Pupils with Exceptional Ability – Our School's Approach – An Overview
September 2017

Overview

In Scoil San Treasa, we are committed to providing an environment which encourages all students to maximise their potential and this clearly includes students who display some form of exceptional ability. There is no universally agreed term for students who generally would be described as 'exceptionally able'. The term 'exceptionally able' is used in the NCCA (National Council for Curriculum & Assessment) guidelines to describe students who require opportunities for enrichment and extension that go beyond those provided for the general cohort of students. The Report of the Special Education Review Committee (SERC) (1993, p.160) defines students who are exceptionally gifted or talented as those who have demonstrated their capacity to achieve high performance in one or more of the following areas:

- general intellectual ability
- specific academic aptitude
- creative or productive thinking
- leadership ability
- visual and performing arts
- mechanical aptitude
- psychomotor ability (e.g. athletics, gymnastics)

The identification of pupils with exceptional ability will include elements of the following: - teacher referral; assessment results; peer referral; parental referral; identification by a previous teacher, previous school, external agency or organisation; self-referral.

It should be noted that good practice for exceptionally able students is also good practice for all students and can improve the quality of teaching and learning throughout the school.

The school aims to develop all the abilities of students, including their personal and social skills, especially if these are not strengths. We aim to create a climate in which students are taught to relate well to each other and where differences of all kinds, including ability, are accepted.

Provision for Exceptionally Able Pupils*

- Teachers have high expectations.
- The school endeavours to provide a wide range of extra-curricular and co-curricular activities so that pupils will be afforded the opportunity to discover and develop and challenge their talents, encounter new challenges and gain exposure to a breadth of learning and life experiences (e.g. various activities associated with Novelty Day, such as entrepreneurship, creativity, self-management, management of resources, leadership and social skills; a wide range of Sports activities; Green Schools programme and related activities; Orchestra; Choir; Debating and Presentation. Additional extra-curricular opportunities are provided before/after school or during lunch-times in academic, creative, sporting and miscellaneous activities as resources allow, bearing in mind local circumstances at any given time.)
- Opportunities for extension and enrichment are built into all our schemes of work via a variety of forms of differentiation, including the seeking of different outcomes so that exceptionally able students can extend their thinking. Teachers use a variety of forms of differentiation in their teaching. For example, specific homework can be set for exceptionally able students and different outcomes can be sought so that exceptionally able students can extend their thinking/challenge their talents as appropriate. The class can work as individuals or in groups or at whole-class level at various times.

*Note: This is not an exhaustive list – consideration will be given to augmenting materials/activities etc. as opportunities present themselves and in line with overall resources and needs of school.

- Use of differentiated teaching, where the student remains with his/her peers, working with the same class material, but is also afforded access to differentiated materials that address the content/material in more depth.
- A bank of resources is augmented over time to facilitate in-class differentiation – in hard copy/electronic format as appropriate/as per available options e.g. Comprehension Boxes (graded/banded material); Maths Boxes (graded/banded material); resources such as Brain Snack (Maths-based problem solving – hard copy & digital format); a range of activity packs/books including material such as Creative Frameworks packs (R.Shaw), packs of activities to stimulate creative thinking (P.M. Clutterbuck) and activities specifically geared towards providing structured opportunities to develop and refine thinking skills against the backdrop of Bloom's Taxonomy; a range of parallel readers and parallel Maths textbooks; practical materials/puzzles such as tangrams and related tasks.
- There are planned extension opportunities or open-ended tasks at class level, group level, individual level and whole-school level e.g. Solve-A-Problem (Maths initiative), Write-A-Book Project (Third Class and Sixth Class), various competitions e.g. poetry/art/slogan.
- Creation of school displays and entering competitions in the pupil's identified area(s) of interest. Competitions provide opportunities for the student to research a topic beyond its content in the curriculum and assist in the development of the student's autonomy. Pupils are encouraged to engage with the Extension and Enrichment noticeboard in our school where they can self-select areas of interest and related follow-up activities/competition – this noticeboard was set up in 2017 and it is planned to steadily add to the activities presented there.
- Project work in various subject areas is actively promoted and encouraged. Project-based learning can draw on students' innate drive to learn and consequently increase motivation. It permits frequent feedback and opportunities for students to learn from their experience, and it can also act as a collaborative learning experience with peers that will help to develop social skills and increase self-esteem. Projects can be open-ended, thus encouraging students to engage in the art of inquiry.
- Creating opportunities for the student to express what they are learning in a variety of ways (e.g. PowerPoint® presentations, speeches, web-page productions, inventions, classroom demonstrations, exhibitions, etc.)
- Giving the student opportunities to consider questions/problems to which there are no definitive answers.
- Suggesting and/or providing supplementary reading on selected topics. The school will endeavour to provide library resources in response to particular areas of interest identified by pupils.
- Focus on assessment of own learning: Encouraging students to manage their own learning. Asking them to discern between what they did well and what they could do better in a particular project (e.g. 'Two Stars & A Wish' approach). Find out what aspects they are especially proud of. The emphasis should be on the evaluative component, rather than on the grades achieved.
- Avoidance of giving the student repetitious work as this may lead to students slowing down their work rate to avoid being given extra repetitious work as a 'reward' for finishing quickly. It is preferable to build extension activities onto the foundation of what has already been learned in new ways.
- The pupil may be invited to act as 'Expert on a Topic', if they have demonstrated a deep understanding of a topic/concept/task.
- Compacting the curriculum to render it denser and more complex, where appropriate and practicable. This involves sifting through and streamlining the curriculum in order to challenge students and provide more time for pursuing accelerated and/or enriched activities. It also involves establishing a baseline assessment to ascertain how much of the prescribed material the students have already mastered and how to devise a programme of enrichment.
- Plan for acceleration by moving the student through the curriculum at a faster pace, where appropriate and where practicable. This may involve skipping sections where work has been adequately mastered to move further ahead.
- Encourage and facilitate higher-order thinking and questions. Encourage critical thinking in relation to the curriculum. Allow the student to look for themes, patterns, main features, etc.
- Involve the student in organising co-curricular activities such as exhibitions, cake sales, outside speakers, various events etc. This will assist in the development of skills such as assessment of

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key issues, fact finding, self-management, managing others, managing resources and social skills.

- Use information and communication technology (ICT) to allow the student to work on specific topics in novel ways and to enhance the presentation of their work.
- Use of ICT to develop specific skills e.g. Scratch programming
- Use of ICT resources as a means of extending/enriching learning in specific areas
- The student may enjoy assisting peers with their work, which is valuable in terms of creating inclusive school environments. It is important, however, not to overuse this strategy and to negotiate it with the students concerned.
- Provision of opportunities for independent study. However, ensure group work with peers is not neglected as this is important in developing students' social and emotional skills.
- Suggestions and/or provision supplementary reading on selected topics.
- Information can be provided re the Centre for Talented Youth.
- The SEN team may give additional support (pending available resources, including time & staffing allocation constraints) by assisting the class teacher with the provision of resources.

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