

Policy and implementation
strategies for the education of
**gifted and talented
students**

Revised 2004



NEW SOUTH WALES
DEPARTMENT
OF EDUCATION
AND TRAINING



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strategies for the education of
**gifted and talented
students**



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1. Abstract

The New South Wales Government aims to identify gifted and talented students and to maximise their learning outcomes in all public schools. Giftedness refers to potential distinctly beyond the average for the student's age and encompasses a broad range of abilities in the intellectual, creative, socio-emotional and physical domains. Talent denotes achievement distinctly beyond the average for a student's age as a result of application to training and practice.

School communities have a responsibility to develop effective and equitable identification procedures and developmentally appropriate programs for gifted and talented students. Professional development will occur at state and regional levels and within school communities to enable provision for gifted and talented students. The Director-General will report on the outcomes of schooling for gifted and talented students and ensure that policy implementation is monitored and evaluated.

2. Applicability

This policy applies to all staff employed in State Office, regions, NSW public schools, their school communities and all students who attend public schools.

3. Superseded documents

This policy replaces:

- NSW Department of School Education. (1991a). *Policy for the education of gifted and talented students*. Sydney.
- NSW Department of School Education. (1991b). *Implementation strategies for the education of gifted and talented students*. Sydney.

4. Context

All government schools have a responsibility to educate all students to their potential. The NSW public school system is committed to high quality educational outcomes for all gifted and talented students.

Gifted and talented students are found in all communities regardless of their ethnic, cultural or socio-economic backgrounds. The gifted population includes students who are underachieving and who have disabilities. It is imperative that school communities develop effective, equitable and defensible identification programs that avoid cultural bias and provide developmentally appropriate programs for gifted and talented students.

Educational practices promoted in the field of gifted and talented education draw on information about:

- the nature, identification and development of giftedness and talents in the school population
- implementation of effective curriculum and instruction for gifted and talented students.

This policy is to be implemented in the context of all other Departmental policies and the NSW model of pedagogy described in *Quality teaching in NSW public schools: Discussion paper* (NSW Department of Education and Training, 2003).

Definitions

The policy adopts definitions of giftedness and talent based on Gagné's (2003) *Differentiated Model of Giftedness and Talent* (DMGT).

Gifted students are those whose potential is distinctly above average in one or more of the following domains of human ability: intellectual, creative, social and physical.

Talented students are those whose skills are distinctly above average in one or more areas of human performance.

Gagné's model recognises giftedness as a broad concept that encompasses various abilities including intellectual, creative, leadership, social and physical skills. Gifted and talented students vary in terms of the nature and level of their abilities. It is critical that gifted and talented students be given appropriate opportunity, stimulation and experiences to develop their potential. The translation of giftedness into talent results from application to appropriate opportunities for learning, training and practice.

It is important for school communities to be sensitive to catalysts and impediments that can help or hinder the recognition of giftedness and the development of talent in young people. These include intra-personal and environmental factors:

Intra-personal factors

- motivation
- self-management
- self-esteem
- self-efficacy
- poor health and disability
- learning difficulties
- language proficiency

Environmental factors

- socio-economic background
- beliefs about giftedness and talent
- inter-personal relationships
- events
- teacher expectations
- teaching practices
- learning activities

The recognition of gifts and the development of particular talents may be affected by a student's cultural identity. Gifts and talents need to be viewed from multiple perspectives reflecting the values and beliefs of different cultures.

Underachievement

If students are not working to their potential in school they are underachieving. Underachievement is defined as a discrepancy between a student's school performance and some index of the student's natural ability. Many factors may contribute to underachievement through intra-personal or environmental difficulties. Some students may deliberately underachieve for peer acceptance.

The problem of underachievement can be compounded by inadequate identification procedures, resulting in the problem of 'invisible underachievement'. Some gifted students may not be identified because social-emotional issues or lack of meta-cognitive skills affect their performance.

5. Policy statement

This policy statement recognises that decision making in relation to programs and provisions for gifted and talented students is a complex and interactive process.

School principals, in consultation with parents/caregivers, teachers, school counsellors and other appropriate personnel, have the prime responsibility for decisions in relation to the education of gifted and talented students.

- School communities have a responsibility to identify their gifted and talented students.
- School communities have a responsibility to foster collaborative home–school partnerships to support gifted and talented students.
- School communities have a responsibility to provide a range of opportunities and to monitor and evaluate programs for their gifted and talented students.
- Teachers, with support, have a responsibility to identify the gifted and talented students in their classes.
- Teachers have a responsibility to select and implement a variety of teaching strategies for inclusion in programs for the range of gifted and talented students in their classes.
- Regions and schools have a responsibility to co-ordinate school provisions for gifted and talented students when it is feasible for more than one school to share this responsibility.
- Regions and schools have a responsibility to provide opportunities for staff development in the education of gifted and talented students for principals, teachers and other appropriate personnel.
- The Director-General has a responsibility to account for the implementation of Government policy and to report on the outcomes of schooling for gifted and talented students in NSW.

6. Procedures and standards

6.1 School communities have a responsibility to identify their gifted and talented students.

The principal will ensure that an identification program is developed to identify gifted and talented students. The purpose and characteristics of the identification program are to be communicated to the school community. The boundary and features of the local school community will depend on contextual considerations and will be determined by the school principal. Parents/caregivers, students, peers, teachers, principals, school counsellors and community members are to be included in the identification process.

The identification process must:

- be school-wide
- use multiple criteria
- be inclusive
- be dynamic and continuous
- be culturally fair
- ensure that all domains of giftedness and fields of talent are identified
- recognise degrees of giftedness and talent
- be organised and linked to differentiation
- allow for early identification and identification at all stages
- enable input from the full range of stakeholders.

Specialised approaches may be needed to recognise gifts and talents in relation to the following groups:

- underachievers
- students with learning difficulties
- students with disabilities
- conduct-disordered students
- students from non-English speaking backgrounds
- students from culturally diverse backgrounds
- socio-economically disadvantaged students
- students disadvantaged by gender inequity
- geographically isolated students.

The school community should recognise that certain factors may inhibit the expression of giftedness.

- Students may deliberately hide their giftedness to seek peer acceptance or avoid appearing different.
- Students may lack the motivation to achieve.
- Students may need intervention strategies to enable their giftedness to be identified.
- Parents or caregivers may be reluctant to acknowledge, or may be unaware, that their child is gifted.

Schools may seek the support of regional gifted and talented committees and networks in providing:

- means appropriate for recognising creativity as well as general ability
- performance and behavioural indicators appropriate for all stages to assist teachers to identify and cater for gifted students
- structures that enable gifted and talented students to be grouped and to work together in a variety of educational contexts.

6.2 School communities have a responsibility to foster collaborative home–school partnerships to support gifted and talented students.

Parents/caregivers can provide useful and reliable information about the abilities and characteristics of their children. It is important that information from parents/caregivers is collected and considered before the child enrolls in Kindergarten and throughout the child's schooling experience.

Schools are required to organise and publicise home and school communication channels for the purpose of sharing information about gifted and talented students. In the case of Indigenous students, schools must foster collaborative relationships with their communities. Differing cultural groups have their own protocols for communication and for relating to schools. Examples of these protocols can be found in the document *Working with Aboriginal communities: A guide to community consultation and protocols*. This document can be found on the Board of Studies web site:

http://www.boardofstudies.nsw.edu.au/aboriginal_research/#community_consultation

Recording information provided by parents/caregivers helps reduce the risk of underachievement and improves opportunities for identification and educational provision for gifted and talented students.

6.3 School communities have a responsibility to provide a range of opportunities and to monitor and evaluate programs for their gifted and talented students.

Schools have a responsibility to develop a school policy for the education of gifted and talented students and, where appropriate, a KLA policy.

A wide range of opportunities is available to support gifted and talented students. A key set of strategies includes the provision of opportunity classes, selective high schools and specialist secondary schools. Schools may form their own full-time or part-time classes or join with schools in the region for gifted and talented educational programs.

School principals will form gifted and talented committees and should identify a person or persons to co-ordinate gifted educational provision. The role of this person or persons will be determined by the school principal in consultation with the school community. These committees may include parent/caregiver, cultural group and student representatives. The role of the gifted and talented co-ordinators may include:

- developing school policy
- serving as chairperson of the school's gifted and talented committee
- organising identification programs
- developing and evaluating programs
- contributing to the professional learning of teachers
- training staff in cultural education
- serving on the Professional Learning Team
- serving on the Learning Support Team

- monitoring and tracking gifted students
- liaising with parents/caregivers
- attending conferences
- disseminating information
- mentoring
- counselling.

Gifted and talented students require a differentiated curriculum to cater for their academic, social and emotional needs. Programs that incorporate acceleration, enrichment, grouping and counselling options best meet the needs of gifted and talented students.

More information about differentiation of the curriculum, acceleration and grouping strategies can be obtained in *Guidelines for the use of strategies to support gifted and talented students*, a companion document to this policy.

Accelerated progression is a set of administrative strategies that can be implemented for gifted and talented students. In relation to 6.3.1 and 6.3.2, principals will consult other relevant people to assist them in these decisions.

- 6.3.1 School principals have the final responsibility for deciding when the early entry to school of a student who is intellectually gifted and talented is appropriate, in order to meet the student's educational, social and emotional needs.
- 6.3.2 School principals have the final responsibility for deciding when any form of accelerated progression is appropriate for individual gifted and talented students in Years K–12 to meet each student's educational, social and emotional needs.

The *Guidelines for accelerated progression* (revised 2000) can be found on the Board of Studies web site: <http://www.boardofstudies.nsw.edu.au/manuals/index.html>

6.4 Teachers, with support, have a responsibility to identify the gifted and talented students in their classes.

Identification of a student's giftedness is an integral part of the teacher's process of recognising and catering for individual student needs. Teachers may initiate the identification of gifted students in consultation with parents/caregivers, school counsellors and other members of the school community. Identification of giftedness is fundamental to the provision of a developmentally appropriate program. Teachers will contribute information to the school-wide identification program from a variety of sources. A learning environment that incorporates creativity and challenge is an important source of information about students' abilities. Challenging provisions should be maintained as a daily routine for gifted and talented students.

Identification methods will be selected on the basis of age/stage and the domain of the ability to be assessed. They include:

- evaluation of student responses to a range of classroom activities
- nomination by parent/caregiver, peer, self and teacher
- assessment of responses to challenging competitions

- off-level testing¹
- standardised tests of creative ability
- IQ tests and other culturally appropriate measures of ability
- observation and anecdotal evidence
- behavioural checklists
- interviews
- academic grades.

It is important that:

- the teacher identification process be part of a school and community-wide identification program
- multiple criteria be used
- a mix of subjective and objective strategies be employed
- IQ tests be used in the context of other indicators and measures
- the expectation be avoided that students will perform equally well on all measures
- the underachieving, the exceptionally gifted, students with disabilities and those with learning difficulties or from minority populations be not overlooked.

School counsellors contribute to the identification of gifted students and support teachers by:

- conducting psychometric assessment
- providing counselling at the request of the student/parents/caregivers or the school
- being an advocate for the student
- conducting student development programs
- providing staff development.

6.5 Teachers have a responsibility to select and implement a variety of teaching strategies for inclusion in programs for the range of gifted and talented students in their classes.

Differentiation or modification of the curriculum caters for differences between gifted students and age peers. Gifted students need differentiation because they:

- learn at faster rates
- find, solve and act on problems more readily
- manipulate abstract ideas and make connections to an advanced degree.

To encourage high achievement, originality, problem-solving, higher-order thinking skills and creativity, teachers will consider the individual needs of the gifted and talented students in their classes. Teachers will assess students' knowledge and skills to provide challenges and learning options appropriate for their development.

¹ Testing at a level designed for older students

Teachers may use a variety of teaching and learning strategies. Programs can be implemented that incorporate:

- various grouping strategies
- accelerated progression
- extension activities within and across classes
- enrichment
- contract work, with students negotiating the components of the contract
- open-ended questions, activities and assignments
- online learning
- hypothesis testing and problem solving
- individual research and investigation
- opportunities for peer tutoring and assessment
- mentors with specific expertise.

6.6 Regions and schools have a responsibility to co-ordinate school provisions for gifted and talented students when it is feasible for more than one school to share this responsibility.

Each region will nominate a senior officer who will have responsibility for the education of gifted and talented students as part of a statement of duties.

This officer will chair a regional committee that develops and oversees regional plans made in response to schools' needs regarding gifted and talented students. The regional committee may include representatives from:

- primary schools
- secondary schools
- school counsellors
- tertiary institutions
- significant cultural groups
- parent/caregiver groups
- community members.

The regional committee may assist with the provision of links among schools, and with outside agencies, to support programs that cannot feasibly be provided by an individual school, e.g. mentor programs and out-of-school-hours programs. Inter-departmental, intra-departmental and business links may also assist and provide support for regional provision of gifted and talented education.

Where distance poses a problem for attendance at meetings, alternatives such as email, video-conferencing and online chat rooms can be used.

Educational provisions for gifted and talented students will be included in regional management plans.

Regions are to develop strategies for co-ordinating provisions for gifted education by working with gifted and talented co-ordinators either within each school or, where practical, across a group of schools.

6.7 Regions and schools have a responsibility to provide staff development opportunities in the education of gifted and talented students for principals, teachers and other appropriate personnel.

State Office and regions will support the professional learning of staff in gifted education through a range of resources and opportunities.

Schools, regions and State Office will work collaboratively to provide professional development courses in response to the identified needs of students, teachers, executive staff and the school community.

State Office, regions and schools will evaluate the impact of professional training in gifted education in developing and improving future professional learning.

In developing an endorsed school plan for gifted and talented education, the team responsible for professional learning will work collaboratively with the school community, taking account of identified teacher needs, school evaluation data and school and Departmental priorities.

The professional learning component of the school plan is to include the goals and strategies for training teachers and other school personnel in gifted and talented education.

The professional learning team has overall responsibility for implementing and evaluating the gifted and talented professional learning component of the endorsed school plan.

6.8 The Director-General has a responsibility to account for the implementation of Government policy and to report on the outcomes of schooling for gifted and talented students in NSW.

The Director-General will nominate a senior officer at state level to have responsibility for policy on the education of gifted and talented students.

On matters related to the education of gifted and talented students in Government schools, the Director-General will:

- develop a mechanism for the public reporting of educational outcomes achieved by gifted and talented students
- provide representation on government policy and advisory committees
- collaborate with the Board of Studies
- communicate with State, Territory, Commonwealth and international bodies
- consult with key parent/caregiver, student representative and community groups, professional associations and tertiary institutions
- institute a reference group to monitor and oversee a structured evaluation of the implementation of the policy.

References

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