

Identification

Parent factsheet: Gifted and talented education

Gifted students have different learning needs from those of their age peers and therefore need targeted educational planning to support them in developing their potential. To help these students, the first step is to accurately locate and describe their specific or multiple gift(s) and talent(s) – commonly termed identification.

To identify gifted and talented students, schools must first understand giftedness and talent. The role of the teacher, trained and supported in the identification of giftedness, is crucial for spotting and nurturing gifted and talented students.

Some gifted students may not easily be identified because many factors mask the expression of giftedness (see the 'What it means if your child is a gifted underachiever factsheet'). It is important to recognise that many factors can hold back the expression of giftedness, and that gifted and talented students are found in all communities regardless of their cultural, socio-economic or ethnic background. There are gifted students who also present with one or more disabilities or other factors that impair identification.

When we can effectively identify gifted students, we are able to:

- locate the student's domain(s) of giftedness (intellectual, creative, social, perceptual, physical [muscular or motor control])
- describe the student's level of giftedness (mild, moderate, high, exceptional, profound)
- describe the student's fields of talent (academic, realistic, investigative, artistic, social, enterprising, conventional, games, sports).

Identification is a process with a diagnostic purpose. A collaborative process between parents, teachers, school psychologists and other professionals is best practice. Identification should occur throughout schooling, not only at a particular time such as at enrolment.

School principals need to ensure that there are processes in place to identify gifted students. Identification of students is a complex issue and includes the selection of suitable tests, checklists and tools. In the process, schools use multiple objective and subjective measures, and then group, differentiate, extend, enrich and accelerate as needed. Once a student has been identified as gifted, schools can use appropriate educational programs and provisions to meet their needs.

Where required, a psychologist must oversee assessments to ensure their relevance to the individual needs of the students and that results are communicated to parents and the school.

Schools select these tools so that gifted students who may otherwise be hard to identify are found. For example:

- underachieving students with high intellectual potential may score poorly on achievement tests
- other diagnostic tests, requiring reasonable literacy levels, may be ineffective in identifying students with higher abilities from culturally diverse backgrounds or who have a specific learning disorder.

The Gifted and Talented Students Policy Flowchart shows key steps and strategies in the ongoing process of identifying and monitoring gifted and talented students.

Characteristics of Giftedness: How we determine this

Early identification of giftedness is an important mechanism which provides a pathway to the full realisation of a gifted student's potential. There are characteristics that researchers have shown to be:

- consistent indicators of giftedness
- possible indicators of giftedness (that is, there is conflicting evidence or they are also observed in children who are not gifted)
- not related to giftedness (that is, there is no proven link).

There are also child and family characteristics which can mask giftedness. Not every characteristic needs to be evident for a child to be considered gifted – there will be individual clusters of these characteristics as well as individual expressions of them.

Consistent indicators of giftedness

- 'Good' thinking – e.g. reasoning, conceptual understanding, abstract thinking, problem solving, generalising
- Ease or speed of learning – may learn from being told/shown just once; quick to see errors as learning opportunities
- Advanced verbal abilities – early/sophisticated expressive language development, sophisticated vocabulary and/or complex sentences (although some gifted children begin to talk later than usual, then progress swiftly); advanced receptive language that can be observed (advanced ability to comprehend concepts, vocabulary, directions and questions)
- Exceptional memory – e.g. can retain information after brief exposure; able to recall early life events in complete detail
- Exceptional concentration or attention span – a long attention span when interested; children in the upper levels of giftedness may be able to concentrate on more than one thing at a time;
- Perseverance or motivation – e.g. greater goal-directedness and persistence to completion, an appetite for learning
- Wide ranging interests and knowledge – interests may be intense and outside what is expected for young children;
- Preference for older companions – prefer older children/adults to age peers, which may reflect advanced language levels, preferences for complexity in play, mature views of friendships
- Keen observation – an eye for detail; notes subtle changes
- Quantitative ability and interests – interest and skill in numbers; greater interest in time, calculators, money
- Exceptional spatial ability – interest and skill in puzzles, maps, diagrams; advanced sense of place and direction
- Early use of symbolic representation – early or sophisticated drawing or writing (depends on fine motor development).

Possible indicators of giftedness

- Early development – e.g. begins to sit and walk earlier than other children; begins to speak, read, write or use numbers earlier than other children
- Intense curiosity – shows intense curiosity/deeper knowledge than other children; e.g. insatiable need to know/explore
- Wide range of temperaments – e.g. perfectionism (concern with precision, especially in area of interest), sensitivity (easily hurt, empathetic), intensity, concern with moral or social issues
- Often exhibits imagination and creativity – e.g. finds imaginative ways to get out of doing things they don't want to do
- Has an advanced sense of humour – is humorous in speech, social interactions, art or story telling; makes jokes, puns, or plays on words.

Child characteristics that can mask giftedness

- Problematic behaviour – disruptiveness, stubbornness, lack of cooperation, refusal, questioning of authority
- Introversion – shy and hesitant children can be underestimated; introversion is more common in a gifted population
- Uneven development – it is common for gifted children to be more advanced in one area than another
- Learning difficulty – can result in the giftedness and learning difficulty masking each other so that the child appears average
- Physical or sensory disability – may result in fixation on disability and failure to recognise strengths
- Hiding ability – to gain acceptance, to meet teacher expectations, or to avoid failure or perceived adult demands.

Family characteristics that can mask giftedness

- Economic disadvantage – potential may be hidden without experiences to reveal it
- Minority language/bilingualism – proficiency in a language may be greater than the language of the educational setting
- Cultural customs – e.g. drawing attention to self; approaches to thinking; views of what giftedness is
- Gifted siblings – if one child has been identified as gifted, siblings may not be recognised if different in skills, interests etc.