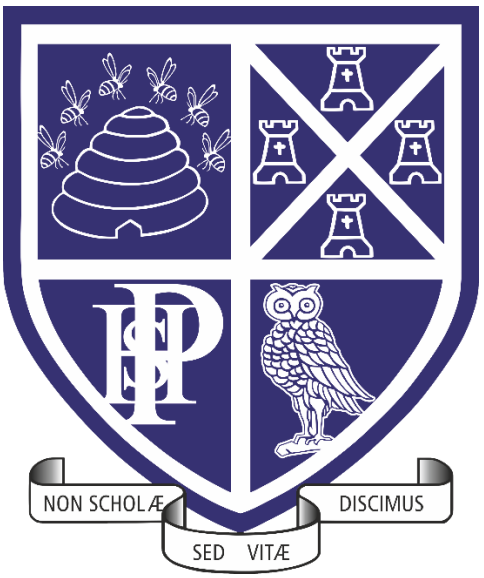
Plymouth High School for Girls



Thinking, Teaching and Learning Policy

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Revision Log (last 5 changes)

Date	Version No	Brief detail of change

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Thinking, Teaching and Learning Policy

1. Purpose and Scope

1.1. This policy outlines the principles and expectations that underpin high-quality thinking, teaching and learning at Plymouth High School for Girls.

1.2. It draws on, and aligns with, the Thinking Schools Academy Trust TTL Trust Expectations and Principles document (TEP v4), while contextualising these principles to PHSG's unique ethos, values, and strategic direction.

1.3. It applies to all staff involved in the planning, delivery, support, and monitoring of learning.

2. Vision and Values

2.1. Our school's motto, "*Non scholae sed vitae discimus*" (For life not school we learn), underpins all teaching and learning practice.

2.2. We are committed to developing articulate, confident, thoughtful learners prepared to thrive in complex future contexts.

2.3. Our identity as a University of Exeter-accredited Thinking School guides our strategic and classroom practices.

3. Alignment

3.1. The Trust Development Plan aims to advance three foundational priorities in our school:

- Strong Policies
- Strong Leaders
- Strong Services

This policy supports the **'Strong Policies'** priority.

3.2. Within the **'Strong Policies'** priority area, a number of policies are categorised within the **'MADE Framework'.** It asserts that outcomes are **MADE** by our mission to:

- **Motivate all**; ensure our students have the best support, encouragement and guidance to achieve strong outcomes and transform their life chances
- **Analyse & Act;** use quantitative and qualitative data effectively to drive strong outcomes and thus transform life chances
- **Decide & Drive**; support strong leaders to deliver strong outcomes that will transform life chances
- **Educate All**; ensure we have a strong cognitive education provision, to support all learners to achieve strong outcomes that will transform their life chances.

This policy sits under the **Educate All** strand of the MADE framework.

3.3. Through consistent, cognitively rich TTL approaches, teachers at PHSG should ensure all learners are empowered to meet ambitious academic and personal outcomes.

4. RESPECT Framework

4.1. All PHSG lessons are designed with our **RESPECT** framework in mind:

- Retrieval Practice
- Expectations of learning
- Salient Slide
- Pace
- Expectations of behaviour
- Challenge
- Thinking Tools

4.2. Retrieval practice strengthens memory by encouraging students to recall information from long-term memory. This improves retention and reduces forgetting (Roediger & Karpicke, 2006). Spacing and low-stakes testing are powerful tools for building durable learning. All lessons* must start with around ten minutes of retrieval practice which must be carried out silently and independently. When answers are shared, students must be permitted to correct their responses.
** retrieval practice would not be typically expected in lessons where lengthy assessments are carried out*

4.3. High expectations of learning contribute to a culture of belief, effort, engagement, participation and academic responsibility. It means that all students are included in the learning and expected to think deeply, work hard and meet ambitious academic goals. Teachers should make clear that engagement, active participation, precision and sustained effort are non-negotiable parts of learning. Teachers should help students develop and embed high quality thinking dispositions as described by Costa & Kallick's Habits of Mind (2000). The OECD PISA-TALIS (2022) link study found that "students who perceived high teacher expectations were significantly more engaged, even after controlling for prior attainment".

4.4. All lessons at Plymouth High School for Girls conclude with the display of a salient slide which lists the key knowledge and skills that the lesson has developed. Summarising helps consolidate learning and primes it for future retrieval. Making key knowledge and skills 'salient' supports the EEF's recommendations (2023) on explicit instruction and memory by highlighting essential content and removing distractions.

4.5. Well-paced lessons maintain a sense of urgency. Effective pace supports attention, working memory and engagement. While not every lesson should be fast-paced, there should be momentum and clarity of purpose. There should be effective chunking of the lesson activities where prolonged open-ended exercises are rare with clear transitions supported by communicating the relevant learning mode. Varied activities should be considered to refresh attention and avoid monotony. Visual or verbal timings should be used to help students anticipate the pace and consider quick mental refreshers to maintain momentum in longer lessons (e.g. double lessons).

4.6. High expectations of behaviour establish safe and structured environments which are essential for learning. Consistent behaviour routines reduce the chance of cognitive overload and maximise instructional time (EEF 2022, Lemov 2021). Teachers should use well-established routines, such as entrances, correct equipment and predictable instructional language. All staff at Plymouth High School for Girls should use clear and consistent consequences via the C-system and, wherever possible, frame behavioural expectations and corrections positively.

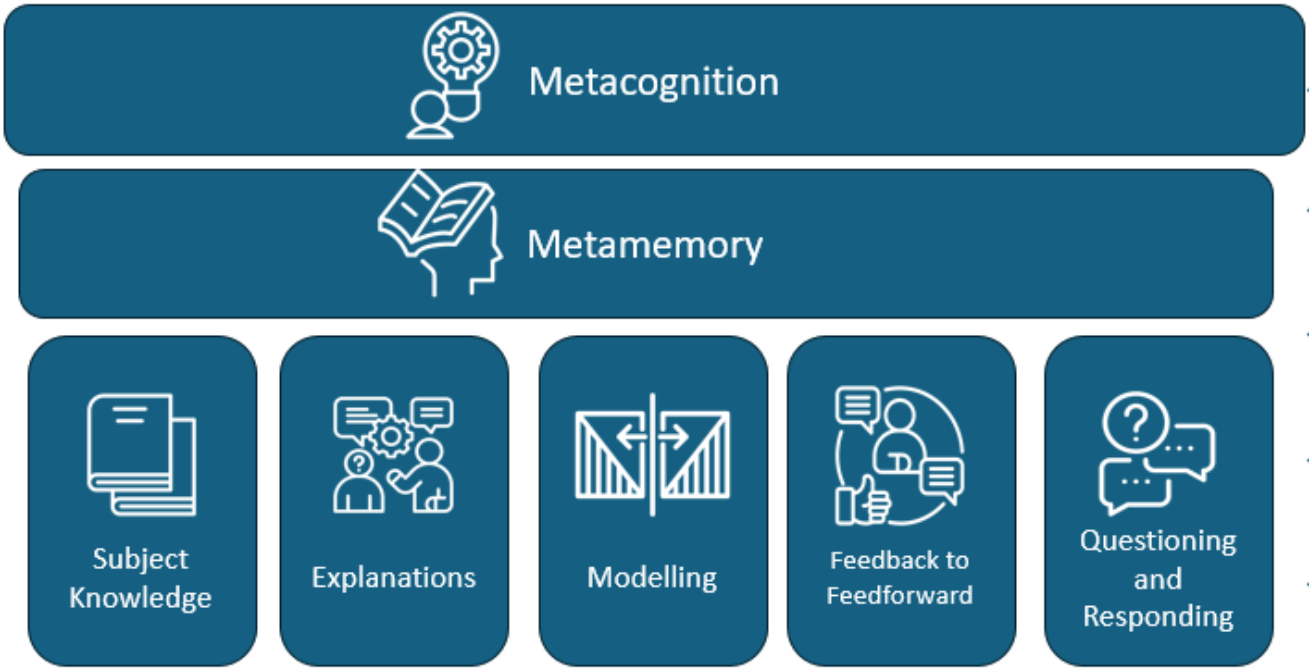
4.7. Challenge is key to cognitive development and has been well known since Vygotsky's key work on the Zone of Proximal Development was published in 1978. The level of challenge must be well-designed and age-appropriate; tasks ought not to be too difficult nor too easy to avoid disengagement (Bjork 1994, EEF 2018).

Teachers should carefully choose exercises which allow all students to be challenged, gradually release scaffolds and encourage productive struggle where making errors is an expected part of the process.

4.8. Plymouth High School for Girls has curated a **thinking toolkit** for use in lessons in order to support metacognition, creativity and critical reasoning. This will help students become flexible, independent learners. Hyerle's eight Thinking Maps (1988) help students make their thinking visible, Ryan's Thinker's Keys (1990) which help develop critical and creative questioning, and de Bono's Thinking Hats (1985) which develops quality thinking dispositions.

5. The Seven Principles of Thinking, Teaching and Learning

Figure 2: Seven Principles of Thinking, Teaching and Learning



5.1. The Seven Principles of Teaching and Learning at Plymouth High School for Girls underpin consistent, high-quality classroom practice. Inspired by Allison and Tharby's Making Every Lesson Count (2015), and aligned with the EEF's evidence-informed recommendations (EEF, 2021), these principles must consciously guide planning, delivery and reflection across all subjects and key stages.

5.2. **Subject knowledge** (both substantive and disciplinary) is the foundation of expert teaching. Teachers must demonstrate confident disciplinary understanding, identify key concepts, anticipate common misconceptions and design coherent learning sequences that build cumulatively over time (Shulman, 1986). Effective teaching blends deep subject knowledge with pedagogical agility to stretch all learners and close knowledge gaps. The curriculum should be ambitious, well-sequenced and vertically integrated, supporting both disciplinary literacy and cognitive development (Ofsted, 2023).

5.3. **Explanations** must be clear, purposeful and audience-aware, helping students to integrate new information into existing schema. Teachers should connect new knowledge to prior understanding through analogy, metaphor and dual coding (Paivio, 1990), and use concrete examples to support abstraction (Rosenshine, 2012). Effective explanations support working memory by breaking complex ideas into manageable chunks and using visuals or narratives to aid comprehension and retention.

5.4. **Feedback** must be timely, actionable and rooted in the specific learning intention. It should help students close the gap between current and desired performance, while also fostering self-regulation and ownership of learning (Wiliam, 2016). Teachers at PHSG use multiple forms of feedback—written, verbal, and peer-based—to inform responsive teaching, adapt future planning and guide students in improving the quality of their work.

5.5. Teachers help students understand how memory works (**metamemory**), including the limits of working memory and the need for spaced, interleaved and retrieval-based practice to secure learning in long-term memory (Bjork & Bjork, 1992; Roediger & Butler, 2011). Lesson design should ensure repeated exposure to key content over time, with cumulative assessments and structured reviews to combat forgetting and reinforce core knowledge.

5.6. High-quality **modelling** is used to demonstrate both the product and the process of success. Teachers should 'think aloud' to reveal cognitive strategies, problem-solving methods and desirable learning behaviours (Collins, Brown & Newman, 1989). Scaffolding is used strategically and gradually withdrawn as student competence grows, allowing for increasing independence while maintaining high expectations.

5.7. **Metacognition** is explicitly taught and modelled across the curriculum. Teachers help students plan, monitor and evaluate their learning using structured reflection and deliberate thinking strategies. Our Thinking Toolkit, including Thinking Maps (Hyerle, 1988), Thinker's Keys (Ryan, 1990), and Thinking Hats (de Bono, 1985), supports this by making thought processes visible and transferable. Students are encouraged to become self-aware, strategic learners who can adapt their approach to different tasks and challenges (EEF, 2018).

5.8. Effective **questioning** is used to probe understanding, reveal misconceptions and promote elaboration. Teachers should use a variety of techniques including cold calling as the norm, probing, think-pair-share, Bloom's Taxonomic command terms as well as tools like the Q-Matrix, Thinker's Keys to ensure all students are cognitively engaged and accountable (Lemov, 2021; Black & Wiliam, 2009). Dialogic teaching approaches allow for extended responses and reasoning, helping students refine and articulate their thinking with increasing sophistication.

6. Continued Professional Development

6.1. At Plymouth High School for Girls, high-quality professional development is central to our thinking, teaching and learning culture. Our CPD programme is underpinned by the belief that all staff can and should continually refine their practice. Effective CPD improves teacher efficacy, supports retention, and raises outcomes for students (Cordingley et al., 2015; Kraft, Blazar & Hogan, 2018).

6.2. Our CPD approach reflects the Education Endowment Foundation's (EEF) 'Effective Professional Development' guidance report (2021), which identifies 14 evidence-informed mechanisms that make professional development most effective. These mechanisms are grouped into four core areas:

- **Build Knowledge**
- **Motivate Teachers**
- **Develop Teaching Techniques**
- **Embed Practice**

6.3. In alignment with our own CPD Principles, our professional development is:

6.3.1. Relevant and Evidence-Informed
CPD aligns with our strategic and curricular priorities. It is responsive to our phase, subject context and the needs of our students and staff. All training is rooted in robust research, such as EEF guidance, the ITT Core Content Framework, and disciplinary-specific best practice. This ensures coherence with national standards and a strong link between CPD and pupil impact (EEF, 2021; Weston, 2022).

6.3.2. Memory-Aware
CPD is delivered in a way that reflects how people learn. We manage cognitive load by sequencing content carefully, avoiding split attention, and using dual coding. Key messages are spaced, revisited and embedded using retrieval practices, mirroring what we expect teachers to do in classrooms (Sweller, 1988; EEF, 2021).

6.3.3. Model then Rehearse
Training includes live or recorded modelling of effective teaching, narration of thought processes, and worked examples. Staff are given opportunities to rehearse strategies in a low-stakes setting before using them with students. These sessions often include peer discussion and deliberate practice with feedback (Grossman et al., 2009; Goodrich, 2024).

6.3.4. Feedback to Feed Forward
Feedback is used not only in the classroom but also as part of staff development. CPD includes supportive cycles of coaching, reflection and collaborative planning. Feedback is expected for both participants and facilitators to promote mutual growth and accountability (Wiliam, 2016; Goodrich, 2024).

6.3.5. Sustained and Adaptive
We recognise that short, one-off sessions are rarely effective. Instead, our CPD is part of a sustained programme that promotes habit formation and cultural change. Teachers revisit and reflect on learning, while CPD leads monitor impact, gather feedback and adapt delivery accordingly (EEF, 2021; Weston, 2022).

6.3.6. Owned by Staff
All teachers are professionals with responsibility for their own growth. Staff are supported to reflect regularly, engage with research, and pursue deliberate practice. Every teacher is encouraged to identify areas for improvement and take informed risks to refine their craft. Our aim is that CPD is not done to teachers, but with them.

6.4. CPD is delivered through a variety of formats including INSET days, whole-school and departmental CPD, staff briefings, Trust-wide conferences, instructional coaching, and external speakers.

6.5. To ensure coherence and quality, our CPD is mapped annually to both the RESPECT Framework and our Seven Principles of Thinking, Teaching and Learning. Lesson observation, staff voice and pupil progress data inform ongoing priority areas. Our CPD provision is subject to both internal and external quality assurance.

7. Implementation and Quality Assurance

7.1. The consistent implementation of this policy is the responsibility of all staff. Leaders at every level will model, support, and monitor for the RESPECT Framework and the Seven Principles of Thinking, Teaching, and Learning.

7.2. The Assistant Headteacher for Thinking, Teaching and Learning oversees the implementation of this policy, ensuring it informs lesson planning, subject reviews, and professional development. Findings from QA processes

will be shared with the Senior Leadership Team and Trust representatives as part of our continuous improvement cycle.

7.3. Quality assurance at PHSG is multi-layered and evidence-informed. Monitoring will include:

- Lesson observations (including live coaching, drop-ins, and developmental observations)
- Learning walks
- Book looks and work scrutiny
- Student voice and surveys
- Think Ahead CPD reflections
- CPD session reviews and QA

These processes will use the RESPECT Framework and Seven Principles of Thinking, Teaching and Learning as key evaluative criteria.

7.4. Staff are supported to engage in professional reflection, coaching, and peer feedback. Professional development targets linked to this policy form part of our appraisal and performance development process.

7.5. CPD and teaching quality will be externally quality assured through periodic review in partnership with the Trust and external bodies (e.g. Education Development Trust), ensuring standards are sustained and continually improved across the Trust.

8. Related Policies and Resources

8.1. This policy should be read alongside:

- PHSG Assessment Protocol
- Trust TTL TEP (v4)
- Outcomes Policy
- Principles of behaviour and culture document
- SEND Policy
- Leadership Principles
- TTL Guided Pathways