



Learning and Teaching at Caterham School

As Director of Learning and Teaching at Caterham School the obvious assumption to make would be that my main focus is on exam results. However, my passion is making sure that our students leave with the ability to think for themselves, and that they each have a deep understanding of how they learn. In fact my greatest fear is that a student leaves our school with a clutch of impressive A-levels, but lacks the metacognitive skills and self-confidence to make a success of university and career.

To support this belief we run an extensive programme of staff and pupil training both in and out of lessons. We are keen proponents of De Bono Thinking techniques such as the Six Thinking Hats® and CoRT 1 Skills®. We use the techniques to help students and teachers alike to structure their thinking in such scenarios as problem solving, planning essays or even running meetings.

The Six Thinking Hats® are a framework for an alternative to traditional argument and are often more constructive. This technique encourages all participants to think in one direction at the same time. For example, the White Hat requires an attention to information: what do we have; what do we need; what is missing. The Green Hat demands a focus on 'creative effort.' When the Green Hat is in use everyone generates new ideas, alternatives, modifications of an idea, possibilities, provocations, etc. Caterham became the first Independent School in the country to be awarded Thinking School status by De Bono in 2006.

We also run dedicated study skills sessions throughout the school, including Multiple Intelligence Testing and Information Skills so that students understand how to make best use of reading skills and research techniques. 1st and 2nd Years follow a course on Thinking and Study Skills as part of a Carousel programme. Aside from De Bono techniques they start to look at their own learning preferences, how they might appeal to them, and how to develop learning styles that are perhaps not yet favoured by them. Students also learn about Mind Maps, Brain Gym, and even coping with stress or exam nerves.

Last November we shared many of these strategies with our feeder schools at our first ever Conference on Innovative Learning and Teaching. We wanted to make it uniquely hands-on so after the morning workshops delegates spent the afternoon visiting classrooms and sitting in on lessons to see the theory translated into practice.