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INTRODUCTORY PARENT PACK

This pack contains:

- What are the characteristics of gifted and talented children?
- What is gifted and talented in schools?
- How do schools support gifted and talented children?
- What does my gifted and talented child need?
- How can I support the school to meet my child's needs?
- How do I address any concerns with the school?
- How can Potential Plus UK help me?

PLEASE NOTE: This pack uses the term 'gifted and talented', as this is what many schools use. However, the Department for Education has been using the term 'academically more able' since spring 2012. In addition, Potential Plus UK uses the term 'high learning potential'.

What are the characteristics of gifted and talented children?

Parents are often the first to recognise that their child is bright for his or her age as they learn quickly and sometimes surprise people with their advanced thinking. However, parents may not realise that other parts of their child's personality may be down to their ability. There are some characteristics that are common amongst gifted and talented children, though not every gifted and talented child will have all of them.

All children are different, but it has been shown that many gifted and talented children share common characteristics because of their advanced thinking ability. Below is a list of the most common characteristics of gifted and talented children that has been drawn up through research by Dr Linda Silverman. Different gifted and talented children will have a different mixture of these, but each should display a majority of them.

Gifted children:

- are able to learn quickly
- have a rich vocabulary
- have an excellent memory
- have a long attention span
- are early or avid readers
- persevere when interested
- have a wide range of interests
- are good at puzzles
- reason well (good thinkers)
- show ability with numbers
- show compassion
- are perfectionist
- are intense
- are morally sensitive
- have strong curiosity
- are emotionally sensitive (feelings hurt easily)
- have a high level of energy
- prefer older companions/adults
- have a quirky or grown-up sense of humour
- are concerned with justice and fairness
- tend to question authority
- have judgment mature for age at times
- are highly creative
- are keen observers
- have a vivid imagination

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What is gifted and talented in schools?

Whole School Provision – the Government Guidelines in England

From 'Identifying Gifted and Talented Learners; Getting Started' published in 2008 by the then DCSF:

"DCSF defines the group supported by the National Programme for gifted and talented education as:

"Children and young people with one or more abilities developed to a level significantly ahead of their year group (or with the potential to develop those abilities)."

We encourage schools in identifying gifted and talented learners to focus on:

- learners aged 11 – 19 who meet the published eligibility criteria for the top 5% nationally including those who were members of the former National Academy for Gifted and Talented Youth (NAGTY)*, and others who meet the criteria;
- in addition, learners aged 4 – 19 who are gifted and talented relative to their peers in their own year group and school/college;
- a range of abilities including talent in the arts and sport; and
- ability rather than achievement, so that underachievers are amongst those identified.

There are gifted and talented learners in every year group in every school/college. All institutions are free to determine the size of their gifted and talented populations, but should be able to justify this in terms of improved standards for all learners identified. Every school/college should have some gifted and talented learners and should keep a register of those learners. Since relative ability changes over time, learners should move on and off the register when appropriate, though such movement might be expected to reduce with age. Since ability is evenly distributed throughout the population, a school's or college's gifted and talented population should be broadly representative of the whole learner population in terms of gender, ethnic and socio-economic background."

These guidelines were, and still are, non-statutory and aim to support the teaching and learning of gifted and talented students. Terminology has since changed and the Department for Education (DfE) has been using the term '**academically more able**' since spring 2012. However, many schools are still using 'gifted and talented'.

In general, secondary schools have been following guidelines since 2002, so tend to have more provision in place. The guidelines for primary schools are since 2007, so many are at different stages in developing their provision.

Original Government guidelines to schools are listed below in brief. Schools should:

- have a written gifted and talented policy detailing how children are identified and what provision the school will make for them,
- designate a lead teacher with gifted and talented responsibility in the school (this may be the same person as the Special Educational Needs Co-ordinator (SENCO), but not necessarily)
- identify children in each year group and hold them on some kind of register or list.

Institutional and classroom quality standards were provided for schools through National Strategies to help them in their provision.

*2002-2007

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Guidance was also provided for schools on the following areas:

- Identifying gifted and talented learners
- Addressing underachievement
- Exceptionally able pupils
- Dual or multiple exceptionalities
- Children and young people in care
- Effective provision

How do schools support gifted and talented children?

Schools may use one or more of the following, or may have different provisions in place, to provide support for gifted and talented students.

Enrichment – where a child studies the same as the rest of the class but in a deeper way. For example, if the class is looking at good and bad characters in a fiction set in the farmyard then a gifted and talented child could look at animal character stereotypes: Where do they come from? Why is a fox always cunning? Why do we write stories about animals as if they were human? Maths enrichment will often involve solving maths problems, especially within a real life context. If a child is gifted in science then when looking at the water cycle, it would be a more enriched curriculum if the pupil was able to investigate this in different countries for example the Arctic Circle or African deserts.

Acceleration – sometimes called fast-tracking where a child is put in to the next year group for some or all lessons, or takes a qualification early. A long term plan is often put in place if this is to be successful to avoid progression difficulties.

Enrichment out of the class – in small groups or one to one work with a teacher or teaching assistant to employ higher order thinking skills and other enrichment material.

Enrichment out of hours – through clubs, either at lunchtime or after school time, schools can provide a rich variety of activities to stimulate the more able child. There may also be opportunities outside of school provided by local gifted and talented partnerships or other outside organisation.

Developing thinking skills – schools commonly employ the thinking skills that require children to learn and know information, understand it and apply it in a limited set of circumstances. Ideally in most lessons children would be using higher order thinking skills such as analysis, criticism, creativity and evaluation. This can be done through discussion work or by the teacher asking the child a different question, as challenging a gifted and talented child does not always require setting them different written work.

Pastoral support – it is recognised that gifted and talented pupils may have social and emotional needs that require support and some schools provide pastoral care, nurture groups or mentoring / buddying systems.

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What does a gifted and talented child need?

Gifted and talented children often need more support than others at home and in the classroom, but this does not necessarily mean that they need more structured activities. Sometimes it means they need more freedom and a little more guidance instead.

Understanding and Acceptance

Gifted and talented children are each uniquely individual, though they share certain characteristics with other gifted and talented children. People around them notice that they learn differently, act differently and react differently to other children in their peer group. Very often, gifted and talented children are misunderstood and people may look for reasons as to why they don't fit in and try to make them conform. It is very important that the adults around a gifted and talented child understand them and accept them as they are.

The qualities and characteristics of gifted and talented children need to be discussed between parents, family members, teachers and club leaders; so that there is an acceptance of what is normal for them. This understanding will lead to a much more fulfilling experience for the child, where their feelings of isolation will be lessened.

Enrichment

Gifted and talented children often ask a lot of questions in many situations. They have a great thirst for knowledge and their questions should never be brushed aside. If they cannot be answered when they are asked, questions can be saved for later or another resource can be consulted, thereby building up a bank of resources for the future.

To satisfy their thirst for knowledge and preserve their enthusiasm for learning, gifted and talented children will benefit from experiencing subjects they are learning about in a deeper way. This can be gained from reading different books about a subject, researching the topic on the internet, visiting an exhibition at the local museum or art gallery about the theme and discussing their ideas about it with others.

Thinking Skills

To be equipped to work at a higher level in the long term, gifted and talented children need to experience higher-order thinking skills; analysis, synthesis (working with several sources of information to create something new) and evaluation. Other thinking skills that are important are creative thinking, critical thinking and problem solving.

It is important to encourage thinking skills as often as possible and to value the more complex working involved. Reflecting after the event on the skills used and the feelings of triumph and satisfaction gained will help the child to see their value and want to repeat the experience.

Opportunity to Fail

Gifted and talented children need to meet failure because, when they get everything right most of the time, the need to succeed can place excessive pressure on them; they may become idle and could fail to develop good learning strategies. Taking risks in a safe environment is essential to their continued development. Some gifted and talented children are prone to perfectionism, for them it is even more important that they are able to understand that not all failure is bad.

“Failure as a result of adventurous thinking is one of the ingredients of success at the highest level. The only people who never fail are those who do nothing or those who only do easy things, which does not ultimately help them or anybody else.” Teare 2004.

How can I support the school to meet my child’s needs?

Many parents feel that teachers should be left to get on with the job of educating children. However, because every child is different, the teaching role is much easier when parents work in partnership with the school. Being interested and involved in your child’s schooling will give your child a better chance of success for many reasons; they will know that you value education and that you want them to succeed, school staff will understand your child better and know that your family makes a positive contribution to the school.

Getting Involved

- **Learn all you can** about your child’s school and how it works. You can find information in the school prospectus, handbook or on the school website. The more you know, the easier your job as a parent will be.
- **Attend parent consultations.** It is the perfect forum for learning about how your child is doing and picking up on any problems. Your child will also feel pleased that you are interested in their education.
- **Think about your child’s individual needs** and whether they are being met by their school. Gather your thoughts, collect reports, documents and examples of work. You are the primary gatherer of information about your child. Keep a notebook, file folder or other method of storing this information so you have it at your fingertips when you need it.
- **Ask what you can do at home** to support your child’s learning will show that you are interested in your child’s learning and that you want to underpin the school.
- **Get involved in school life**, as part of the PTA, governing body or helping out in class, to build positive relationships with staff members and to contribute to your child’s education experience.
- **Be a good advocate for the school** in other contexts is also important as it can raise its profile in the community. Be careful about criticising the school or members of staff to other people or in front of your child.

How do I address concerns with the school?

When problems arise, you can ask for a meeting with your child's class teacher or other relevant person. It is a good idea for this to be a separate meeting to the regular parent consultations so there is more time to focus on your child's needs. You can prepare for the meeting by writing down all the details you want to cover about the issue. It's best to stick to the facts and focus on your child's needs.

You could ask your partner or a supportive friend to attend the meeting with you and discuss the points you are going to make with them beforehand. Make sure you keep notes of meetings and points that were agreed at them.

Getting help for your child can be a complicated and emotional process. Because of this, there may be misunderstandings in communication between you and the other adults working with your child. As frustrated as you may become, remember there are many good reasons to set aside emotions and try again.

- Focus on your child's best interest;
- Ensure the views you are advocating are accurate, valid, and reasonable;
- Emphasise what is right rather than who is right;
- Separate people from the problem, and avoid personal criticism; and
- Begin with areas of agreement and work from there.

The Three Ps

Be personable

Treating staff members with respect and monitoring your words, tone and emotions will get you off on the right foot. Working with the school throughout the process will be likely to get the best result for your child.

Be patient

It will take time to implement changes and things may not be right the first time. Give yourself a deadline of a few weeks for things to improve.

Be persistent

If matters don't improve, go and speak to the school again. If you get nowhere with your child's form tutor, you can speak to the year group manager. If you still get no joy, speak to the next in line.

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How can Potential Plus UK help me?

What is Potential Plus UK?

Potential Plus UK is an independent charity supporting the social, emotional and learning needs of children often termed 'gifted and talented' or 'academically more able' in the school setting. However, we prefer to use the term 'high learning potential'. We support these children regardless of age, background or multiple exceptionalities (high learning potential coupled with a learning difficulty such as Aspergers, ADHD or dyslexia).

We provide support and specialist advice for those coping with a wide range of issues that affect children's lives every day, such as lack of self esteem, feelings of isolation and frustration, lack of challenge in the classroom or at home, underachievement, or challenging behaviour.

We support parents, carers and professionals to give them the confidence and tools to meet the needs of these children.

Importantly, we celebrate the achievements and potential of these amazing children.

What does Potential Plus UK do?

Potential Plus UK is working hard on a number of fronts - in a practical way, to support families dealing with high learning potential; in a training and advisory capacity to support parents, schools, teachers and other professionals; and on a national level to develop and influence national and international policy.

Our National Work

Our membership gives strength to our voice when we lobby government, and advise and consult with other national bodies. One of our largest pieces of work was a report on how schools and parents can work together effectively to develop a better education for children with high learning potential.

Our Practical Work

We offer a comprehensive range of services and support so that we can support families. This includes our Information and Advice Service, and assessments for high learning potential. We also hold activity days around the country, speak at conferences and run bespoke training workshops for parents and professionals. We are active in seeking funding from numerous sources to help us to provide what families say they need. We are always keen to hear from families informing us of what services they would benefit from most, or how we can improve our existing services.

For more information go to www.potentialplusuk.org or call 01908 646433.

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Parent Voice

“The Introductory Parent Pack was very useful to help me find out what gifted and talented means. As a result of reading it I was able to find out more about what the school is doing for my daughter and know how to support her going forward.”

Sara, Mother of 9 year old girl

Suggested Log On

Website www.potentialplusuk.org

Academically more able information is available on the Department for Education website <http://www.education.gov.uk/schools/pupilsupport/inclusionandlearnersupport>

Gifted and Talented on BBC Website www.bbc.co.uk/schools/parents/gifted_and_talented/

Suggested Read On

***Parents' and Carers' Guide to Able and Talented Children* by Barry Teare**

Discusses issues and practices, gives advice on all curricular areas and offers advice on reading for able and talented children.

***A Parent's Guide to Gifted Children* edited by James T. Webb**

Written by four authors with decades of experience with gifted children and their families, this book covers issues such as peer relations, sibling issues, motivation and underachievement and discipline issues.

***Raising Gifted Kids: Everything You Need to Know to Help Your Exceptional Child Thrive* by Barbara Klein**

Helps parents understand and cope with the obstacles they face in raising a gifted child, and to make the best choices for their child's growth and happiness.

***The Bright Stuff: Playful Ways to Nurture Your Child's Extraordinary Mind* by C J Simister**

Offers an abundance of family activities that can be used on-the-go to initiate conversation and broaden young minds.

***Young, Gifted and Bored* by David George**

Written by an experienced and world-renowned author with a wealth of experience, this practical guide will challenge, excite and inspire teachers and show them how they can identify and provide for the needs of these children, includes a chapter on parenting the young, gifted and bored.