

## Nottinghamshire LEA

### Draft Policy Statement for Gifted and Talented Pupils

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## 1. Introduction

*“Our deepest fear is not that we are inadequate. Our deepest fear is that we are powerful beyond measure. We ask ourselves ‘Who am I to be brilliant, gorgeous, talented, fabulous?’ Actually, who are you not to be? You are a child of God. Your playing small doesn’t serve the world. There’s nothing enlightened about shrinking so that other people won’t feel insecure around you. We are all meant to shine, as children do.” Nelson Mandela.*

Since the mid-1990s schools and LEAs throughout England have significantly increased their commitment to their gifted and talented pupils. With strong support from government many schools have agreed and implemented whole school and classroom strategies which have raised pupils’ achievement in both academic subjects and in areas of talent such as sport, dance, music and art. A key concern has been to **identify and realise the potential of children who are underachieving**, especially those from disadvantaged backgrounds.

Locally, several concerns about the performance and provision for gifted and talented pupils have emerged:

- when compared with other LEAs (statistical neighbours and nationally) the progress of gifted and talented pupils in Nottinghamshire is not as strong. Evidence from Ofsted inspections of schools indicates this is particularly the case at key stages 3 and 4;
- the performance of Nottinghamshire pupils as measured by outcomes at the higher levels in national key stage 3 tests and GCSE examinations is below that of similar LEAs and nationally;
- schools feel the LEA’s support for gifted and talented pupils is not sufficiently robust;
- many headteachers and teachers have indicated they need help better to identify and meet the needs of gifted and talented pupils.

The LEA’s Ofsted inspection in May 2003 recognised the need to raise the profile of gifted and talented pupils, track their progress and identify and share good practice.

As a result of the inspection the LEA drew up a detailed action plan for gifted and talented pupils to respond to these issues. One of the activities within the action plan was to establish and implement a coherent and comprehensive strategy. In addition, the LEA undertook to carry out an audit of school provision and to use this information to construct the strategy.

## 2. What is a strategy for Gifted and Talented pupils?

*‘At all levels an effective Gifted and Talented policy will almost certainly require significant changes in the organisation, curriculum and perhaps culture of the school. As a rule of thumb, if the gifted and talented policy is not having this degree of impact, it is probably not working. (DfES, Gifted & Talented Education Unit).*

**The Department for Education and Skills' (DfES) national strategy** for improving the education of gifted and talented pupils has powerful inclusive objectives, and places significant responsibilities on schools to:

- achieve significant, measurable improvements in the attainment, motivation, aspirations and self-esteem of gifted and talented pupils;
- improve the identification of, and provision for, children who are underachieving or at risk of underachieving, especially those from disadvantaged backgrounds;
- enable more disadvantaged pupils to progress to higher education courses with the most demanding entry requirements;
- promote opportunities for gifted and talented pupils to progress more in line with their abilities rather than their age;
- ensure that every school can personalise learning at the upper end of the ability range;
- develop a 'culture of achievement' where excellence is encouraged and celebrated.

Excellence should not be confused with elitism. Providing all pupils with opportunities to realise their potential is a fundamental right, enshrined in the 1944 Education Act and the United Nations Universal Declaration of Human Rights. Whether a school provides effectively for its gifted and talented pupils is a litmus test of its success as an inclusive institution. Schools need to bring together equity and excellence, driven by a focus on learning.

### **Definition**

The DfES and Ofsted define 'gifted pupils' as those with academic ability which 'places them significantly above the average for their year group'. 'Talented pupils' are defined as those whose abilities in art, music, dance or sport are 'significantly above average'. DfES guidelines require schools to identify 5-10% of pupils as 'gifted and talented' in each year group.

Achievement is a combination of several ingredients. Innate ability is necessary, but opportunity and motivation are also crucial. Joseph Renzulli<sup>1</sup> suggests a 'three-ring conception of giftedness': to fulfil their potential gifted and talented pupils need to score highly in three areas:

- a) Above-average ability
- b) Task commitment
- c) Creativity.

The interaction between these three elements is important. Above average ability and task commitment without creativity may lead to success in examinations but not success in a career where solutions to difficult problems are required. The highly creative and talented pupil who has little task commitment is the classic underachiever. Personality qualities are significant for success: inventiveness, enthusiasm, perseverance, self-confidence, hard work.

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<sup>1</sup> Renzulli, J.S *The Enrichment Triad Model*. Creative Learning Press, Mansfield Conn. 1977

### **Provision for gifted and talented pupils**

Her Majesty's Inspectors (HMI) have welcomed the extensive menu of extra-curricular provision offered by many schools to gifted and talented pupils but warn that no amount of after-hours provision can make up for lack of differentiated learning opportunities within the classroom. HMI also point out that no other group of pupils is expected to engage in weekend or holiday activities in order to access their learning entitlement. With this proviso, it is clearly rewarding for gifted and talented pupils to enjoy a wide range of enrichment activities, including:

- masterclasses;
- weekend activities organised by voluntary organisations such as the National Association for Gifted Children (NAGC);
- visits to museums, performing/expressive arts and sports events;
- coaching by experts (whether mathematics or football);
- experiences of professional working environments (e.g. dance, drama, music);
- summer schools organised by school, LEA or the National Academy for Gifted & Talented Youth (NAGTY).

### **The benefits of working with parents**

Parents and school working together can significantly enhance a child's experience through:

- effective identification of strengths and needs, especially when a child is starting a new school;
- sharing high but realistic expectations of future success;
- agreeing on a broad and balanced curriculum which provides challenge but avoids the pressure of excelling in everything all of the time;
- recognising that the enjoyment of learning is as important as passing examinations and tests;
- valuing parents' input.

Research (by NAGC) shows that parents value schools where teachers are approachable, flexible, willing to listen and discuss possible courses of action (e.g. acceleration) openly. Schools should ensure that parents are aware of the school's policy and practice on gifted and talented pupils, and that they know whom to contact to discuss their child's needs, or their own needs as parents.

### **Nottinghamshire LEA will support effective partnerships with parents by:**

- giving advice and support to parents about making provision for gifted and talented children;
- helping to improve the partnership between school and parents if this is preventing the child from receiving appropriate provision, e.g. by offering the services of an Independent Parental Supporter;
- working with national and local parents groups and associations;
- linking with other appropriate services (e.g. EAL);
- establishing Parents' Forums to listen to and learn from parents;
- suggesting to schools ways in which they can better involve 'hard to reach' parents;

- involving parents from different communities;
- using the local authority's role as corporate parent to ensure that Looked After Children and Children in Care are fully represented in schools' gifted and talented cohorts.

### 3. Principles

In an effective and inclusive education system, all children are:

- valued equally;
- treated with respect;
- given equal opportunities

so that they can receive a high-quality education and achieve educational standards appropriate to their capabilities.

**The shared basic principles for an inclusive approach** to supporting gifted and talented pupils in Nottinghamshire are:

- schools should focus on ability, not achievement and take account of multiple abilities.
- every school, regardless of its ability profile, should have a 5-10% gifted and talented cohort in each year group.
- schools should keep a gifted and talented register but this should act as a guide to a shifting talent pool, not as a gatekeeper.
- the gifted and talented cohort should be representative of the whole school population (and of its various communities).
- differentiation in classroom teaching and learning is the most effective way to meet needs, and is in line with the Government's emphasis on personalised learning.
- underachievement is a critical issue, particularly among pupils from the most severely disadvantaged backgrounds.
- the gifted and talented strategy does not exist on its own; it is intimately linked to other strategies: the primary strategy, the key stage 3 strategy, the strategy for 14-19, and the LEA's local key stage 4 strategy.

To ensure that the needs of gifted and talented children from minority groups are met, Nottinghamshire LEA together with its schools will promote arrangements for identification, and subsequent provision, that are equally accessible to pupils who are:

- from minority ethnic groups;
- travellers;
- in public care/looked after children;
- identified as having special educational needs;
- educated otherwise than at school.

### 4. The LEA's partnership with schools

#### **The role of the LEA**

Nottinghamshire LEA's responsibility to promote high standards includes ensuring that the needs of gifted and talented children are met. To fulfil this responsibility the LEA will:

- establish a policy on the education of gifted and talented pupils;
- monitor its implementation and the impact on practice and standards;
- review the policy at regular intervals;
- ensure that the policy is made available to all relevant partners in the education of gifted and talented children;
- strive for continuous improvement in provision for gifted and talented pupils, particularly those from disadvantaged backgrounds.

### **The LEA's support for schools**

To support schools in meeting the needs of gifted and talented children, Nottinghamshire LEA will:

- provide information and support to schools to enable them to offer appropriate challenges and experiences to gifted and talented pupils;
- provide information and advice on school leadership, curriculum, pedagogy and transition in relation to gifted and talented pupils, and disseminate best practice;
- enhance the provision for gifted and talented pupils, through joint work with schools, and partnerships with other agencies and providers;
- identify sources of funding which can support the further development of provision;
- identify and promote improvements in schools which are making inadequate provision for gifted and talented pupils;
- provide targeted support and resources to schools with a significant proportion of pupils from disadvantaged backgrounds, to ensure that these children have equal opportunities to realise their potential and achieve at high levels.;
- support Senior Leadership Teams and governing bodies by providing training opportunities to develop awareness of gifted and talented pupils' needs.

### **Some guiding principles of school provision**

Schools should make a clear statement about the principles which will guide their practice. This is significant for future decision making, and to demonstrate to parents and pupils why the school has chosen to offer particular opportunities. The issues which the school should consider are:

- are some abilities valued more than others? Do some abilities deserve greater provision and/or reward?
- will certain provision be made to certain groups only? If so, what are the educational arguments?
- are the child's developmental needs neglected by too much focus on academic needs?
- what proportion of the school's overall budget should gifted and talented pupils receive? How does this compare with the budgets for pupils with Special Educational Needs?
- how will the school combine an inclusive approach with ensuring that individual pupils are encouraged to fulfil their potential for high attainment?
- how will the school foster a culture of achievement while at the same time instilling the values of pupil cooperation?

### **Leading for Learning: Who does what?**

The Senior Leadership Team (SLT) has a key role to play in providing status and priority for the gifted and talented agenda within the school. The SLT's responsibilities are:

#### *Directing:*

- establishing whole school awareness;
- providing a framework (whole school policy, governors' agenda, regular discussion at SLT/departmental meetings)

#### *Leading:*

- taking & accepting responsibility for the initiative;
- creating momentum within the school;
- supporting the Gifted & Talented coordinator (including providing a budget).

The school Gifted & Talented coordinator has a crucial role as 'champion' of the gifted and talented pupils within the school. To operate effectively the co-ordinator must have:

- explicit backing from the school's governing body, head teacher and SLT;
- sufficient time to undertake the role effectively;
- recognition and acceptance that the role does not involve performing all activities associated with the gifted and talented programme, but to co-ordinate and lead all such activity.

Governors have an important role to play in ensuring effective provision for gifted and talented pupils. Working with the head teacher and staff, they can help to ensure that:

- the school has a culture of achievement;
- parents are well informed about the strategy and engage their support (particularly 'hard to reach' parents, including those from minority ethnic groups);
- links are established throughout the community;
- provision is regularly monitored and evaluated;
- implications for funding, resources and staff training are addressed;
- there are regular reports to governors' meetings on provision for and attainment of gifted and talented pupils.

It is good practice to appoint a governor with specific responsibility for gifted and talented pupils.

## **5. Monitoring the Gifted and Talented strategy**

The LEA will monitor and evaluate the effectiveness of its gifted and talented strategy on a termly basis, focusing on measurable outcomes:

- pupil attainment; *outcome measure*: achievement at the higher levels in key stage tests, GCSE, AS and Advanced grades;
- identification of gifted and talented underachievers, especially from disadvantaged backgrounds; *outcome measure*: % pupils in receipt of free school meals in gifted and talented cohorts;



- development of pupils' aspirations and self-esteem; *outcome measure*: % increase in post-16 staying-on rates and/or transition to Further Education/Higher Education institutions;
- ethnic minority pupils; *outcome measure*: % of pupils in gifted and talented pupils from each ethnic group within the school population;
- involvement of parents; *outcome measure*: one-to-one interviews held with parents of all pupils within gifted and talented cohorts at beginning and end of each key stage, above and beyond normal parental consultation meetings.

Schools are encouraged to share their good practice in monitoring and evaluation, with a particular emphasis on raising pupil attainment at higher levels in key stage tests and GCSE grades.

## **6. Guidance for schools**

### **Whole School Guidance**

#### **Identification**

Schools need to identify their gifted and talented populations in order to:

- raise pupil attainment;
- maximise potential for self-fulfilment;
- increase society's resource of creative & productive adults;
- disclose & provide for underachievers;
- improve behaviour.

Identifying high-ability pupils is one of the first and most important tasks in the process of developing a successful gifted and talented programme.

#### **Good Practice in Identification**

The key processes for effective practice in identification are:

- school discusses and agrees the characteristics of high ability and potential in each subject, at each key stage;
- school systematically assembles and analyses information on performance and potential (tests and teacher observation);
- special attention is made to groups likely to be under-represented;
- parents and pupils are involved in identifying interests (both within and outside school).

Schools should establish a range of identification processes which take into account:

- the full range of pupils' abilities and 'intelligences';
- the extent to which abilities can be measured through attainment and performance;
- the views of teaching and non-teaching staff, parents, peers and the pupils themselves.

Particular care should be taken to ensure that identification processes are broadly based in order to identify underachieving pupils, and those with potential to achieve at higher levels.



### **Identification impacts at three levels:**

1. *Pupil level:* recognising specific abilities and talents so that they can be appropriately provided for (avoiding underachievement, personal frustration, challenging behaviour);
2. *Teacher level:* providing the basis for effective provision (ensuring challenge levels are high & shaping differentiated provision);
3. *Whole-school level:* ensuring that good quality provision for the most able impacts positively on the overall quality of teaching and learning in the school.

### **An Identification Framework**

- schools should use a range of strategies simultaneously, to provide maximum information;
- it is important to look beyond the hard-working, highly motivated student to watch for :
  - divergent thinkers;
  - pupils asking a particularly perceptive question or linking ideas in an unusual way;
  - daydreamers at the back of the class;
  - the ‘class fool’ who is using his talent to cultivate popularity and avoid being labelled a ‘swot’;
  - pupils who are creative, quirky, or have interesting hobbies outside of school.
- the challenge for schools is to “catch the pupils being bright”;
- through regular classroom observation indicators will emerge as a pattern over time. These need to be recorded systematically and shared among all staff;
- sharing of information is particularly important at key stage transition, both between and within schools, so that valuable insights are not lost;
- schools should monitor the background of pupils identified as gifted and talented to ensure that no particular groups are under-represented;
- whole-school coordination (via the gifted & talented co-ordinator) is essential to an effective identification strategy ensuring that:
  - information from different sources is matched and compared;
  - pattern (and lack of pattern) is noted and investigated;
  - pupil performance data is interpreted, analysed and used to inform future provision.

## Identification Strategies

Method	Strengths	Limitations	Advice
<b>TESTS</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>National Curriculum (including optional teacher assessment tasks)</li> <li>Cognitive ability (CATs)</li> <li>World Class Tests (<a href="http://www.worldclassarena.org">www.worldclassarena.org</a>)</li> </ul>	Apparently objective measure of performance.	Temptation to over-rely on test data. Identification restricted to narrow range of easily testable skills. Disadvantages creative pupils.	Use as part of a broad & balanced framework, not as a sole measure.
<b>TEACHER NOMINATION/ CLASSROOM OBSERVATION</b>	Uses teacher's ongoing assessments. Recognises pupils' responses to teaching.	Relies on teaching which is confident, challenging & flexible. Careful recording of observations vital.	Use as a key element in a managed framework which links identification with provision.
<b>PARENTS</b>	Intimate knowledge of individual child. Takes account of interests outside school.	Danger of over- or under-estimation of ability. Poses difficulties for less confident parents.	Use to build as broad an information base as possible about a pupil.
<b>PEERS</b>	Often know each others' abilities very well.	Risk of peer pressure ('not cool to be clever') leading to reticence to provide information	Use with teacher nomination to identify gifted underachiever
<b>PUPILS THEMSELVES</b>	Use questionnaire to explore child's preferred learning style or multiple intelligences.	Pupil's lack of confidence, peer pressure.	Use to identify underachiever
<b>TRANSITION (between schools and key stages)</b>	Opportunity to check accuracy of earlier identification.	Requires active dialogue and trust across schools, between teachers.	Use to avoid 'lost time' in Y7. Pick up 'creative gifted' pupils.
<b>EDUCATIONAL PSYCHOLOGISTS</b>	Can identify high ability linked to specific learning difficulties (dyslexia, dyspraxia, ASD)	Time consuming & expensive. Unnecessary for most gifted pupils.	Use for 5-10% of g & t pupils with learning difficulty.

### **Pitfalls to avoid in identification:**

- using too limited a range of strategies or overusing one strategy (whether test data or teacher nomination);
- lack of shared understanding about the purpose of identification i.e. some staff may see it as picking out potential Oxbridge candidates while others see it as unlocking a much larger group's abilities. It is important to have a whole-school discussion early on about identification objectives (and hence the methods to be employed);
- care should be taken with assessment processes that:
  - are dependent on words, limiting the achievement of pupils for whom English is an additional language;
  - fail to take into account multi-lingual capacity;
  - are culturally specific, discriminating against children who have recently moved to this country;
  - fail to take into account pupils' achievements outside school.

For a Possible Identification Form, see Appendix.

### **Key Questions to consider in identification**

- 1. What methods of identification does the school use to identify gifted and talented pupils and their abilities? Do these methods identify underachieving pupils?*
- 2. Does the school use identification positively as a tool to inform provision?*
- 3. How is identification coordinated and linked into a framework linking classroom teachers, heads of department, SLT?*
- 4. How is identification monitored and evaluated?*

### **Teaching for Learning**

Teaching for gifted and talented pupils should help each child to:

- develop skills to become an independent learner;
- be creative and develop higher order thinking skills;
- develop personally, socially and emotionally and be able to collaborate with others;
- develop motivation and aspirations which enable her or him to take advantage of opportunities for life-long learning;
- recognise the enjoyment of learning ;
- secure the highest standards of attainment, in examinations and tests.

The range of provision made should offer further opportunities for the child to demonstrate high ability, expert performance and achievement.

Teaching for Learning strategies must take account of:

- needs of academic high attainers (Renzulli calls these 'school-house gifted' pupils);

- needs of pupils who are talented in the expressive and performing arts, or sport, or who are problem-solvers, communicators or leaders (Renzulli calls these 'creative-productive gifted' pupils);
- multiple intelligences;
- pupils' preferred learning styles (which will need to be identified);
- underachieving pupils.

### **An Action Plan for developing Teaching for Learning for gifted and talented pupils**

- 1) Agree clear and specific objectives for the programme within a whole school approach: what do you want to achieve for your gifted and talented cohort and for the school as a whole?
- 2) Complete a thorough audit of the school's existing provision for gifted and talented pupils and the performance of your emerging gifted and talented pupil cohorts.
- 3) Establish pupils' individual learning needs. This will involve discussion with all the pupils' teachers and the pupils themselves.
- 4) Set individual pupil attainment targets which are challenging and stretching, using a full range of data.
- 5) Include different curricular provision, allowing pupils to balance breadth and personal choice.
- 6) Integrate with other support programmes (summer schools, master-classes).
- 7) Adopt a range of organisational approaches, in response to pupils' needs rather than for administrative convenience.
- 8) Plan the implementation of the teaching and learning programme for the academic year:
  - set clear deadlines for introduction of each phase;
  - state clearly how the programme will involve changes to differentiation, curriculum and organisational approaches;
  - identify
    - who is responsible for implementing each element of the programme;
    - what resources are allocated to each element;
    - what monitoring and evaluation arrangements are in place and who will undertake it.
- 9) Monitor and evaluate the effectiveness of the programme against agreed criteria (the objectives and targets set previously).
- 10) Compare your performance against that of other schools with similar intakes.

### **Key Questions for Teaching and Learning**

1. *Do the school's strategies take account of different types of abilities, intelligences and learning styles?*
2. *Are the strategies 'one size fits all' or are they tailor-made to meet individual pupils' needs?*

### Effective learning skills

Gifted and talented pupils need appropriate study skills to tackle an advanced curriculum, although many teachers assume bright pupils know instinctively how to study effectively. Many very able pupils do not fulfil their potential due to poor study skills e.g. weak note-taking and time management, ineffective (or non-existent) revision timetables.

Teaching, non-teaching staff and learning mentors can make a significant difference to gifted and talented pupils' attainment by helping them to develop effective learning skills, allied to their preferred learning style. In secondary schools this may mean including units on developing communication, teamwork and rapport skills in a study skills curriculum.

### A Study Skills Curriculum for Gifted & Talented Pupils

<b>Skills that encourage independent learning</b>	<b>Skills that encourage interdependent learning</b>
Note-taking	Listening
Time management	Communication
Stress management	Rapport building
Revision	Pair-work
Problem-solving	Group work

A minimal approach in a secondary school might involve teaching study skills to Year 7 as part of an induction programme and to Year 10 and 11 pupils as part of a pre-GCSE programme. A more ambitious approach would be to run similar programmes for all year groups at the beginning of each academic year, or timetabling regular 'study skills' lessons throughout the school year.

#### **Key Questions for Study Skills for Gifted & Talented Pupils**

1. *What study skills provision is there for gifted & talented pupils?*
2. *What difference has this provision made to pupils' attainment?*

### Acceleration

Acceleration is any strategy that results in advanced placement beyond a child's chronological age. Views on the benefits of acceleration are divided. Research evidence suggests that acceleration can be beneficial where programmes are carefully planned to reduce the amount of time bright or talented children spend learning the same things that other children learn more slowly. Critics believe acceleration can lead to emotional and social maladjustment, with students reaching a 'dead-end' at age 14 or 16.

To be successful acceleration requires the full support and agreement of teachers, parents and pupils. It should be a whole-school decision, designed to meet long-term learning objectives for an individual pupil, not as a 'quick fix' (e.g. because a classroom teacher is 'out of her depth') or to increase the school's percentage of Oxbridge places.

Approaches to acceleration may be either content-related (fast-tracking) or year group-related. Content-related acceleration can be on the basis of individual work programmes or by arranging for pupils to study a particular subject with a higher year group. Sometimes pupils may attend a higher year group's lessons for part of the week or work in high ability groups within mixed ability classes or sets. Vertical grouping arrangements and extension activities outside normal lessons are further options.

<b>Benefits of acceleration</b>	<b>Considerations before accelerating</b>
Improved motivation & confidence	Gaining parental agreement & support
Helps prevent boredom & underachievement	Child's readiness: social, emotional, physical
Gives positive attitudes to learning	Possible pressure of expectations

### **Compacting**

This is a method which allows teachers to implement accelerative techniques in the classroom. A variation of individual progression, it permits pupils to cover a set amount of work more quickly and to use the extra time to pursue an additional activity, which should not be just more of the same. This is particularly useful for teachers who are not comfortable with gifted and talented pupils pursuing totally different work all the time. Compacting is accelerated learning referring to the individual pupil's learning outcomes.

#### **Key Questions for Acceleration**

1. *What long-term learning objectives do you want to achieve?*
2. *Is acceleration the best option or are there better alternatives?*

### **Setting targets and monitoring pupils' progress**

Clear performance targets, identified and agreed by both pupil and teacher, are essential for planned progress to improved performance. Teachers need to work collectively (whole school, phase, subject) to:

- establish targets for gifted and talented cohorts and for individual pupils;
- design an action plan setting out how the targets will be achieved, including timescales and milestones;
- include monitoring and evaluation procedures that will indicate how far targets are being achieved;
- ensure that pupils' progress is tracked from one year to another and between key stages.

Assessment should be used as a mechanism for moving learning forward:

- using marking to encourage critical thinking;
- valuing quality not quantity;
- valuing creativity and high-level problem solving;
- using individual learning profiles and self-directed learning projects;
- teachers acting as 'critical friend' to encourage new ideas and skills.

Successful schools have found that simple progress checking procedures, carried out on a regular weekly basis, can pick up clues indicating problems and so nip performance issues in the bud. It is good practice for pupils to be involved in setting and monitoring their own targets. This is a possible pro-forma for teachers and pupil to share:

<b>Progress Review</b>	<b>Pupil comment</b>	<b>Teacher comment</b>
Please can you find a few moments to complete this progress check on this pupil and return to the Gifted & Talented Co-ordinator by .....		
Name of pupil .....		
Tutor group .....		
Name of teacher .....		
Subject .....		
Date .....		
Is classwork satisfactory?	YES/NO	YES/NO
Is homework completed on time and to a good standard?	YES/NO	YES/NO
Is student motivated to work?	YES/NO	YES/NO
Is all work up to date?	YES/NO	YES/NO
Have you any concerns? Please outline:	YES/NO	YES/NO

### **Gifted & Talented underachievers**

Gifted and talented underachievers are pupils who are potentially in the top 5-10% of their age groups but whose performance as assessed or measured in school does not generally reflect this.

### **Identifying gifted and talented underachievers.**

Some things to look for are:

- pupils who are responsive orally and ask searching questions, but perform poorly in tests or other written work;
- children who are bored and restless, and often leave routine work unfinished;
- pupils who are disruptive in *some* lessons, but motivated in others;
- children who have low self-esteem and are highly self-critical.

### **What teachers can do to support gifted underachievers.**

- teachers follow their 'hunches' based on classroom observation and are not mesmerised by test results;
- look out for chance comments which reveal abilities usually kept hidden;



- provide pupils with different kinds of experience and watch which ones spark an interest (Renzulli's 'revolving door'<sup>2</sup>);
- compare performance across subjects to identify uneven attainment;
- recognise the influence of peer pressure ('it's not cool to be clever');
- use Individual Education Plans to provide clear and challenging targets;
- use mixed pairing to stimulate 'proximal learning'; research indicates that boys use 35% more language skills in mixed gender pairings and girls are encouraged to take more intellectual risks.
- support a whole-school 'culture of achievement' which celebrates equally academic, sports, creative arts performance.

### **Key Questions for Tackling Gifted & Talented Underachievement**

1. *Do you compare pupils' performance across subjects to pick up underachievers?*
2. *Do your teaching & learning strategies work as well for underachievers as for high achievers?*
3. *Do you know which teachers are most effective with underachievers? Do you use their expertise throughout the school?*

### **Mentoring**

More and more schools are using learning mentors with gifted and talented pupils. Mentoring offers opportunities for pupils to interact on an individual basis with people (older pupil or adult) to satisfy learning needs that are not easily met within the regular classroom. It can provide children with support and learning they cannot otherwise find at home or school. This may be in an area of learning or to meet emotional and social needs.

### **The mentor's role**

The mentor provides one-to-one support, using effective listening and questioning skills, and establishing a trusting relationship which helps overcome barriers to achieving success. The mentoring relationship allows students to evaluate objectively their progress with an impartial adult. Small, time-limited targets are mutually agreed e.g. a student with poor self-esteem may be set a target of asking at least one question per lesson.

### **Providing emotional support**

Students also need emotional support to develop the soft skills needed to handle success/failure, parental pressure, bullying. Mentors can be particularly helpful in tackling issues underlying underachievement (lack of self-esteem, poor motivation due to peer pressure, weak organisational skills). Mentors can detect and deal with problems that would otherwise lead to disaffection, chronic underachievement and even criminal behaviour.

### **Role of the Gifted & Talented Co-ordinator**

The co-ordinator should not normally be the school's SENCO because, in most cases, pressures on their time are already heavy. The co-ordinator

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<sup>2</sup> Renzulli, J.S, Reis, S.M and Smith, L.H. *The Revolving Door Identification Model*. Creative Learning Press, New York. 1981.

should have close links with or be a member of the SLT. He or she is likely to need a nominated contact in each subject department or faculty, and will maintain close links with heads of department and those responsible for other school policies, including assessment, examination entry, homework, home-school agreements and parental involvement.

### **Key responsibilities of the gifted and talented co-ordinator**

Co-ordinators have a number of headline tasks:

- act as “champion” of the gifted and talented pupils in the school, ensure all receive the right blend of challenge and support, and provide a first point of contact for parents and pupils;
- lead the preparation/updating and implementation of an effective whole school policy on support for gifted and talented pupils, linking it with policies on assessment, examination entry, homework, home-school agreements, parental involvement etc.;
- lead the development, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of the school’s procedures for identifying its cohort of gifted and talented pupils and the teaching and learning programme for them;
- work with learning mentors to identify and address the needs of disadvantaged gifted and talented pupils;
- identify, undertake or commission continuing professional development for all school staff (teaching and non-teaching);
- hold and allocate the school budget for gifted and talented, deploying staff and other resources as necessary; and
- demonstrate good classroom practice in teaching the school’s most able pupils.

### **School self-evaluation: what does a ‘successful school’ do for its gifted and talented pupils?**

A school is successful in meeting the needs of its gifted and talented pupils when it:

- provides ample opportunities for pupils to reveal their abilities, interests and preferred learning style;
- has clear criteria for success in terms of:
  - pupil outcomes (attainment, self-esteem, aspirations);
  - partnership working (with feeder/receiver schools, LEA, voluntary organisations);
  - working with parents.
- rigorously examines (and re-examines) its curriculum, teaching styles, use of identification and attainment data, and allocation of resources and asks how far these promote higher attainment by gifted and talented pupils;

- regularly monitors its gifted and talented cohorts to ensure they are representative of the school population by ethnicity and gender, and does something about it if they are not;
- has highly effective pupil progress tracking systems, so that underachievement is kept to a minimum;
- constantly challenges its gifted and talented pupils to expand their horizons and 'raise their game'.

### **A self-evaluation checklist**

The DfES Gifted and Talented Education Unit recommends that schools use the following checklist for self-evaluation:

- Do we have a Gifted & Talented co-ordinator with SLT support, a budget and capacity to influence key staff?
- Have we got a policy statement based on twin pillars:
  - An initial audit of the range and quality of current provision?
  - Agreed SMART objectives for what you want to achieve and monitoring systems in place?
- Do we consult with parents and pupils?
- Do we use a consistent approach to identification across the school? Is the register of gifted and talented pupils working effectively? Are many underachievers being picked up? Is each year cohort representative of all groups within the school (ethnicity, gender)?
- Is there a consistent approach to provision across year groups and/or departments, blending enrichment, extension and acceleration (of learning and of learners)?
- Do we have a strong focus on classroom differentiation, through assessment for learning?
- Do children enjoy good opportunities for independent learning?
- Do we encourage innovation and controlled risk-taking (e.g. in approaches to school organisation)?
- Do we collaborate with neighbouring primary and secondary schools?

### **Monitoring and evaluation of gifted and talented provision**

Typically, gifted and talented initiatives in England have scored highly on commitment and enthusiasm, but poorly on evaluating impact. Identifying outcomes is essential to ensure continuous improvement in meeting pupils' needs. The following process is recommended:

1. Agree with SLT how existing line management processes can help check on planning and provision within each department;
2. Carry out interviews with pupils to hear first-hand experiences of differentiated learning: how good has it been for them?
3. Look at department or staff meeting minutes: is gifted and talented being discussed and addressed?
4. Look at the school and departments' annual development plan: what is their end-of-year evaluation for gifted and talented teaching and learning?
5. Check gifted and talented cohorts' end-of-year results against expected outcomes derived from key stage entry scores;
6. Ensure feedback to staff, parents, pupils and governors is both qualitative and quantitative.

### **Key Questions for self-evaluation**

1. *What are the guiding principles which the school has adopted for meeting the needs of its gifted and talented pupils?*
2. *Are these written clearly for teachers, parents and governors to understand?*
3. *Are there any specific areas of tension or disagreement? How will these be resolved?*
4. *Which particular self-evaluation outcomes do you wish to draw attention to in your 'annual conversation'?*

### **The learning needs of gifted and talented pupils**

Gifted and talented pupils' learning needs are:

- auditing of knowledge and skills already mastered to avoid repetition;
- targets set at higher national curriculum levels;
- negotiation of the minimum explanation that can lead to the performance of the task;
- tasks set that require the use of advanced resource material;
- maximum thinking and minimum recording;
- challenging tasks that require higher order thinking skills, and that have assessment criteria linked to the demands of the task;
- extended time for thinking, redrafting and completing work against assessment criteria negotiated at the beginning of the task

### **Effective classroom strategies with gifted and talented pupils include:**

- set high expectations for achievement;
- develop pupils' questioning and thinking skills:
  - set open-ended tasks;
  - ask open-ended questions;
  - require pupils to explain how they have learned something;
  - ask questions that challenge what pupils believe to be the truth (*cognitive conflict*);
- set 'time-sharp' activities demanding a specific outcome; combine with more open-ended opportunities to work at own pace;
- set extension tasks when the previous task is finished or when the pupil has already learned what is being taught;
- provide enrichment activities which enable pupils to be aware of the wider context of a subject area;
- set different homework, with more demanding resources and challenges;
- allow different starting points;
- negotiate learning objectives;
- provide opportunities for independent learning;
- get pupils to plan pathways through their work;
- don't over-simplify technical terms (a key factor in boys' underachievement);
- encourage pupils to use empowering vocabulary.

### **What should a typical lesson contain?**

Lessons for gifted and talented pupils should have the following features:

- high-level thinking skills;
- open-ended questions;
- motivating and challenging tasks;
- tasks that encourage independent thought;
- pace which sustains interest for the whole lesson;
- pitch that moves pupils' learning forward, avoiding repetition or existing knowledge or skills.

### **Classroom organisation**

Teachers should use a range of organisation, in line with personalised learning objectives. This will involve mixing whole-class and group work, using in-class support assistants where they are available, and using cross-age peer tutoring (e.g. Year 11 pupil tutors Year 7 pupil).

### **Differentiation**

Differentiation is the process through which curriculum objectives, teaching and assessment methods, resources and learning activities are planned to cater for the needs of individual pupils. As personalised learning it is crucial for meeting the needs of gifted and talented pupils. Differentiation with gifted and talented pupils should aim to:

- raise attainment;
- ensure pupils reach their own personal best performance;
- make learning rewarding, exciting and enjoyable.

A curriculum which is differentiated for personalised learning will:

- build on past achievements;
- present challenges to allow for more achievements;
- provide opportunity for success;
- remove barriers to participation.

This means teachers should devise tasks appropriate to the full range of abilities, aptitudes and interests of pupils, regularly review pupils' progress through observation, discussion and testing, and offer support for individual work.

### **Creating a positive environment for differentiated learning for gifted and talented pupils**

- use a wide variety of learning styles;
- minimise low-level demands on the teacher;
- ensure pupils are aware of the success criteria for their contribution (ideally they should be partners in negotiating these criteria);
- use a range of assessment opportunities;
- provide a 'culture of achievement' not containment;
- encourage independent learning.

Below is a simple but effective tool for planning differentiation and can be applied to whole lessons or activities within lessons and to every subject.

	What most of the class should manage	What G & T pupils <i>should</i> manage	What G & T pupils <i>might</i> manage
Concepts			
Skills			
Knowledge			
Tasks planned for each group			

### Developing expert performance

While it is vital to support underachieving pupils, it is also important to help high ability pupils achieve the highest possible attainment they are capable of. The following approaches are suggested:

#### ***Cognitive apprenticeship model***

- *Coaching*: teacher observes pupils carrying out tasks & offers feedback.
- *Scaffolding*: teacher provides support for pupils while requiring them to take steps on the learning ladder by themselves; this encourages risk-taking & confidence building.
- *Articulation*: pupils are given the opportunity to explain their reasoning.
- *Reflection*: pupils are given the opportunity to compare their learning & thinking processes with others.
- *Exploration*: pupils have to come up with their own problem-solving solutions (and so become better questioners & investigators).

#### ***Thinking aloud***

Pupils are asked to talk about what they are thinking as they solve a problem (group, pairs, individual). This teaches planning in problem-solving (as against trial & error) and encourages flexibility when meeting a difficult task. The approach also provides an opportunity for pupils to talk about *what they think they have learned* (not just what they have learned).

### Enhancing pupils' learning process

*Bloom's Taxonomy*

Benjamin Bloom<sup>3</sup> proposed a series of cognitive levels that move from simple to complex. Teachers can use Bloom's levels to design effective curriculum and evaluation activities across all subject areas for all ages of pupils. Bloom's taxonomy consists of six levels of thinking:

1. Knowledge : remembering facts and information
2. Comprehension: understanding the facts
3. Application: using the facts and information
4. Analysis: explaining information
5. Synthesis: creating something new by using information
6. Evaluation: making judgements based on criteria.

The last three cognitive levels are critical in developing higher-order thinking skills in gifted and talented pupils. Pupil outcomes become more complex as they move up the thinking levels. Top level tasks incorporate critical, creative, logical thinking and problem-solving activities. They involve both the 'left brain' (logical analysis) and 'right brain' (creative, intuitive).

Using higher-level thinking skills will move learning forward and encourage new ways of looking at things. The following skills are particularly valuable:

*Observing    Hypothesising    Imagining    Comparing    Criticising*  
*Classifying    Organising data    Looking for assumptions    Elaborating*

***Key Questions for classroom strategies***

1. *Are classroom methods sufficiently flexible and open-ended for pupils to develop at their own pace and develop independent learning skills?*
2. *Do classroom tasks and activities emphasise the acquisition of higher-level thinking skills? Do they provide an intellectually stimulating environment? Do bright pupils buzz with excitement during lessons?*

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<sup>3</sup> Bloom, B *Taxonomy of Educational Objectives*. McKay, New York, 1974.



## 7. Appendix : Identification Form

Name of school .....

Name of child ..... Date of referral .....

Class/Tutor Group ..... Year Group .....

Class/Subject Teacher .....

Area(s) of particular ability you wish to identify:

Linguistic	Mathematical
Artistic	Musical
Creative	Physical/Kinaesthetic
Interpersonal	Problem-solving
Leadership	General knowledge

Across the curriculum .....

Other .....

State (in a couple of sentences) how this ability came to your attention:

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Are these particular abilities supported by assessment data? If so, state which:

If the pupil's test performance and potential seem mismatched, please outline the discrepancies:

Are parents/carers aware of any concerns you may have (e.g. about underachievement)?

State what support you require from the Gifted & Talented Co-ordinator.