

# Thinking School Journey – Portsmouth Academy

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**The journey to becoming a Thinking School began with the City of Portsmouth Girls' School being placed in Special Measures by Ofsted in April 2013. The school was sadly failing to provide a quality education for its students and outcomes were therefore poor. In September 2013 the school opened as The Portsmouth Academy for Girls as part of the Thinking Schools Academy Trust (TSAT), with the Rochester Grammar School for Girls (RGS) as the lead school.**



Work immediately began in planning our route towards accreditation with a firm belief that this would provide the foundations for school improvement that was needed for our students and staff and the wider community. An extensive CPD programme was created to ensure that the pathways were covered and understood by our staff; teachers have been extensively trained in a vast range of

tools, support staff, both children facing and administrative staff have been given training on the concept of a thinking school, our aims and vision and also on the areas of the toolkit which would be useful to them in their roles, governors have also been trained to ensure they have an understanding of the pedagogy behind becoming a thinking school and why we believe that it is absolutely the right pathway for our school and the learning which is at the heart of it.

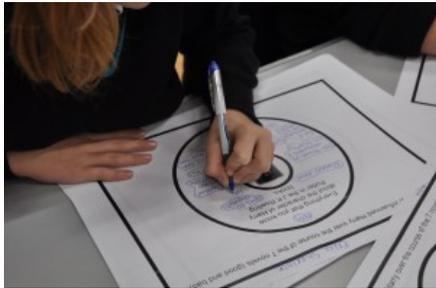


Tony Ryan's Thinkers Keys

We began by introducing Tony Ryan's Thinkers' Keys as a hook for learning, immediately opening students' minds as they entered the classroom. These were welcomed by staff and they adopted this into their planning quickly. This naturally led us to working with staff on questioning and how we could improve students' learning through the use of Blooms' Taxonomy and the Q-Matrix. Again, staff were open to these ideas and strategies and alongside a programme of supportive and developmental learning walks, these strategies began to become habits and we saw engagement, participation and behaviour improve across the school.

Dispositions was an area of interest for us as we saw this as a way to not just target the academic progress of our students but also support them to become well-rounded learners for life. We divided the school year up to focus on fortnightly Habits of Excellence with the assemblies focussing in this and tutor group activities throughout the fortnight to really allow the students time to understand each habit and reflect on their own skills and areas for development within them. This made sure the students were talking about their own learning and practising the habit of the fortnight. Teachers in the subjects also aimed to refer to them where appropriate

however each subject has taken ownership of three habits which relate most to them and support the development of them through their curriculum, often writing them into objectives for the learning.



We believe the real breakthrough in supporting achievement has been the introduction of the eight Thinking Maps. These have given our students and staff an understanding of the thought processes and a common visual language for learning. This visual language for learning has bred a consistency across the school for students and supported them to have a framework for their thinking processes. The use of these has become widespread and students now use them independently, particularly to support with revision.

The school has also been keen to involve parents on our journey, giving regular communication about events and learning tools their children are using in school. We ran a 'Thinking workshop' for parents to support them in understanding the toolkit as homework has also centred around the use of tools and the development of habits. Parents have been keen to understand the processes involved and feedback to us that the pedagogy we are using is a key reason for them choosing the school for their child.



The learning environment is also an area which we are extremely proud of at The Portsmouth Academy. We utilised part of a training day for staff to walk around different subject areas of the school and feedback on where there was strength in practice, around displays reflecting thinking and where they could gain ideas from others. This proved extremely valuable and generated a real buzz

around displays which transferred into solid actions. The school environment now fully reflects thinking and it is commented on by many visitors to the school.

We are fortunate to be in a family of schools with RGS (who are an advanced Thinking School) taking the lead on Thinking. This allowed us to make links with colleagues in Medway and share good practice. Many of our staff were given the opportunity to visit RGS and see the use of other thinking tools and the impact that they could have on the children. Two of our senior team with responsibility for Thinking Schools were also given the opportunity to be trained as consultants which gave us a very deep insight into the cognitive processes. Those staff members have been able to support other schools within TSAT.



The Portsmouth Academy was delighted to have been accredited by the University of Exeter in July 2016 and our belief in the pedagogy was compounded even further by record breaking results in August 2016 with 65% A\*-C including English and maths and an 'above average' progress 8 score. We are exceptionally proud of our school and the culture and ethos our journey to become an

accredited Thinking School has embedded in both our students and our staff.

See more information about Portsmouth Academy for Girls celebrating their best ever GCSE results [here](#)

Find out more about [Portsmouth Academy](#)

See the benefits of the TSI Approach and what it can do for your school – [here](#)

For information about how to gain accreditation as a Thinking School – [see here](#)

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