



nace●essentials guide

Teaching and
leading for
able, gifted and
talented learners

Guide 3

The Essential Guide for
supporting the exceptionally able

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Guide 3

The Essential Guide for supporting the exceptionally able

Introduction

Like every other pupil, those deemed to have exceptional abilities and talents deserve our attention and our consideration of their particular needs and how to meet them in school. Exceptionally able (EA) pupils – whether younger or older – may be at risk of being neglected as they are such a diverse group. Exceptionality may go unrecognised, because too difficult to deal with, because schools have many other priorities, or because it is felt that the needs of the exceptionally able can be provided for alongside their “more able” peers.

Moreover, exceptionality is by definition scarce, which may make it even less of a priority in a busy school. There can also be the perception that students who have been identified as exceptionally able are blessed with special qualities and advantages that will help them to succeed and that they don't need additional consideration. Not to understand and provide for this particular group of children, however, risks losing a precious resource and, more importantly, to leave such children unfulfilled and their talents unrealised – often storing up potential challenges not only for their school experience but also for their future lives and well-being.

At best though there is a recognition in a growing number of schools that students with exceptional ability are just as much in need of support as their peers for their individual educational needs and for the social and emotional challenges exceptionality can bring. Such schools, along with the research base, have contributed to this guide which seeks to help schools develop provision and practices to meet the needs of this small but nevertheless important group of children and youngsters.

“But you just said you were totally lost in those classes at school.” “I was!” he emphasized. “Josh, I'm not understanding.” “Well,” he explained. “I answered the problems, but the teachers were always asking, ‘Tell me the process you used. What steps did you follow?’ I had no idea what they were talking about.” “Why was that a problem?” I asked, “I just didn't know what they wanted, so I quit doing anything.” “How do you solve such problems?” I asked. “I don't know. When I learn new information it just has a shape. Then when I have a problem it has a shape. I just find the information that has the same shape as the problem, match them, and that solves the problem. It works in art or math or anything. But there aren't any steps. I just scan and match the shapes. Isn't that how you do it?”

Source: Gifted Education Communicator, Winter 2009

Who are the exceptionally able and how do we know?

There is no universally agreed term for students whose ability exceeds that of even their “more able peers”. Some descriptions include “genius, gifted, very bright, high flyer, very or highly able and talented”. The term “exceptionally able” is used in this guide to describe students whose needs go beyond those of students already deemed to require opportunities for enrichment and extension in the normal curriculum.

There are different schools of thought about what characterises exceptional ability. For some it is characterised in young children by precocity in achievements, emphasising quantitative aspects of ability. It is certainly the case that many exceptional young children reach developmental milestones earlier than their peers, including those for reading, talking and writing. Some stress exceptional ability as developmental potential, with cognitive ability outstripping physical and emotional development i.e. so-called “developmental asynchrony”. The evidence suggests that exceptional ability may comprise quantitative and qualitative aspects, but will certainly include high abstract reasoning ability and complexity of thinking. Other observed characteristics are indicated in the section below.

One picture of the exceptionally able student is of a hard-working student who diligently completes work, and is perceived by peers as the best in the class. The student may achieve outstanding success, which is recognised by winning competitions or displaying his/her abilities in one or many arenas. However, in reality the picture is much more complex. Students who are classified as exceptionally able belong on a continuum of students with specific educational requirements. Many have the skills to adjust to their educational and social environment with relative ease, while others may manifest a range of emotional problems and adjustment issues. For example, an exceptionally able student may be chronologically aged seven, at the emotionally developmental age of five, and be working intellectually at a post-primary level without the life experiences to temper their thoughts.

Exceptional ability in a student may also go unnoticed because of a physical, intellectual, or learning disability. Within the cohort of exceptionally able students are those who despite their exceptionality may persistently underachieve due to boredom, lack of interest, or extreme perfectionism. There are also students whose exceptional ability may be masked by the fact that they are not being educated in their first language. Some students from minority backgrounds may not show “traditional” signs of exceptionality, as different values and skills are prized differently in different cultures, and teachers may not be attuned to signs of exceptionality beyond the norm. Schools should also take into account that an exceptionality may emerge later in a student’s school career or that the student simply may not have been spotted earlier. Given such diversity, it is not uncommon for exceptionally able students to go unrecognised in school.

Assessment and identification

Early identification of exceptionally able students is important. However, assessment and identification procedures for exceptionally able students are not as clearly delineated as in other areas of education.

While there are many different approaches to the identification and assessment of exceptionally able students, it is important to note that the most holistic approach is the best, using a combination of methods. A multi-level definition recognises the frequent centrality of atypical development in the lives of exceptionally able students and implies the need to go beyond traditional, psychometrically based findings to explore their educational, emotional and psychological needs.

The following checklist is indicative of some of their characteristics but should be used critically and carefully, taking particular account of age, developmental milestones and the wider profile of the individual pupil.

Exceptionally able students may:

- Possess extensive general knowledge, often know more than the teacher
- Show good insight into cause-effect relationships
- Easily grasp underlying principles and need the minimum of explanation
- Quickly make generalisations and extract the relevant points from complex material
- Have mental speeds faster than physical capabilities
- Show exceptional short- and long-term memory
- Have reading ability well beyond their chronological age.

Some of the most observed characteristics of exceptionally able individuals, taken from the literature, also include the following:

- Rapid and thorough comprehension of the whole idea or concept
- Unusual ability to perceive essential elements, underlying structures and patterns in relationships and ideas
- Need for precision in thinking and expression, resulting in a need to correct errors and argue extensively
- Ability to relate a broad range of ideas and synthesize commonalities among them
- A high degree of ability to think abstractly that develops early
- Appreciation of complexity; finding myriad alternative meanings in even the simplest issues or problems

- Ability to learn in an integrative, intuitively non-linear manner
- Extraordinary degree of intellectual curiosity
- Argumentativeness
- Ability from an early age to think in metaphors and symbols and a preference for doing so
- Ability to learn in great intuitive leaps
- Awareness of detail
- Unusual intensity and depth of feeling

The implications of some of these characteristics do not necessarily make for an easy time for teachers or parents so schools should consider how to work with and mitigate some of the more challenging aspects of exceptional abilities.

The phenomenon of exceptional ability is usually associated with high-level outcomes, whether on a measure of general ability, responses to achievement task, a performance or a production. Important to recognising and providing for exceptionally able students is the thinking and learning-teaching interactions that lead to these high-level outcomes.

A Year 9 maths teacher introduces her students to Pythagoras, to the idea that the area of the square on one side of right-angled triangles (the hypotenuse) is equal to the addition of the area of the squares on the other two sides. They learn this as a formula, for example, $c^2 = a^2 + b^2$, and use it to calculate the length of the sides in triangles of this type. This teacher asked: "Did anyone think of ideas about this that I haven't mentioned?" Anna, without directed teaching, speculated about joined right-angled triangles in building construction, architecture and civil engineering, for example, in the triangular struts in girders holding up bridges. "Are these triangles somehow stronger than squares or other types of triangles?", she asked. Con looked at curved surfaces in the classroom and wondered whether Pythagoras holds on curved, wavy or three-dimensional surfaces. In another class, Gus reflected on the whole number triplets that are described by $c^2 = a^2 + b^2$ – for example, 3, 4 and 5, or 12, 5 and 13 – and wondered what the special pattern is between these numbers. He asked whether the tetraplet relationship $d^2 = a^2 + b^2 + c^2$ existed and whether there are sets of four whole numbers that satisfy it. He asked: "What would the sum of four squares look like spatially?" Toni imagined a cube on each side of a right-angled triangle instead of squares, and questioned whether $c^3 = a^3 + b^3$ would hold for some whole numbers and what this might look like spatially. She recalled rational numbers: "Are the fractions that fit the pattern only those that comprise the whole number triplets or tetraplets?"

Source: Munro, 2014



The exceptionally able students in the scenario above generated highly elaborated and differentiated networks of meanings. They formed an understanding that was more comprehensive than what was in the teaching information. They spontaneously generated interpretations about Pythagoras during the lesson that were more comprehensive.

The interpretations formed by the students here comprised both links from the teaching and links they formed independently. They extended ideas in the taught understanding. They saw the taught ideas as parts of patterns and linked them with other aspects of what they knew. They inferred links and formed intuitions or suppositions that were unique to them.

In summary, during a teaching episode, exceptionally able learners differ in the extent of elaboration and differentiation of the meaning networks they form. They also differ in the quality of the links, amount of knowledge they can think about at once and extent of their inferences or extensions and syntheses. There are several other ways in which the thinking of highly able students differs. These include their attitudes and dispositions towards particular topics and to themselves as learners and thinkers, their motivation orientation, the influence of cultures to which they belong on their thinking, their concept of being a learner and their self and social identities (for example, Munro, 2013).

It is often in particular disciplinary contexts and engagement in high-level cognitive tasks that we observe how exceptionality is manifested. Observations of young highly able mathematicians conclude that such children often:

- Have a liking for numbers and use them in stories and rhymes
- Have an ability to argue, question and reason using logical connectives
- Like pattern-making, revealing balance or symmetry
- Set out their toys with precision
- Use sophisticated criteria for sorting
- Take pleasure in jigsaws and other constructional toys.



Observations of older students working on problem solving noted their ability to:

- Grasp the structure of a problem
- Generalise
- Develop chains of reasoning
- Use symbols and language accurately and effectively
- Think flexibly - backwards and forwards and switching strategies
- Leave out steps and thinking in abbreviated mathematical forms
- Remember generalised relationships, problem types, ways of approaching problems, and patterns of reasoning
- Persevere in problem solving.

The message here is that in order to discover or confirm that a student is highly able we need to offer opportunities for that student to grasp the structure of a problem, generalise, develop chains of reasoning... and so on.

Why we may miss some exceptionally able children

Peter, a Year 6 pupil at school B (primary) demonstrates EA in English, mathematics and science. In Peter's words, his early primary years were characterised by frustration and low attainment. His view was that this was due to an overemphasis on his dyslexia and a lack of recognition of his exceptional abilities. A theme day which focused on problem-solving activities later highlighted the extent of his exceptional abilities. Peter reports that his attainment in all areas improved dramatically when the attention switched to his learning strengths. He identifies opportunities within lessons to deploy his extensive vocabulary and utilise his problem-solving abilities as being particularly effective.

Work reported by PEGY (retrieved January 2017) suggests that the following features may hinder easy identification of exceptional ability.

Speed of learning

A child who is truly exceptional is likely to be invisible to teachers if they are never given material from the curriculum with which to demonstrate their speed of learning.

A very few such children will seek out opportunities on their own, but many more will not, and will not have the facilities to do so. Such a child may race through material at a high speed if permitted and motivated to do so, but if kept to the pace of a typical class is very likely to become alienated and disengaged.

When the child learns extremely quickly, she may find it hard to pay attention when the teacher goes over and over the same concept and may miss instructions on a set task, leading to mistakes. These mistakes may make the teacher think that the child does not know how to do the task.

Intellectual opportunity

Some exceptionally gifted children should be easy to spot. For example, the seven-year-old who, at home, enjoys Stephen Hawking's "Brief History of Time" and analyses the evolution of the steam engine and its impact on industrial development. He or she should be very obvious - or so you might think.

But schools do not present this level of intellectual activity to a seven-year-old, nor do teachers have the time to develop a relationship with each pupil that would enable them to discover each child's true potential.

Culture and socio-economic group

A child not given access to books and resources, or whose culture values different kinds of knowledge, is likely to be even less visible to teachers than the example above. If such a child comes from a lower socio-economic group or a minority culture, they may also be adversely affected by preconceived ideas of their ability level.

Disability/special needs/specific learning difficulties

A "twice exceptional" or 2E child is one who is intellectually very able, but also has difficulties such as dyslexia, dysgraphia, ADHD, dyspraxia, hearing (especially auditory processing disorder) or vision problems, or other difficulties which prevent them from demonstrating what they know.

Blending in

On beginning preschool or reception the exceptionally able child will notice the behaviour of the other children and may very quickly start to act and perform as they do so as to fit in. An exceptionally socially aware child will even alter their language to speak like the other children in preschool. This extreme "blending in" is more common in girls, but can affect boys too, and the urge to blend in can strike at any age. A child who is proficient at blending in is unlikely to be recognised as highly able by his teachers.

Full marks

Identification is made more contentious because adults often believe the exceptionally able child should always be getting 100% on school tasks which are well within their capabilities. However, they may not achieve to this standard. This may be explained by:

- Inability to comply correctly with instructions

The child's idea is too big for the task.

For example, an eight-year-old who reads complex fiction at home is asked to write a story about "Going to the moon", but simply cannot condense the novel he can imagine into the page of writing the teacher requires. He may end up refusing to write anything, or turning out a meagre paragraph.

- Creativity with non-challenging tasks.

For example, doodling on a reception class worksheet which requires the drawing of two objects. The worksheet ends up with two objects, and then many more! The teacher believes that the child doodled because she didn't understand the task and so was unable to comply, not that the task was so well within her capabilities and completed so quickly that she sought to entertain herself with extra activity.

- Lack of co-operation

Unwillingness to complete tasks which were well within his capability several years ago and which teach him nothing day after day after month after year.

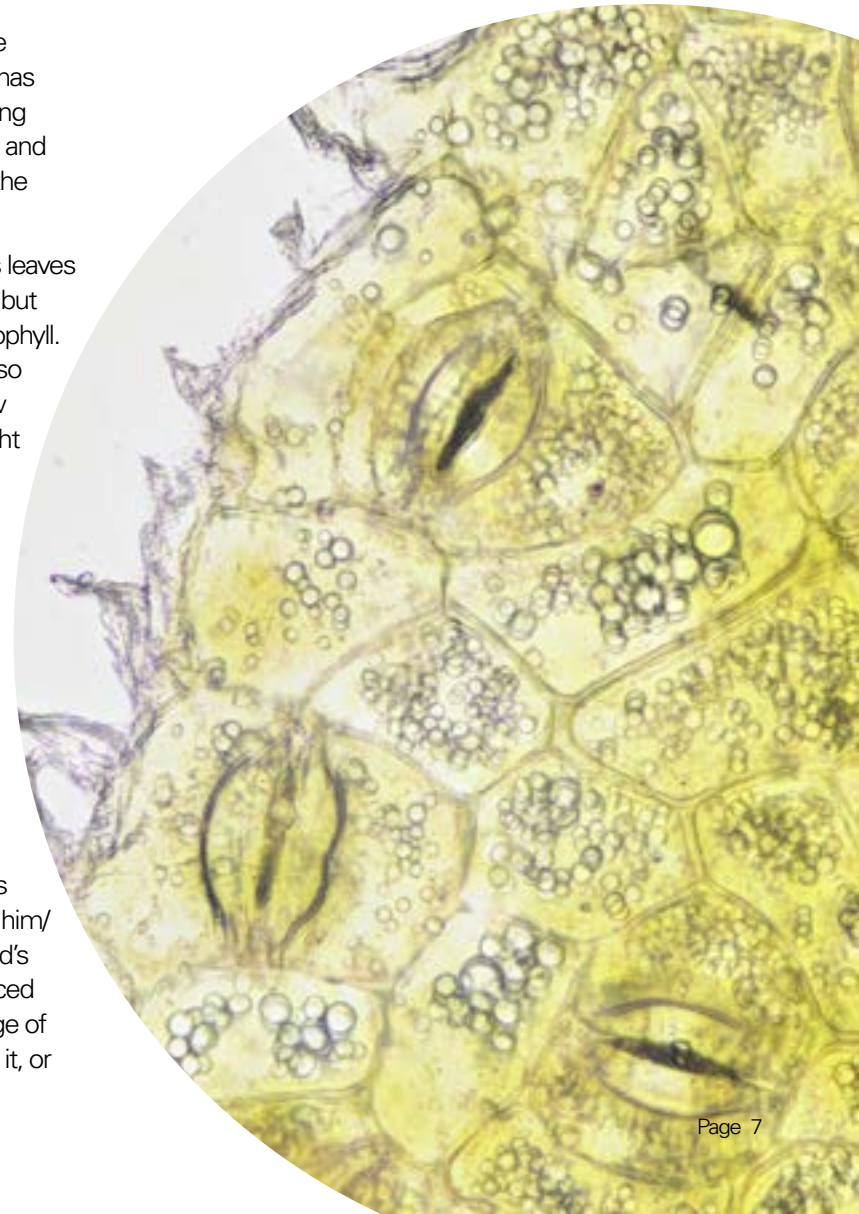
- "I don't know"

An inability to answer the question with the correct amount of detail because the child has already gone beyond the level currently being taught and sees connections, relationships and depths which make it very difficult to give the answer the teacher is expecting.

For instance, the teacher asks what makes leaves green, expecting the answer "chlorophyll", but the child has known for years that it's chlorophyll. She assumes everyone else in the class also knows, and that the teacher is asking "how does a leaf absorb a full spectrum of sunlight and reflect only green, and why?" She knows that this is something to do with how the chlorophyll molecule within a plant cell absorbs light but doesn't know the details of exactly how this happens – which chemical bond or combination of atoms is responsible – so when called on by the teacher answers "I don't know."

- Inability to control his attention sufficiently to complete tasks he finds simple and repetitive.

Thus it may be impossible for an exceptionally able child to achieve full marks on tests of material which is too simple for him/her. For an accurate assessment of the child's level of knowledge and ability, more advanced material must be presented, and knowledge of simple concepts either incorporated within it, or tested in a complex way.



School A

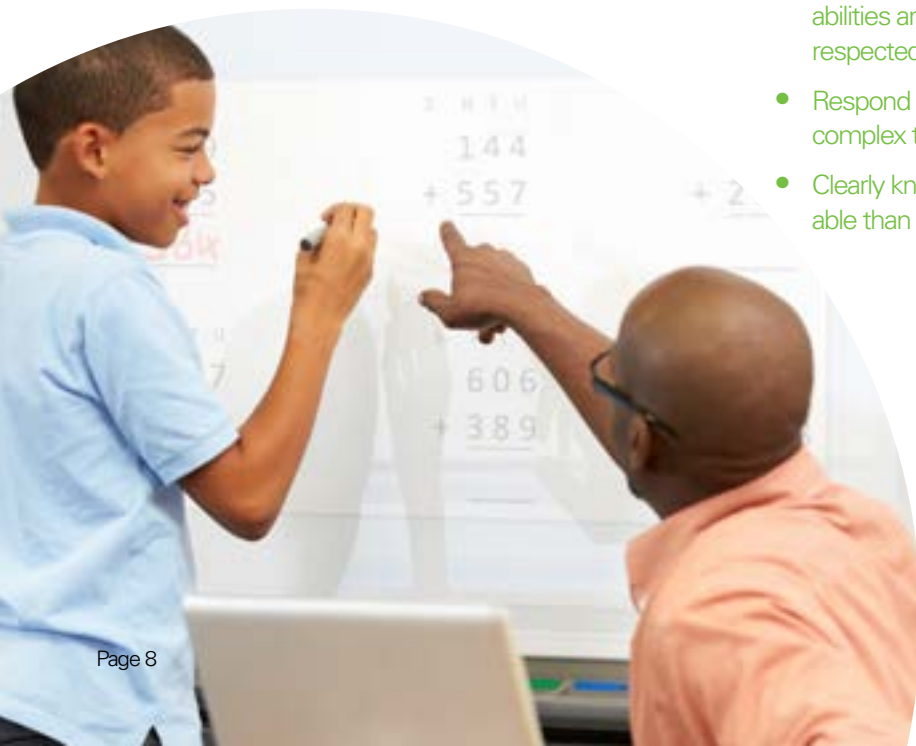
We use the following criteria to identify those with exceptional ability. Such children may demonstrate some or all of these characteristics. However, it is also recognised that some exceptionally gifted children may work hard to disguise their gifts, possibly leading to some uncooperative and apparently disrespectful behaviours. Staff are alert to this possibility. Staff should be on the look out for children who:

- Demonstrate high levels of concentration, tenacity and capacity for absorbing information
- Show wide awareness and excellent general or area specific knowledge
- Grasp and apply complex and abstract concepts easily
- Use language in unusual and highly creative ways showing an interest in different angles and approaches including obscure trains of thought
- Thrive on individualised projects, research and challenges
- Enjoy a highly personalised relationship with the teacher who recognises and celebrates their exceptional abilities and is able to make them feel special and respected
- Respond to simple questions with unusual and complex thoughts or questions
- Clearly know more, think more quickly and are more able than the adults in class!

In summary, teachers need to have a holistic picture of a child thought to have exceptional ability. Such a picture may comprise:

- Outcomes e.g. performance on tests and tasks
- Cognitive ability tests
- Personal profile of interests and strengths, including outside school
- Independent learning behaviours
- Learning and thinking interactions in the classroom and in other learning contexts.

For the very reason that these pupils are exceptional, teachers need to be alert to the exceptional response, the unusual, the unorthodox and the unexpected.



The needs of the exceptionally able

Exceptionally able pupils are first and foremost children, young adults and individuals. They will therefore bring to school and to learning their own personality, background, interests - and sometimes areas of challenge/barriers to learning. These may include additional learning needs, issues of motivation and engagement, and an uneven profile of ability. A frequent characteristic of an exceptionally able pupil – and often with younger ones – is the “gap” between their exceptional abilities and other abilities, the gap between their social and emotional development and their intellectual maturity and prowess. At times other gaps may also be at play, for example between self-image and the perceptions and expectations of others, especially teachers and family.

The needs of exceptionally able pupils are therefore by definition complex and sometimes challenging. They include:

- Having their abilities and talents recognised and valued
- Understanding of them as individuals
- Access to and mastery of broad and balanced learning opportunities as well as specialist support where needed
- Well-planned and differentiated learning in the everyday classroom complemented by enrichment and experiences beyond
- Longer-term planning for their needs in areas of the curriculum where they excel.

It is of course essential that opportunities in school and beyond allow such abilities to be displayed – and that teachers are also in touch with information about children’s strengths and passions from a variety of sources, including parents and children themselves. Strong communication between all involved in the child’s education is key to successful provision and support for exceptionally able children.



What should schools do?

This section summarises various organisational strategies which may be used by all schools to support exceptionally able pupils, ranging from an ethos which recognises and rewards exceptional achievement to systems and structures which allow for adjustments to take account of students' specific needs.

Aspect	Example
Ethos and culture	Acceptance of difference; flexibility; celebration of high achievement; willingness to work in partnership; high aspirations for all pupils
Policy, organisation, systems, structures	EA policy; flexible timetable, curriculum and groupings; secure transition arrangements; excellent communication systems
Professional development/recruitment	Staff specialisms; dedicated professional development; named teacher with MAGT responsibility
Information, advice and guidance (IAG)	Personalised & appropriate to ability; access to HE advice; exposure to high level careers
Support/mentoring	Focused on socio-emotional needs; "expert" mentoring/tutoring
Enrichment	Enrichment in class and beyond subjects; experience with EA peers
Networks, partners	Other schools, HEIs, specialist organisations (e.g. STEM focus)
Resources	Teaching/learning resource; online sources; appropriate reading age materials

School B

As a school we ensure that all students are challenged and stretched in both their lessons and in their aspirations for the future. The school has a culture of extremely high expectations which filters through from the most able students to all others – a rising tide lifts all ships.

One of the key ways in which we ensure that exceptionally able students (EAS) are identified is through identifying students who display outstanding ability in a particular subject area and demonstrate outstanding skills in that subject. To give an example, one of the characteristics that an EAS would display in mathematics would be a high degree of competence in identifying relationships, visualising, predicting and generalising, whereas in art an EAS would display the ability to record the world around them with accuracy, sensitivity to line, colour, pattern, texture and tone. Through these characteristics, we are able to challenge these students by teaching through tasks linked to Bloom's Taxonomy to help students reach the higher-order thinking skills which include evaluation and analysis.

Through our prestigious colleges programme, we give EAS opportunities to develop the skills, confidence and attitude needed to enter to independent colleges on scholarships or bursaries to which they may not otherwise have access. Over the past few years we have had increasing success with placing students into prestigious colleges to study their A-levels.

Furthermore, our EAS are following pathways which go beyond the GCSE curriculum and this results in many of our brightest students being entered early for GCSE. Particularly effective for our EAS is the idea of learning independence and "flip" learning, whereby students acquire knowledge prior to lessons and then secure their understanding in class. Students all have access to their learning targets for the year on an online platform which allows students the flexibility to go above and beyond what is being taught through the school curriculum. Our "Master Mission" programme allows EAS to develop the spiritual, moral, social and cultural development which will ensure they are well-rounded individuals and able to apply their intellect in the real world following their education.

School C

Encouraged an EA mathematics pupil to take up the UK Mathematics Trust Maths Challenge and to take advantage of its mentoring scheme. The pupil's response to this is given below. "In Year 9 I took the Maths Challenge organised by the UK Mathematics Trust. I came out very close to the top in the whole country. This set the seal on my perception of myself as an EA pupil in mathematics. The Trust now gives me access to an academic mentor and enrichment activities which are very challenging. I'm proud to be involved. I'm also interested in making contact with Durham University which I believe is organising a summer school and other activities."



What should teachers do?

Within the more able and talented group there may be only one exceptionally able pupil in a subject or talent area, so learning needs to be personalised at an individual level. An individual learning plan, drawn up and reviewed jointly by pupils, their parents and teachers, can be used to give a clear direction and structure to the provision for each exceptionally able pupil. The focus of this plan should be to identify opportunities when exceptional abilities can be expressed and developed. This would include provision not only from within the school but also from beyond the school, and include ways of ensuring that the social and emotional needs of the exceptionally able pupil are met. *Alongside wider school arrangements, it is the learning opportunities provided in everyday classrooms which can make the most difference to exceptionally able pupils.*

Recognition of exceptional ability is closely tied to provision; EA will be demonstrated only when pupils have a range of opportunities to do so in a rich, challenging and supportive school environment.

Approaches to teaching and learning for these learners often resembles those used with the broader range of very able students, the major differences typically being the extent of complexity and pace and greater personalisation.

The strategies cited by many schools making good provision for EA include:

- Setting high-challenge independent research tasks;
- Higher-order questioning, dialogue and technical/disciplinary language;

- Giving pupils information about additional study materials and guidance on how to use them;
- Providing more challenging homework and independent learning assignments;
- Giving differentiated success criteria;
- Setting creative open-ended tasks;
- Incorporating AS-level units into GCSE;
- Using feedback and marking to allow for progress in accordance with ability.

Teaching strategies should take account of the need for:

- Pace of learning commensurate with rapidity of learning in some areas (with implications for classroom management and learning focus in class);
- Conceptual learning to feature highly, with tasks which prioritise problem solving, enquiry, high-level analysis, application and synthesising of learning; bigger picture thinking;
- Advanced material and resources; sources taken from contemporary developments and research;
- Cross-curricular links ("interconnectedness") and real-life exemplification;
- Development of independent learning and research;
- Flexibility to allow for the pursuit of individual interests and aptitudes.

Effective approaches to managing differentiation may include:

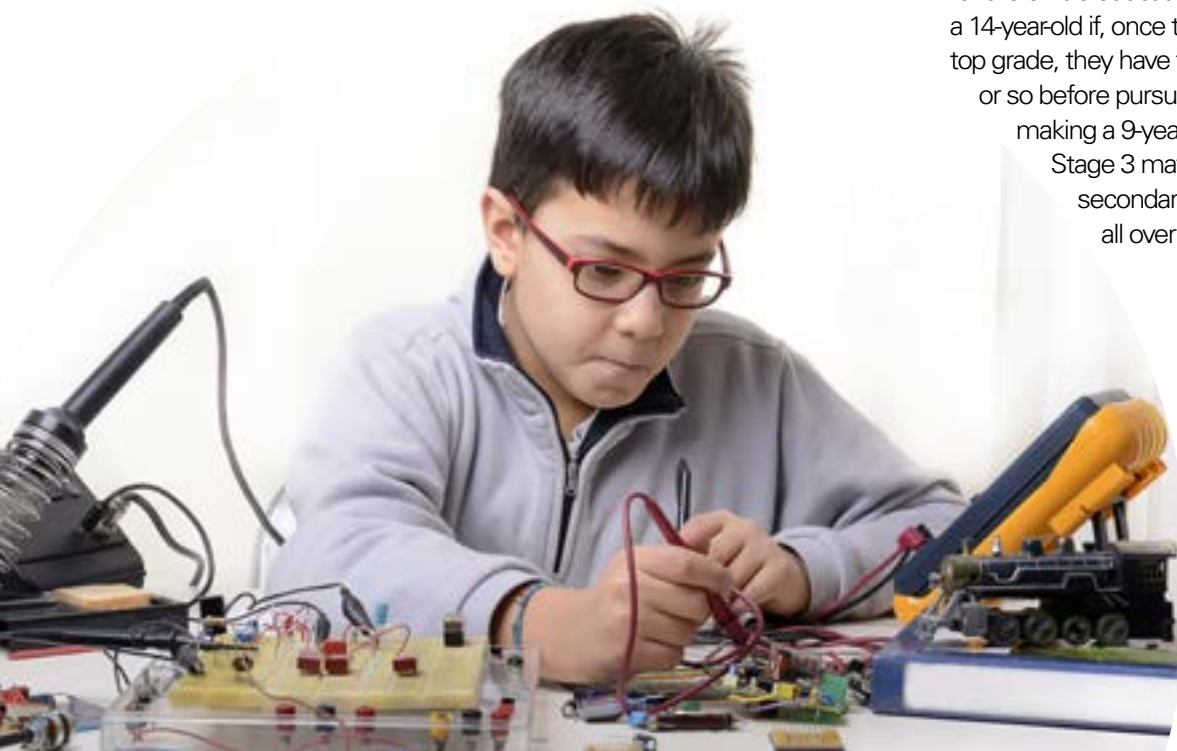
- Giving challenging (in-depth/beyond mastery) tasks that are related to the class activity – this is a good option as it keeps the pupil working in the same context as the rest of the class and supports the classroom community.
- Giving material from later in the key stage – usually done alone and with little support as the teacher has the rest of the class to cope with. Able students are entitled to teaching as much as all the others, so use this selectively.

- Organising for the pupil to move to work with older students – different forms of acceleration, organised properly, can be an effective way of meeting highly able students' needs. The conditions for this to happen are that:
 - a) The student should have absolute mastery of the current content (i.e. should be capable of getting an A* or equivalent in any assessment in KS4)
 - b) That they are emotionally and socially able to cope with working with older students and
 - c) Most importantly, that there is a long-term plan for the child's education. It's no use accelerating a 14-year-old if, once they've got their GCSE top grade, they have to tread water for a year or so before pursuing more maths. Or making a 9-year-old work through the Key Stage 3 material if, when they get to secondary school, they have to do it all over again.

In addition to classroom learning, exceptionally able pupils benefit greatly from curriculum enrichment, either linked to topics studied as a normal part of the curriculum or in a different disciplinary area not encountered in school.

Renzulli's model of enrichment emphasizes:

- 1) A student's intensive and multi-faceted exploration of a topic of his or her deep personal interest;
- 2) Acting upon it, using the vocabulary, methods, tools and dispositions of professionals in that field; and, from the knowledge and skills used,
- 3) Creating a uniquely original product that can positively affect humankind.



School D

Gifted STEM Programme

The Gifted STEM Programme provides the most able students with the opportunity to learn in the ways that allow them to make the most progress in their learning, and to go way beyond the traditional National Curriculum. Students in the Gifted STEM Programme are fully integrated into the main school, and spend three days a week at the main campus, coming across to the STEM Centre for the co-curricular programme at the end of each day. These students spend the other two days of the week at the Centre following the Gifted Programme.

There are opportunities for all students from the school to engage with an innovative and exciting co-curricular programme. The current co-curricular programme includes astronomy, coding and microbits, game development and Mandarin.

To develop the students' understanding of the real-world applications of the science and maths the students are learning, we have excellent links with a variety of organisations such as Royal Navy Air Station Culdrose, which will be offering a co-curricular programme in helicopter engineering. Co-curricular time can also be used for music lessons and practising musical instruments.

School E

Classroom provision for the higher and advanced performer is monitored through observation as part of the ongoing cycle of lesson observations and work sampling (as specified in the Assessment, Recording and Reporting Policy). Observation may take the form of teaching and learning reviews, appraisal and peer observation activities. All schemes of work indicate appropriate extension resources and materials for use with higher and advanced performance students in lessons. All members of staff make full use of the school's planning template in their planning and teaching. Gifted mathematicians have the opportunity to complete an extra GCSE in Further Mathematics. Further Mathematics is available as an A-level option. All subjects share designated enrichment components for use with higher and advanced performance students in their schemes of work.

School F

Work with exceptionally able children is, by its very nature, highly personalised and designed to meet the needs of each individual. Having demonstrated competence in the core curriculum, exceptionally able children are encouraged to: explore more complex and open-ended tasks within the subject area being studied, either working on their own or with other highly able children; undertake individual research that flows from the class topic following learning pathways that interest them and that they have, perhaps, identified themselves; devise different and original ways to demonstrate what they have learned; develop an ongoing personal project in a field of study outside the class topic using higher-order research questions and presentation approaches; take part in wider learning opportunities offered after school and after hours which enable them to use their highly developed understanding or abilities to the full.

Examples of after-school activities include sports clubs, the art club, the chess club, the upper junior enterprise groups, modern foreign language clubs, and G&T opportunities run by local secondary schools.

Examples of after-hours activities include membership of an adult choir/orchestra; a local history society; an all-age chess/bridge club; and internet forums for creative writing, maths or science.

Exceptionally able children are monitored as part of the monitoring of all gifted and talented children.

Progress maps are available, showing how the children are progressing and helping staff identify any who may be underperforming. It is also accepted that such children are likely to be able to perform well beyond national expectations and that normal assessment systems do not stretch their capabilities.



Recommendations

The key to meeting the needs of exceptionally able pupils is through school and classroom flexibility and attention to planning and practice which reflects the individual profile of the student. It is important to have a shared view about this across a school, enshrined in policy and guidance, but also to recognise that how the school shapes provision may change from year to year according to the needs of the child and the make-up of the wider school population.

Providing an engaging and challenging curriculum and other opportunities for learning and personal development are central, but these should sit alongside ensuring that a highly able child feels acceptance and belonging, enjoys the normal and joyful experiences of childhood and growing up, and has opportunities for autonomy as well as at times the company of their intellectual peers.

Encountering an exceptionally able child is one of the great pleasures of teaching, and nurturing that exceptionality so that it is realised must also count as one of the most important tasks and sources of satisfaction for any teacher.

Below are some recommendations for schools to consider when reviewing and planning for EA pupils.

- Agree what constitutes exceptional ability in each of the subjects;
- Staff development opportunities on the needs of the exceptionally able in particular subjects and also enable them to network and share effective practice across the school and other schools;
- Raise awareness of all teachers that pupils with EAL or apparent difficulties with literacy may have exceptional ability which can be masked by relatively low level of attainment in English;
- Subject areas to show how they provide for EA pupils, including strategies to remove potential barriers where exceptional abilities are being masked;
- Teachers' planning to incorporate the needs of EA pupils and appropriate learning objectives set;
- High attainment in previous settings or classes to be recognised in planning and provision;
- Additional teaching and learning resources to be identified to cater for the learning needs of EA pupils;
- Social and emotional aspects of learning to be taken into account when planning provision for EA pupils;
- Set targets high enough and ensure that EA pupils are aware of their standard of attainment – likely to be off the 'normal' scale;
- Specific reference to EA pupils to be made in the school's more able and talented policy.

References & reading

These references have both informed this article and present further opportunities to develop teachers' understanding and practice. Exceptional ability also features in NACE's CPD programmes and the NACE Challenge Framework provides detailed descriptions of provision for the exceptionally able against which schools can evaluate and develop their own policy and practice.

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Hilary Lowe has written, advised and presented widely on the education of more able pupils. She led a major national professional development programme for Gifted and Talented Coordinators and has designed national training and guidance materials. She is currently an Education Adviser with NACE.



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