



nace●essentials guide

Teaching and
leading for
able, gifted and
talented learners

Guide 1

Leading developments for more able
and talented learners

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Guide 1

Leading developments for more able and talented learners

1 Introduction

If you have taken on the role of leading your school's work for more able pupils you might be thinking about what this role entails and how you are going to go about developing your work, whether you are a senior leader in the school or taking on one of your first roles of responsibility as a classroom teacher. Your role may also involve you in working beyond the school or with a group of schools. What your role is called in individual schools will also differ, with designations including, for example, More Able Co-ordinator, and some schools encompassing the role within a wider teaching and learning responsibility or a senior leadership portfolio.

This Essential Guide will help you to understand your role in more depth and focus on the skills and core functions it entails. There is a separate section in the guide looking at some of the protocols and strategies that you might find useful in establishing and sustaining productive relationships in your role. Secondary phase colleagues may also find this section useful in deciding on how best to work across departments or faculties.

This Essential will address a number of key questions:

- What is the national context for the education of more able learners?
- What does lead responsibility for the more able entail?
- What should I be doing?
- What am I going to do to get started?
- How do I lead excellent practice?
- What are the excellent learning and teaching skills we need to develop in our school?
- What are the particular skills that I need to develop?
- How will I identify effective learning amongst our more able learners?
- How do I develop colleagues' practice?
- How do I mentor or coach?
- How should I work with other schools or with other teams?
- What support might I need?

2 The national context



National policy for the education of more able pupils has been through a number of versions in the last few years. This includes a period when high ability was very much a formal policy focus, reflected in, for example, the dedicated National Strategies and 'Young, Gifted and Talented' programmes. Currently a focus on the more able is integrated within the broader school improvement and raising achievement drive and schools' accountability for it embodied in Ofsted inspection requirements. Inspections are asked to scrutinise and report on the quality of schools' provision and outcomes for more able pupils.

There is no national requirement for a 'register' of more able pupils, although national data sets make reference to a specific cohort of 'high attainers'. Neither is there a specified 'official' terminology although Ofsted tends to refer to 'more able pupils' in the primary phase and 'highly able' in the secondary phase. NACE uses the terminology 'more able' for such pupils in both phases.

Most schools nominate a member of staff to take lead responsibility for the education of more able pupils. Where they don't the important thing is that the school enables and monitors the progress and well-being of this group of children. Again, this is good practice rather than national policy.

Nominate a member
of staff to take lead
responsibility.

3 What does a responsibility for more able pupils entail and what areas should I focus on?



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The breadth and scope of your role will vary according to your school and whether you're in a primary or a secondary phase setting.

NACE believes that the role should be understood within the school's overarching aims for more able pupils, embodied in the school's policy for Teaching and Learning or discrete policy for more able and talented pupils (see NACE web-site) and in the school development plan. NACE recommends that emphasis is placed on high expectations and high quality, challenging teaching for all, with able pupils' needs met largely in everyday lessons. These will be supplemented where needed by extracurricular enrichment or additional approaches within and beyond school. Provision should enable all able pupils to reach at least national benchmarks in attainment and to progress in line with and often beyond expectations for this group.

The main purposes of the work of leading teachers for the more able would therefore encompass:

- developing whole-school self-evaluation and improvement planning for more able provision and outcomes
- developing / disseminating effective classroom practice and additional support for more able pupils

Keeping sight of these aims and purposes will help you to understand your role as well as to define and shape your work.

Broadly the role can be seen to fall into three main parts:

- acting as an advocate for more able pupils, co-ordinating and managing systems and resources to support their education
- modelling or identifying and disseminating good practice
- providing support for colleagues

a. The leading teacher as advocate, co-ordinator and manager of systems and resources

It's important that pupils capable of high achievement are known about and discussed.

An 'advocate' acts as both guardian and promoter of national standards and the school's policy through trying to enable the necessary conditions to be created and upheld so that the learning, social and emotional needs of able pupils are met. So you will need to develop a clear understanding of who are and might be, the more able pupils in your individual context and what their needs are – including bearing in mind that a wide group of pupils may benefit from more challenging provision and high expectations. You will also need to understand and share with staff notions of expected and exceeded progress and attainment for this particular group, although of course this is only one aspect – albeit a very important one – of high achievement.

The important point is that pupils capable of high achievement are known about and discussed and that there are shared expectations about the role of all teachers in providing for such pupils and in being 'on the lookout' for ability and talent. You will therefore find it useful to reflect on the process of the 'identification' of more able pupils. By establishing and understanding who are the able pupils in your teaching groups you will constantly be seeking out and gathering information about their needs in lessons and using this information to shape future learning. The process of looking out for and recognising pupils' particular abilities needs to be ongoing across the curriculum, within a constant loop of providing opportunity and monitoring response. Through discussion with staff and senior leaders the school's policy may well include guidance about the range of information which might complement teachers' observations and formal tests when building a picture of a pupil's learning strengths and needs e.g.

Checklists of indicators of high ability

Subject specific criteria

Testing – e.g. of cognitive abilities, reading age, creativity

Information provided informally by pupils about other pupils

Discussions with children e.g. to ascertain a rounded picture of their strengths, interest, talents

Parental information

Referrals from other sources e.g. sports coaches, local clubs.

In schools where there is high pupil mobility or many pupils who have English as an additional language (EAL) or high levels of disadvantage it is particularly important to look at a wide range of information about pupils as their abilities and talents may not be obvious. They may also need particular kinds of support, for example, the development of higher level language skills.

Although there is no requirement for schools to have a formal 'register' of more able pupils many will keep records as part of their normal pupil progress tracking and target setting processes.

The important thing is that children with high ability and talents should not be overlooked and that teaching and curricular provision should enable them to progress in line with their abilities. Therefore a key question is whether the school is providing opportunities in the curriculum and in its approach to teaching and learning that enable pupils to achieve highly and to excel.

The leading teacher needs to have a good overview of the learning needs of able pupils and to regularly seek out pupils' viewpoints about how well their needs are being met. Generally speaking, able pupils will embrace learning that challenges them, such as activities that incorporate a problem solving approach, involve speculation or don't have a 'right answer'. It is important therefore to seek able pupils' views about the extent to which they are regularly challenged or stretched and what their preferences for learning are.

In your role of 'champion' for more able pupils it will be essential to try to ensure that pupils' views are shared, considered and acted upon.

The second strand of the role, looked at in the next section, is to exemplify effective practice for more able pupils or to identify and disseminate effective practice in a school. Expert practitioners are vital in the development of best practice, as their expertise can be disseminated in a formal way for others to gain from and develop their own practice. This emphasis on modelling best practice helps the focus remain on learning. The leading teacher will be someone who is constantly learning, examining their practice, asking questions of themselves and seeking out ways to deepen their understanding of learning and the ways in which pupils learn. This will include keeping up to date with relevant developments, publications and resources.

The person leading on more able provision will also need to provide collaborative support for colleagues or specialist coaching to help colleagues develop their capacity to tailor learning for their more able pupils.

A 'peer learning' or collaborative approach to professional development is known to have a range of benefits. The leading teacher will need to place emphasis on this aspect of their role, drawing on a range of skills to help them assess the professional learning needs of others, devise programmes of professional development and utilise their skills as a 'coach'.

Reflection:

Am I clear about what my role entails?

Are other colleagues clear about their role and responsibilities in relation to their more able pupils?

Do I see myself as an 'advocate'?

Do I have a good overview of the needs of able pupils in my school?

In what ways do I 'champion' the needs of able pupils?

Am I fully established in my role as a lead practitioner or a specialist lead for the more able in my school?

What further personal professional development could support me?

Am I ready to undertake a role as a professional learning coach for my colleagues?

Do I have links with colleagues whose work and responsibilities relate to my area?

Do I have access to and an understanding of pupil and other data enabling me to understand better the school's development needs?

Do I know what resources need to be allocated and information provided to support high quality provision for more able pupils?



What should I be doing? What am I going to do to get started? What skills do I need?

The leading teacher will need to gain an understanding of the extent and quality of the school's provision.

The most important starting point will be for the leading teacher to gain an understanding of the extent and quality of the school's provision for more able pupils. This will include areas of strength as well as any development needs. Carrying out an analysis of needs will help you gain a whole school profile of:

- particularly effective practice and provision
- clarity about development needs
- priorities and resources needed.

Why?

Identifying strengths and development needs accurately will support you in meeting your responsibilities and addressing the school's overarching aims. However, this process needs to lead to evaluation where information is analysed, interpreted and acted on. It is vital therefore to involve others in the process and act on the outcomes to ensure that they help drive improvement. A self-evaluation led approach linked to action will become accepted if teachers and pupils are getting something out of it and if all can see a measurable increase in success for pupils.

What can I use to do this?

A key tool to support schools in reaching judgements about the extent to which provision is effective is the NACE Challenge Award Framework (CAF). The Framework can be used by schools in any phase or context and stage of development as the process for reviewing and developing high quality provision for more able pupils and to provide evidence for a national quality mark. The Framework has eight elements and related criteria which when taken together describe quality provision and provide users with suggested evidence about the standard and extent of their provision. The Framework is designed to help schools reach objective judgements about the extent to which able pupils' needs are met. The elements and criteria also provide a set of prompts or ideas for ways in which practice can be developed.

For more information visit:

www.nace.co.uk and follow the links to the Challenge Award home page.

How will I do this? Evaluation and needs analysis.

Step 1

Leading teachers for more able provision need to evaluate school wide provision so that they can form judgements about how effectively class-based and out-of-class learning meet pupils' needs. A good starting point is to develop your understanding of the self evaluation materials you'll be using. You could, for example, work through the Challenge Award Framework and form an initial view of the school's position

If you are not a member of the Senior Leadership Team there may be some areas where it is harder to form a view. A good starting point may be to focus on an evaluation of your own practice.

Step 2

Arrange a time to meet with the Leadership Team to carry out a full audit of the extent and quality of provision for more able pupils and the data about their progress and achievements. If you use the NACE Challenge Award Framework you can turn the Elements into questions and use the criteria and suggested evidence to help the team form judgements about a 'best fit' position.

For example: Element 3 is '*A target for improvement of the school's provision, performance and achievement of more able pupils*' and one of the criteria that '*Teachers use assessment for learning including oral feedback and positive marking to indicate next steps in pupil learning*'. Suggested possible evidence is to consider pupils' books and annotations on teachers' plans.



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To support self evaluation or to assist in developing a collaborative approach to self review you may want to use the wording or phrasing from the elements and criteria as questions or prompts to help you form judgements, for example:

- Do we set targets for the improvement of the school's provision, performance and achievement of more able pupils?
- Do teachers use assessment for learning including oral feedback and positive marking to indicate next steps in pupil learning?

An example response might be: "Generally, the majority of our lesson observation reports provide good quality feedback that will help develop learning. Book scrutinies show that marking indicates next steps and these are challenging. Both sources of evidence show that pupils are also involved in identifying next steps. Overall these features show well developed or established practice in about eighty percent of the school." Then use the evidence to form conclusions; in this instance, 'Evidence shows that we are meeting some of the criteria for Element 3'.

You may find that the Leadership Team will want to tackle the audit in one go or take a generic element in turn over a period of time. It is useful to plan the audit so that it will fit with your school's usual monitoring and review cycle and to select current areas of focus.

Step 3

As you review and make judgments about the school's overall position remember to discuss and identify priorities for development with the Leadership Team, recording them as you go along. It can be useful to summarise findings for each strand and then together establish a 'best fit' judgement for each generic element. Decide how findings from the evaluation, both strengths and next steps, will be shared with the staff team. Agree whose responsibility this will be and how and when to do this.

Use findings to develop practice and keep the 'more able' profile high.

Establish contact with someone in each department faculty, or curriculum area, someone who will champion the cause.

In your role you will need to have a 'helicopter view' of whole school provision, acting as the focal point for sifting and synthesising findings from school wide evaluations. Once you've completed an initial evaluation you'll have a good overview of the quality of school wide provision, including the views of pupils. You'll know which areas need further development and your priority may be to compose your action plan. However, at this point it's important to pause and check on the school's systems for monitoring the effectiveness of ongoing developments.

Without continuous monitoring of what is happening to individual teachers and pupils in the classroom there is a danger that plans become theoretical. Reflection, reinforced by monitoring, can change a situation enough to provide ideas for the next stage of action.

Find out more about existing systems for monitoring, review and evaluation and identify the best opportunities to tap into this already established structure for gathering information and evidence. Aim to involve a cross section of staff as this will help you to keep the profile of your action plan high throughout the school. It may be worth considering establishing a working party of interested but representative staff and for example, to create some prompts for involving staff as part of your action plan. Try also to set aside a little time each term to formally reflect and summarise for the school leadership team.

Creating an effective action plan: why is this so important?

Make explicit what you want to see on the ground. Think about what you want to see in the classroom and this will help you when you are monitoring 6 months later, because you'll know what you're looking for.

The leading teacher needs to try to ensure that the areas identified from evaluation as strengths continue to be sustained and that areas for development are progressed.

An effective action or development plan is vital in helping you to create a shared set of priorities and sense of purpose amongst the school team.

An effective action plan will also help you to address NACE Challenge Award Framework Elements 1 and 8.

What are the key features of an effective action plan?

A good tip for creating an effective action plan is to make sure that the first action on the plan is one with maximum impact and will be a 'quick win', so that staff can see an early tangible success. For example, some inspirational training which motivates staff to try out ideas the next day. This then becomes a focal point for discussion and follow up around the school.

An action plan should provide a structure for development and clarity of purpose. It will set out activities leading to development outcomes in a clear concise way; it may contain some 'maintenance' activities to ensure that the school is able to sustain current strengths.

Effective action plans:

- express priorities that are directly based on findings from a needs analysis or audit
- have priorities written as objectives
- articulate expected outcomes that will have a positive impact on pupils' learning
- are written in a way that can be understood by other staff and governors

- set out how outcomes will be evaluated and by whom
- show who will do what and when, along with the resources needed.
- are realistic in the number of objectives they contain
- contain enough detail for them to be a useful working document

You will find an example Action Plan as a downloadable resource in the CAF resources and in the NACE website resources.

As part of your role and the action plan you will need to consider what resources and information will support high quality provision for more able pupils. Apart from professional development support for staff, such resources may include, for example, materials, enrichment opportunities and aspiration raising activities as well as deciding on the allocation of financial resources such as the Pupil Premium.

Ensure that the first action on the plan is one with maximum impact and will be a 'quick win', so that staff can see an early tangible success.

Reporting

Regular reports on progress against the action plan helps to keep vision and focus at the forefront. Including some overall aims in your action plan or personal notes helps you to keep sight of the bigger picture and can be very helpful when you're preparing to report on progress. The leading teacher will need to distil information from a variety of sources and summarise findings succinctly for a variety of audiences within the school. To help you, ensure that you express the outcomes or success criteria sections of your action plan in terms of positive differences for learners. Use these as prompts along with the overall aims to help you structure your reports. For example,

- 'Our three main aims this year are ... (keep sight of the big picture – your overarching aims)
- Against our first objective the following actions have occurred ... (list a sample of actions, rather than all of them – it's more important to place emphasis in your reporting on outcomes and impact for learners)
- Monitoring shows that these positive changes have happened ... (list some headlines here, this will show that you are basing conclusions on agreed sources of evidence from a variety of staff. Remember, using some of the phrasing and terminology from the outcome orientated success criteria in your action plan will demonstrate cohesion and focus)
- Finally, the impact on learning has been ... (summarise the main impact for learners. It can be very powerful to articulate this both in terms of attainment and achievement). For example, 'lesson observations show that able pupils demonstrate increased resilience when problem solving, regularly using a variety of taught problem solving approaches before seeking support'.



b The leading teacher and excellent practice



What are the particular skills that I need to develop? What are the excellent learning and teaching skills that we need to develop in our school? How will I identify effective learning amongst our more able learners?

The second strand of your role is mainly concerned with being an exemplar of effective practice and identifying and providing opportunities to disseminate exemplary practice in the school. The presence of someone with specialist expertise helps drive improvement. This expert dimension helps to build motivation amongst staff and pupils.

The idea behind having a colleague with exemplary practice leading development is to convey best practice first hand to others. This aspect of the role is important and one which many leading teachers may be modest about. However, it is really important for new staff to see planned approaches or approaches from the action plan developing in your practice. Having someone model strategies is a powerful way to help others see themselves tackling what may seem daunting or difficult. This will certainly include modelling/establishing good differentiation practices which challenge the more able but which do not limit pupils not perceived as 'more able'.

In order to share practice effectively it is important to have a good understanding of what constitutes effective learning. The leading teacher will also need to remain aware of the overarching aims – demonstrating high quality teaching and counteracting underachievement. There is material to help the leading teacher articulate what constitutes successful and effective learning, such as the NACE Challenge Award Framework (Particularly E4) and you may find it helpful to use the following key questions to help you keep sight of the bigger picture.

- Who are our able pupils?
- Who are the underrepresented or 'at risk' groups?
- What are their learning and social needs?
- What are my strategies to meet those needs?
- What does 'challenge for all' mean and how does it relate to the focus on the more able?

It is important to have a good understanding of what constitutes effective learning.

You will need to draw on your analytical skills to judge which learners already work at higher levels and those that have the potential to work in greater depth and breadth than most other learners. The effective practitioner will be one who can combine both observation and analysis to design and present further demand and challenge for learners. Leading teachers will need to be able to summarise how they look for ability and present the challenges designed to stretch learners or to uncover new ability. To help you fulfil this strand of your role more fully, utilise opportunities in your day to day teaching to gather feedback from learners about challenge. Start by talking to more able pupils / students, find out what they need, what helps them learn, what excites them and what holds them back.



Reflection:

How well are pupils engaged in classroom tasks and activities?

How are they enabled and supported to make choices about and advance their learning themselves?

What evidence is there that they are working at levels commensurate with their abilities?

What does 'challenge' look like across the curriculum?

Sharing of effective practice may take several forms, including through team teaching.

The teacher with lead responsibility for the more able will need to synthesise the answers to the key questions above. Practise articulating the responses as if you were talking to someone new or unfamiliar to your school. Perhaps start by challenging yourself to describe a couple of the learning traits most frequently exhibited by able pupils, responding to those by saying what you do to meet those needs in your own practice. For example:

'I've noticed pupils in my class who always seem to get under the surface of things, regularly asking difficult or provocative questions. Their answers are often supported by a rationale which is complex and raises new questions. I have adapted my practice to meet those needs by being more flexible with time management across lessons, creating spaces for raising questions at the start of a topic or mini learning reviews. For example, I present the main areas of learning and set aside a whole lesson for debate and discussion which raises questions for these pupils to pursue. I can then embed these in my planning to drive the sequence for delivery or utilise these for student led project based learning. Pupils say that they welcome these opportunities, 'I feel more in charge of my learning and it helps me to think more about what I'm learning in lessons and carry on with what I'm interested in out of lessons'.

This model of self-reflection will help you when working with staff in your school or colleagues in other schools. Staying focused on benefits and impact on learners and speaking from your personal experience is extremely powerful. Presenting a 'can do' model where you explore the challenges you faced and how you overcame them is a genuine sharing of practice and one that others will be able to see themselves achieving.

In the context of your role the sharing of effective practice may take several forms. For example, you may be able to deliver demonstration lessons or use the vehicle of joint planning to share practice. One of the best ways to share and develop practice is through team teaching. A model for this could be:

- class teacher plans with leading teacher, identifying areas of potential challenge for learners
- class teacher observes leading teacher
- evaluate lesson together (in terms of impact on pupils' learning)
- class teacher plans next lesson and leading teacher observes
- evaluation of lesson and own learning points

Your skills as an effective practitioner will stand you in good stead when developing the practice of others. Your understanding of identifying pupils with high abilities and of meeting their needs will enable you to decide how best to support other teachers.

c Developing and supporting colleagues



The third strand of your role will be to provide support for colleagues, helping them to develop their own practice with more able pupils. Your colleagues will all be at different stages of development so this part of your role may bring different challenges according to the needs of your colleagues as well as your own level of expertise and confidence in coaching and guiding others.

You may find yourself working with groups of colleagues in phase, key stage or subject-focused groups to support collaborative continuing professional development to develop knowledge and skills relating to effective provision for able pupils and providing or facilitating specialist and peer coaching/mentor support for teachers.

Your main concern will be to decide on both focused and optimum approaches to create maximum impact on learning. To do this you will need to draw on your findings from school based evaluation so that you can identify generic areas for development and articulate the individual professional development needs of colleagues. The NACE Challenge Award Framework needs analysis will provide you with a good overview about the content for training. If you want to analyse pedagogic skills needs in more depth you may want to refer to the NACE Challenge Award Framework itself to support your decision making regarding content for training. For example:

Step 1

Keep sight of the bigger picture. Analyse findings from the audit about professional learning needs. Try to summarise findings as headlines. This will help you to communicate priorities to others and keep areas manageable for you to refer back to when you're reporting on progress.

For example:

The findings from our whole school audit showed that the main areas for further development are to increase pupils' independent learning skills, mainly:

- assessment for learning so that classroom practice regularly requires pupils to reflect on their own progress against targets and engage in the direction of their own learning
- increase the range of challenging learning and teaching strategies evident in lesson planning and delivery, so that independent learning skills are developed

Your colleagues will all be at different stages of development so this part of your role may bring different challenges

Step 2

Discuss and agree the professional learning needs of individual members of staff.

Your objective is to establish a school wide profile of professional learning needs. The next task is to decide on what has to be done, how it will be achieved and when it will happen. In order to keep the focus on meeting the learning needs of able pupils and increasing challenge for them, consider whether any action points will accelerate learners' progress and raise achievement and standards still further.

Remember, it is likely that there will already be a variety of information already available for you in school. So you may not need to re-audit the extent to which individual pedagogic skills are developed against main areas for development. Ask about previous recent monitoring and sift this for further information. Also, refer to the NACE Challenge Award Framework to help you select pertinent information.

What sort of professional development will staff need? How do I decide on the best way forward?

At this point you will have identified the main development priorities for the school and have a better understanding of needs at a team and individual level. Your next challenge will be to decide on the best approaches to develop practice. This can be challenging when everyone's needs may appear to be very different.

As an effective practitioner your pedagogic skills will stand you in good stead when deciding on how to extend the practice of other colleagues and your analytical skills will enable you to decide on the best type of professional learning experience to support them. You will need to decide on whether you will:

- act as a mentor or guide where your personal knowledge and understanding of more able matters will be key in developing others
- select another member of staff with well developed practice as a mentor or guide
- involve subject leaders / heads of department
- act as a coach to refine / extend the existing skills of staff
- decide and select specialist coaching to address specific needs.

What should be my role in developing others? Am I a coach or mentor?

A leading teacher may select a mentoring approach when there are new staff to induct or when a colleague is moving into a new role with more responsibility for more able provision. In this situation the leading teacher's role as mentor is very much about informing and guiding others about policy and practice. For example:

A Newly Qualified Teacher (NQT) has identified high ability as an area for development so the leading teacher has assembled an information pack for the NQT to read. The pack could include:

- More Able Policy and Teaching and Learning Policy
- action plan
- sample of short and medium term planning
- sample of monitoring formats.

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Arrange some briefing meetings with the NQT.

Recommended items for meetings:

- Focus on identification and definitions in the policy to ensure that the NQT understands this in the school's context.
- Focus on provision in the classroom describing the needs of able pupils in the school and what strategies for challenge are in use in the everyday lessons in the school, including the summary of pupils' views from monitoring and evaluation.
- Talking about working with parents, how the school supports them and how parents' views are sought.
- Looking at a sample of plans so that the NQT can identify policy into practice.
- Talking through procedures for monitoring more able pupils in the school and the prompts on lesson observation proformas and other proformas for book and work scrutiny.
- Arranging for the NQT to observe 2 lessons, one led by a leading teacher or excellent practitioner. Focus on aspects of classroom provision embodied in the policy.
- Identifying formal and informal opportunities for the NQT or new member of staff to revisit procedures, discuss learning and decide on any further mentoring that may be needed.

It could be that your evaluation of professional learning needs in the school shows that there is well established practice for more able pupils in some teams/departments and that the majority of the role of the 'mentor' or guide could be undertaken by another member of staff, possibly a team leader or head of department. This may increase your or others' capacity to provide more specialist coaching for others in the school.



It is widely accepted that collaborative or coaching approaches to professional learning are powerful drivers for improvement.

There is an enormous variety of models that could be used as a vehicle for developing a coaching approach for professional learning.

In order for a collaborative learning approach to be successful the coach will need to have developed and consolidated a range of essential coaching skills and dispositions:

| Skills | Dispositions |
|---|---------------------------------------|
| being self aware | respect for others, views and beliefs |
| establishing rapport with the coachee | selflessness |
| active listening | interested in the coachee |
| effective questioning | patient |
| reflecting on and synthesising learning | open minded |
| succinct evaluation | solution focused |

It is important that the coach is able to identify and articulate with the coachee what are their goals are what successful learning will occur and what this will look like. It's also vital that sufficient time is given to identifying these goals and agreeing together the success criteria. In this way, you both know what you are looking for.

Specialist or Peer Coaching?

You may find that the best starting point is to reflect on the main areas for whole school development and those of individuals. Look out for where there may be common needs and assess whether you could group them together. Alternatively, you may wish to group together colleagues who have similarly strong skill sets, to enable them to explore an aspect of specialist input in more depth.

It may be that the leading teacher could act as a mentor or specialist coach for the peer coaching team to help them clarify their development needs and maintain focus. Consider recording these needs as statements or key enquiry questions for their professional development plan. For example:

Articulating our key question for development: How well are learners enabled to take charge of their learning and become self-regulating?

Initial thoughts about success criteria are aired: 'What will be the positives for pupils?' and 'How will we know?'

Through questioning the leading colleague models the peer coaching team's methodology. For example:

What could we do to move these pupils on?

The leading teacher listens and acts as a sounding board for the peer coaching team. They may use further questioning to re-steer and focus the group. 'Could we summarise why we think this approach is best?' They may also synthesise the group's responses and solutions.

It's also important at the start of the process to identify and agree opportunities for reviews of progress. Reviews will often happen informally between peer coaches as their collaborative learning project may bring them into frequent contact. You will need to create formal times for review and feedback so that progress in the areas identified is evaluated and recognised. It will be useful to ensure that once success criteria have been agreed these are added to any monitoring proformas used, such as lesson observation reports. This will help to keep reflection on key areas identified and encourage coaches to describe impact on pupils' learning. In your review meetings, listen out for the unexpected and keep the focus on how the peer coaches found solutions. This will help empower your colleagues and encourage creative and innovative approaches where teachers and pupils are prepared to take risks and are confident about doing so.

Specialist Coaching

The leading teacher may have specialist coaching skills as they will have a range of developed expert pedagogic skills in relation to more able provision that others could draw upon. The deployment of specialist coaching will depend on your analysis of need. Generally it is where individuals have ideas and practices that are well developed but an injection of expertise is needed. This could be to challenge or support their thinking so that a series of incremental (next) steps leading to positive changes can be taken.

As a specialist coach it is useful to focus on understanding that your involvement is to support the coachee in forming a new view or set of exploratory questions. This helps the coachee to critically reflect on their learning, recognise success accurately and define potentially productive next steps for themselves.

In this role you will need to draw on your expertise as an exemplar of best practice, along with your skills as an effective questioner, to steer the coachee as their ideas and reflection evolve.



Examples of such questioning are:

- what are the different ways you could approach an able student who ... ?
- what would happen if?
(questions to probe understanding and provoke further creative thinking)
- have you considered ... ?
(testing out all the options together)
- how might this lead to ... ?
- why is this approach so essential for able pupils in your class?

In any coaching situation the primary objective is to build the individual's capacity and their confidence to take responsibility for their own development. So it is important to find opportunities to encourage and to value their responses, particularly when the coachee is challenging their own thinking and possibly moving out of their comfort zone. For example:

- 'That sounds like a good strategy' and say why. Use your expertise in how to challenge pupils to model or affirm some helpful / practical strategies here for the coachee.
- 'Can you say a little more about why this is so essential?' Probe understanding and help the colleague to recognise potential areas for development.
- 'These ideas are exciting for learners.' Say why. This will show that you recognise the quality of the coachee's thinking and problem solving.

Remember to create opportunities for regular formal review and invest time at the start of the process to define what success will look like. Ensure that you revisit and articulate this explicitly together in any review meetings. To enhance the review sessions look out for, and think about, the ways in which you might help the coachee to reflect on the following:

- How well has their practice developed? (against the agreed success criteria)
- To what extent does the coachee describe this in terms of pupils' learning?
- How well does the coachee structure and extend their critical reflection over a period of time – you may notice that you're prompting or probing for learning and evidence from lessons over time. Encourage the coachee to summarise main points and identify key points to move forward.
- How well does the coachee identify and analyse new needs both in terms of pupil learning and of their own?

As the colleague with lead responsibility for the more able you will need to ensure that the school Leadership Team receives good quality information about the progress being made in developing quality practices. Remember to set aside some time each term so that you can reflect overall on the impact of all professional learning across the school. Focus on the headlines for staff and the impact that you know this is having on pupils' learning. Seek out evidence to back up your judgements, such as lesson observation reports.

Finally, if you are new or unfamiliar to coaching, try becoming the coachee yourself, so that you can experience learning in this type of role. Ask a colleague to coach you. Give them some of the question stems from this Essential so that you have the opportunity to build your confidence and skill in posing simple but effective questions.

Whatever form professional learning takes it should enable individuals and teams to make a positive difference for learners. Professional learning experiences should seek to develop independence, so that colleagues are able to reflect critically on practice and identify optimum learning for themselves.

Remember to keep your focus on the bigger picture, refer to the school's main areas for development and make connections between an individual's needs and those headlines. In that way each member of staff will see that in developing their own skills and practice they are contributing strongly to the overall development of learning and the school.



What do I need to think about when I work with staff from other departments or other schools?

Leading teachers will need to be confident about working with staff to develop practice in a variety of settings. Those in secondary phase schools may work with colleagues across a range of faculties or departments. It is essential that you create the conditions for positive relationships to develop, right from the outset.

What might you need to consider?

Your deployment in other schools will vary according to local arrangements. A starting point may be to reflect on the main strands of your role and function as a leading teacher:

- acting as an advocate for more able pupils
- modelling good practice
- providing support for colleagues.

Your role in another setting will be to help the school, over a period of time, develop quality provision, ensuring that they build their own capacity to do so. Before you contact the school do some research to build an understanding of the context of the school. Look at the school website and perhaps read the most recent Ofsted report. If you're working across departments, liaise with a member of the SLT to gain their views of strengths and areas of need. You will build positive relationships more easily if you have a good overview of the school's context and acknowledge that in your first contact.

Protocols

Contact the school and, as a courtesy, introduce yourself to the Headteacher and explain who you are and that you are looking forward to working with the school. Arrange a time to visit and ascertain whether you'll meet with the Headteacher or whether the Headteacher will appoint another member of the SLT to be your main point of contact.

Be clear about what your purpose for the first visit, such as 'I'd like to gain an overview of the school's strengths, whether there are any areas for development and how I can best work with you to support this'. Say that it would be helpful for you to view a copy of the school's policy and action plan before you visit.

Then make arrangements and agree an outline for the first visit. For example:

- *tour of the school – say you're happy to arrive before school or at lunchtime if staff would like to meet you informally. Don't be concerned if the school don't want to do this.*
- *meeting with Headteacher / SLT to gain an overview of strengths and areas for development*
- *discussion of priorities on the school's action plan*
- *share conclusions and agree dates and purpose of next visit.*

To help you during the meeting:

- *Find out whether the school has undertaken a self evaluation and what materials they have used.*

Watch point:

Even if the school has not undertaken a specific self evaluation of provision for the more able it doesn't mean that there isn't strong or well developed practice. It may simply be that the school formulates its findings as part of its wider self evaluation.

When viewing the action plan, remember that it will be personal to that school and that you will need to interpret it. Phrase any questions in terms of the development process such as ascertaining findings from any audit that the school carried out. This will help you understand why the school has selected and prioritised these development activities.

A school may not have audited their more able provision so you could advise them on how to do this or offer to carry this out with the SLT / staff.

Maintain an advisory tone throughout, for example, 'You may find it useful to ...' 'You might want to consider ...' 'I'd recommend ...'

Ensure that you finish on time and conclude the meeting by summarising main points. Ensure that you identify strengths and articulate some priorities for the school and note them down.

Thank the school and arrange a date for your next visit and identify which staff you'll work with.

Watch point:

You must respect confidentiality. The discussions and your involvement in the school must not be shared. You will probably receive guidance locally about reporting on your work in the school.

Once you've established a positive working relationship with the SLT you're ready to start working together on some of the areas for development. In your next visit spend some time adding your input to the school's action plan to help develop a sense of cohesion and a shared approach over a period of time. Identify where you'll work with individuals and how this will complement the school's existing plans for professional learning.

When you're acting as a specialist coach you may find that you're working with a range of new staff in the school. Ensure that your initial contact sets the tone and clarifies the purpose of your visit.

Be clear about:

- the focus for your visit
- procedures – such as for a joint observation regarding the observation schedule that you will use
- intended outcomes – think about where this fits into the school's action plan
- timings – ensuring that there is time for discussion and follow up
- agreement on how the visit will be followed up
- what records will be kept and that confidentiality will be observed.

Always try to articulate what the school hopes to achieve in between your contact with them. In this way you can act as a sounding board to help the school summarise their successes and identify ways in which they can challenge themselves further.

4 Conclusion

The role of leading work that focuses on more able learners in a school is an exciting one. In this position you will have opportunities to develop or refine your existing leadership skills whilst maintaining excellence in your own classroom practice. Your role as guardian and advocate of more able education in school will continue to be an essential one, ensuring that teaching staff understand the needs of able pupils and can confidently personalise provision to meet those needs in a context of high expectations and challenge for all.

This Essential Guide is intended to complement other training you may undertake and materials that you may acquire, for example through NACE membership and its programme of professional development and consultancy work.

Series Editor

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