lessons, very good use was made of incidental learning opportunities; the teaching was well-paced and provided all the children with appropriate levels of challenge and opportunities to develop their thinking skills through investigative and collaborative activities.”*

(St Macnissi Primary, Northern Ireland: ETI)

A reason behind many schools embarking on a thinking journey is the desire for their learners to be more independent: to have ownership of skills and strategies to support their own learning and progress.

*“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. 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, Nottingham: Ofsted)

*“The revised school day provides longer periods for the development of independent-learning skills. The new thinking-skills programme in Key Stage 3 is supporting students' development of study skills.”*

(Cardinal Newman RC Comprehensive, Luton: Ofsted)

*“They increasingly, and enthusiastically, make choices about what they want to learn.”*

(Rhydypenau Primary, Cardiff: Estyn)

*“The promotion of thinking skills is an integral part of all learning experiences and an outstanding feature of the school’s work. This is sector-leading practice, which has a clear and direct impact on pupils’ ability to learn independently.”*

(Rhydypenau Primary, Cardiff: Estyn)

### **3. Leadership and Management**

A key common feature of inspection reports of Thinking Schools is the clarity of vision of their leaders: their commitment to this approach gives clear direction and motivation for the school. This focus and vision leads to improvements in teaching and learning:

*“In many classes, the quality of teachers’ planning of activities to develop pupils’ thinking skills is excellent. They provide resources and structured support that are very well designed to enable pupils to read, investigate, research and learn independently.”*

(Rhydypenau Primary, Cardiff: Estyn)

*“For example, the lead professional for developing the school as a thinking community has provided invaluable support and inspiration for all staff.”*

(Ernehale Infants, Nottingham: Ofsted)

One outcome of embarking on a Thinking School journey is that other schools inevitably become interested in what you are doing. This can often lead to hosting visitors and supporting others to introduce thinking strategies. This is a key and dynamic example of leadership to share with Ofsted and is also one of the criteria for the advanced Thinking School accreditation through the University of Exeter.

*“Leaders have established very effective partnerships with others to support learning and pupils’ personal development. Members of staff take a key role in working with other schools to share good practice, especially with regard to the development of thinking skills.”*

*This innovative project has helped to motivate pupils to write with enthusiasm and to ensure that progress in writing is now good for both boys and girls at Key Stage 1.”*

(Kingsdown and Ringwould Primary, Deal: Ofsted)

With the development of empowered independent learners and a community of enquiry, a likely consequence is that the curriculum will be more relevant and meaningful. Learning will be more purposeful: often there will be less stress on fragmented subject teaching and more on a coherent, integrated curriculum.

*“The outstanding curriculum provides pupils with a wide range of interesting and often exciting opportunities which support both their academic and personal development.”*

(Rhydypenau Primary, Cardiff: Estyn)

*“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, Nottingham: Ofsted)

#### **4. Behaviour and Safety**

*“Pupils demonstrate an excellent perspective on the world around them and are equipped with the skills to think deeply about a range of subjects. In a Year 6 lesson, for example, pupils reflected on the differences between their Christmas experience and those of the children they had supported through the ‘shoebox appeal’. The depth of empathy, reflection and understanding displayed by pupils was outstanding as was their ability to listen to and respect the differing views of their peers.”*

(St Benet’s Primary, Ouston: Ofsted)

Thinking Schools understand that developing learner dispositions alongside training in skills is vital if pupils are to achieve their



potential. Collaborative learning is key as pupils support each other to learn.

*“Morale is high and teamwork is a strength, with excellent opportunities to work collaboratively”*

(Ernehale Infants, Nottingham: Ofsted)

*“Pupils are able to think deeply about their own and others experiences, respecting the rights of others to hold different beliefs to their own.”*

(St Benet’s Primary, Ouston: Ofsted)

Clearly parents have a valuable contribution to make to school inspections. Involving them in the Thinking School journey is significant.

*“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.’”*

(Cardinal Newman RC Comprehensive, Luton: Ofsted)

## **Overall**

Over the past four years all of the 37 accredited Thinking Schools inspected were judged as follows: 18 outstanding; 17 good and 2 satisfactory. Many of these were also schools who were not long into their Thinking School journeys. In the past two years 13 of these schools had their next full inspection delayed following impressive interim assessments. It is clear that the Thinking School approach in combination with passion and hard work has positively impacted these schools.

*“Pupils in Year 6 took part in an innovative ‘apprentice’ style event where groups worked together to produce art work to support a production of Macbeth, pitching their ticket and programme designs*

*to a team of judges which included a graphic designer. Such activities, combined with the excellent skills acquired through their 'thinking work', ensure that they leave school with very well honed skills that will support them as they move on to secondary school."*  
(St Benet's Primary, Ouston: Ofsted)

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