

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

Revised 2004

Support package

**Parent
information**



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Contents

Foreword	5
Introduction	5
What is meant by giftedness and talent?	6
Characteristics of gifted and talented students	6
What is Departmental policy in relation to gifted and talented students?	7
Policy and implementation strategies for the education of gifted and talented students (revised 2004)	8
What does it mean for parents?	8
Support packages	9
What is the purpose of the support packages?	9
Selective high schools and opportunity classes	10
Specialist high schools	11
Extension programs	11
Associations	12
References	13
Abbreviations	14
Resources	15
Frequently asked questions	17

Foreword

This package provides an overview of the New South Wales Department of Education and Training's policy for the education of gifted and talented students. Its purpose is to provide parents with an understanding of how giftedness and talent are defined, the needs and characteristics of gifted and talented students and the public education provisions for them.

The information in this document should be read in conjunction with the *Policy and implementation strategies for the education of gifted and talented students* (revised 2004) available at

<https://www.det.nsw.edu.au/policies/>

The associated support packages in identification, acceleration and curriculum differentiation are available at

<http://www.curriculumsupport.nsw.edu.au/gats/index.cfm>

Introduction

The Department of Education and Training comprises ten regions. The ten regions are:

- Hunter/Central Coast
- Illawarra and South Coast
- New England
- North Coast
- Northern Sydney
- Riverina
- South Western Sydney
- Sydney
- Western NSW
- Western Sydney

Regional directors are in charge of each region and are supported in this role by school education directors. School education directors are responsible for the operation of a number of schools in each region. Each principal reports to a school education director.

Further information about the Department of Education and Training is available at <https://www.det.nsw.edu.au/>

The NSW Government is committed to providing all public school students with the opportunity to do their best. School principals, in consultation with their staff, determine which types of educational programs are needed to maximise the educational opportunities for gifted and talented students. All learning activities of the school make up the curriculum. The curriculum involves studies specified within syllabuses produced by the Board of Studies (BOS). Syllabuses are written for each key learning area (KLA) in primary school and for each subject within key learning areas in secondary school. Information about syllabuses that are taught in NSW schools is available at <http://www.boardofstudies.nsw.edu.au/>

A wide range of programs and initiatives based on the BOS syllabuses is provided to support gifted students. These services include selective classes and schools and access to programs in local primary and secondary schools.

What is meant by giftedness and talent?

Gagné's (2003) *Differentiated Model of Giftedness and Talent* (DMGT) has been adopted in the revised policy. This model provides research-based definitions of giftedness and talent that have a logical connection to identification and curriculum programs.

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.

This means that giftedness is a broad concept that encompasses a range of abilities, not only in the intellectual domain but also in the creative and social areas. An important feature of the DMGT is that there is a distinction between giftedness and talent. Giftedness becomes talent as a result of training and practice. A gifted person will not become talented without application.

Characteristics of gifted and talented students

Distinguishing features of the gifted become apparent from an early age. Silverman (1993) provided a useful generalisation of the intellectual and associated personality characteristics of the gifted group. Not all of these features are exclusive to gifted students, but such students possess them to a greater degree.

Intellectual traits	Personality traits
Exceptional reasoning ability	Insightful
Intellectual curiosity	Need to understand
Rapid learning rate	Need for mental stimulation
Facility for abstraction	Perfectionism
Complex thought processes	Need for precision/logic
Vivid imagination	Excellent sense of humour
Early moral concern	Sensitivity/empathy
Passion for learning	Intensity
Powers of concentration	Perseverance
Analytical thinking	Acute self-awareness
Divergent thinking/creativity	Nonconformity
Keen sense of justice	Questioning rules/authority
Capacity for reflection	Tendency to introversion

(Silverman, 1993 p. 53)

Not all the characteristics of gifted and talented students are seen as positive. Davis and Rimm (2004) listed the following negative characteristics that gifted students may display. These are often exhibited by gifted underachievers and students with a learning disability:

- stubbornness
- non participation in class activities
- uncooperativeness
- cynicism
- sloppiness and disorganisation
- a tendency to question authority
- emotional frustration
- absentmindedness
- low interest in detail.

Varying patterns of characteristics are found in individual students because they differ in intellectual level, specific abilities and degree of mental activity (Silverman, 1993). The more highly gifted students tend to show more intensity and energy (Clark, 2002). Not all students will display all of these characteristics, all of the time. Many criteria are required to identify gifted and talented students because of their diversity.

What is Departmental policy in relation to gifted and talented students?

The Department of Education and Training takes a strong equity stance, providing a range of programs and initiatives to cater for the individual needs of gifted and talented students, including rural students and other students who may be considered disadvantaged.

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. School communities are required to develop fair and effective identification programs that avoid cultural bias and provide appropriate programs for gifted and talented students.

A flexible approach to the provision for gifted and talented students is endorsed. This approach acknowledges that gifted and talented students cannot be stereotyped. All government schools in New South Wales are responsible for identifying their gifted and talented students and providing for their educational needs.

All gifted students have access to various forms of acceleration that enable educators and parents/caregivers to determine the most appropriate means of increasing the pace at which the gifted child is able to move through the curriculum. These include early entry for Kindergarten students, grade advancement and acceleration in one or more key learning areas.

The provision of acceleration enables gifted students to work with older students who are performing at similar levels. Students for whom placement with age peers

is needed for appropriate social and emotional development can access learning opportunities that are designed for older students. Students who have already demonstrated achievement of learning outcomes at their stage level can be provided with the opportunity to achieve outcomes designed for higher stages of schooling.

More information about acceleration is provided in the Board of Studies document, *Guidelines for accelerated progression* (revised 2000) available at <http://www.boardofstudies.nsw.edu.au/manuals/index.html>

Gifted students are also catered for in the regular classroom by:

- ability grouping, which may occur within a class or across several classes or grades
- curriculum differentiation, which involves providing an enriched program for gifted students, including challenging, open-ended learning activities, long-term assignments and additional activities designed to enrich the regular teaching program
- extension programs for gifted students who are already capable of achieving many of the learning outcomes of the regular curriculum.

Policy and implementation strategies for the education of gifted and talented students (revised 2004)

What does it mean for parents?

The 1991 *Policy for the education of gifted and talented students* was recently revised. The new *Policy and implementation strategies for the education of gifted and talented students* (revised 2004) aims to maximise the learning outcomes of gifted and talented students in all public schools.

The 2004 policy outlines the roles and responsibilities of parents/caregivers and of school, regional and state office personnel.

Parents/caregivers have a role to play in:

- fostering home-school partnerships
- supplying information to schools about the needs and characteristics of their children
- deciding whether grade advancement or subject acceleration of their child is appropriate
- evaluating gifted and talented educational programs.

Schools have a role to play in:

- developing a school policy for gifted and talented students
- developing and publicising home and school communication channels
- developing an action plan for gifted and talented education
- ensuring that an identification program is developed, implemented and evaluated

- developing, implementing and evaluating a range of programs for gifted and talented students
- providing staff development opportunities in gifted and talented education.

School counsellors are available to support the school in the education of gifted and talented students by:

- providing advice on appropriate assessment procedures and tools
- providing counselling for students
- interpreting reports from other agencies
- consulting on students' emotional and social maturity.

Regions have a role to play in:

- providing a senior regional officer contact for the education of gifted and talented students
- forming a regional committee to co-ordinate school provisions for gifted and talented students
- establishing regional committees and networks to enable gifted students to work together among schools, with outside agencies or mentors
- providing staff development for principals, teachers and other relevant school personnel to implement the 2004 policy
- collecting, analysing and evaluating data to report on the outcomes of regional gifted educational programs including accelerated progression.

Three additional support packages have been developed to enable implementation of the 2004 policy.

Support packages

What is the purpose of the support packages?

In addition to the material directed at parents/caregivers within this package, three other packages for schools are available. They are titled identification, acceleration and curriculum differentiation.

Much of the material within these support packages concerns strategies for whole-school and classroom implementation of the revised policy for the education of gifted and talented students. However, components of each package provide reference points in informing and maintaining support for parents/caregivers.

The material on identification, for example, includes discussion about the diverse nature of gifted children, why it is important to identify these children, and the subjective and objective screening methods that may be applied as part of the identification process. This information may help parents/caregivers to understand the characteristics and needs of their preschool child and assist in communication with teachers and schools.

Supportive information that parents/caregivers may be able to provide is invaluable in enabling teachers to identify gifted children. This, in turn, helps teachers when

catering for each student's learning and emotional needs. There are checklists for parents/caregivers, teachers and peers to use in the identification of the gifted child, with specific material provided on identifying gifted children from culturally diverse groups.

The second package advises on procedures for early entry to school, subject or stage acceleration, mentoring, and other models of a faster-paced instruction for the gifted student. Of the many intervention strategies provided by schools, acceleration is supported by research as being most advantageous to students. This is because it can enable students to access a developmentally appropriate curriculum. Research information should enable parents/caregivers to proceed with confidence when schools recommend a specific program for the gifted student. Many supplementary resources accompany this package, and parents/caregivers may find these interesting and helpful. Where appropriate these will also be available online.

Because curriculum differentiation may be difficult to understand, it is intended that parents/caregivers also have access to resources that explain which approaches are being employed in their child's learning and why. The definitions and explanations of curriculum differentiation are extensive, so that teachers and parents/caregivers have a common understanding of the practice. The availability of many models and approaches should reassure parents/caregivers that schools are able to respond to the needs of their gifted child in a way that provides flexibility, challenge and interest.

The comprehensive reference and resource lists in the packages will assist parents/caregivers in keeping abreast of current approaches to instructional methods for gifted students. They provide contact details for support agencies and additional materials for those who are interested in reading more widely in the field of gifted education.

These support packages are an ongoing project. As more material is developed, it will be progressively added to the web site, so it is recommended that parents/caregivers regularly visit the site to check on current ideas and information, at <http://www.curriculumsupport.nsw.edu.au/gats/index.cfm>

Selective high schools and opportunity classes

The extent of the system-wide provisions of opportunity classes and selective high schools in NSW is unique in Australia. They cater for academically gifted and talented students by providing an educationally enriched environment. These schools provide intellectual stimulation by grouping students, concentrating school resources and using specialised teaching methods.

Partially selective high schools have both selective and community classes. For example, Sydney Secondary College Balmain and Leichhardt Campuses cater for students from Years 7 to 10. Students then generally proceed to Sydney Secondary College Blackwattle Bay Campus for Years 11 and 12.

Students applying for placement in selective high schools and opportunity classes are selected on academic merit in open competition. Academic merit for selective high schools is determined mainly by the combination of results of the Selective High Schools Test in English language, writing, mathematics and general ability, together with primary school assessments in English and mathematics.

For placement in opportunity classes, academic merit is determined mainly by the combination of results of the Opportunity Class Placement Test in English language, mathematics and general ability, together with primary school assessments in English and mathematics.

Further information can be found at
<http://www.schools.nsw.edu.au/schoolfind/types/index.php>

Specialist high schools

Specialist schools exist to meet the diverse needs of gifted and talented students. These schools provide for students who are gifted in a particular domain. Schools are available for students gifted in sport, languages, performing arts, music and technology. These specialist schools include, for example, Keira High School and Westfield Sports High School. Entry requirements for these schools vary. Some schools interview and audition students for a place.

Community classes also exist in some of these schools, along with specialist classes. As each school has its own criteria for entry the most up-to-date information regarding application procedures can be found by contacting the individual schools.

Further information about specialist schools can be found at
<http://www.schools.nsw.edu.au/schoolfind/types/index.php>

Extension programs

The purpose of extension programs is to provide the appropriate level of academic challenge to cater for the intellectual and socio-emotional needs of gifted and talented students. Each school determines the needs of its gifted and talented students and designs programs that are appropriate for them. Appropriately complex extension opportunities can be offered to gifted students in various ways. Extension programs consist of curriculum goals, methods of instruction and grouping, enrichment and acceleration opportunities. Counselling is an important component. More information about the ways in which developmentally appropriate programs can be developed for gifted students is provided in the support packages for the revised policy, available at

<http://www.curriculumsupport.nsw.edu.au/gats/index.cfm>

Associations

The NSW Association for Gifted and Talented Children Inc. aims to provide support to gifted children, their parents/caregivers and teachers. Activities such as camps, workshops and forums are organised by the Association and are open to children, parents/caregivers, teachers and interested community members.

The Association publishes a journal, titled *Gifted*, four times a year. This journal provides material for gifted students, their parents/caregivers and teachers. Activities and support groups organised by the Association are advertised in the journal.

The Association has a library which members can access by attending the Association's office or by having materials sent to them.

The Association's web site provides information about gifted children and is available at

<http://www.nswagtc.org.au>

Each Australian state has its own gifted and talented association.

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Abbreviations

A comprehensive list of Department acronyms is available at <https://www.det.nsw.edu.au>

ACER	Australian Council for Educational Research
AP	Assistant Principal
BOS	Board of Studies
COGE	Certificate of Gifted Education
DET	NSW Department of Education and Training
DP	Deputy Principal
GATS	Gifted and Talented Students
GERRIC	Gifted Education Research, Resource and Information Centre
HECS	Higher Education Contribution Scheme
IQ	Intelligence Quotient
KLA	Key Learning Area
MCEETYA	Ministerial Council on Education, Employment, Training and Youth Affairs
OC	Opportunity Class
SED	School Education Director
WISC	Wechsler Intelligence Scale for Children

Resources

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Electronic

The following web sites were available on 9 November 2004:

Australian Mensa.

<http://www.au.mensa.org/giftedkids.html/>

National Association for Gifted Children.

<http://www.nagc.org/>

NSW Association for Gifted and Talented Children.

<http://www.nswagtc.org.au/>

NSW Department of Education and Training. *Gifted and Talented Education.*

<http://www.schools.nsw.edu.au/learning/yrk12focusareas/gifteded/>

NSW Department of Education and Training, Gifted and Talented Unit.

<http://www.curriculumsupport.nsw.edu.au/gats/index.cfm>

University of New England. *TalentEd.*

<http://scs.une.edu.au/TalentEd/>

University of New South Wales. *GERRIC: Gifted Education Research Resource and Information Centre.*

<http://gerric.arts.unsw.edu.au/>

Frequently asked questions



What is the Department's policy on early entry to school?

The Department's policy (revised 2004) states: "School communities have a responsibility to develop effective and equitable identification procedures and developmentally appropriate programs for gifted and talented students" (p. 5). Acceleration, which includes early entry to school, is an administrative procedure that accommodates the intellectual and emotional characteristics that allow gifted and talented students to learn more quickly than their peers. Early entry is at the discretion of the school principal. It is restricted to gifted children aged four years or older at January 31 of the year of enrolment. An extensive psychological evaluation of intellectual, academic and socio-emotional ability is required.



Which schools have programs for gifted and talented students?

Local authorities will be able to provide information regarding early childhood programs in preschools. Parents/caregivers are advised to contact the local primary schools in their area and ask them what programs or provisions are available for gifted students. Feeder preschools may also be able to advise parents/caregivers as to what is offered in schools past pupils now attend. From the beginning of 2005 all Departmental comprehensive high schools will be required to make provisions for the gifted students in their schools. Contact your local high school and ask them what programs they offer. If you have any further concerns, contact your local regional office and ask to speak to the officer responsible for gifted and talented education in that region.



How can I get my son/daughter assessed?

Assessment of the student can be done in many ways. Parents/caregivers can provide information that can aid the assessment process. Information about what children are reading or doing at home and involved in outside school hours will provide useful information to schools. It is often helpful to keep a portfolio of drawings and other tasks that your child completes.

The classroom teacher may be the first professional person to assess a student. This assessment will be done using various techniques and tools. The teacher will observe the student in a variety of learning situations. The teacher will also assess the student using achievement and standardised tests in the various key learning areas (KLAs). If further and more in-depth assessment is required, the school counsellor can test the student, using an individual IQ test. Individual IQ testing will be undertaken after consultation with the teacher and parents/caregivers and any other relevant personnel. The test is usually conducted at the school the student attends.



I think that my child is gifted but I am not sure. How can I tell?

Agreement about what “gifted” means is not easily reached, although it is generally accepted that a gifted student has the potential to perform in one or more domains of ability at a superior level, compared with students of the same age. The domains of ability are intellectual, creative, social and physical.

A gifted student may demonstrate characteristics that are associated with giftedness long before he/she begins school. Research shows that, in the early years, parents/caregivers are the best judges of their child’s abilities. Early predictors of potential in a gifted child may include:

- curiosity
- advanced/refined development of either gross or fine motor skills
- quick assimilation of knowledge, early vocalising, and sentence complexity
- creativity in activities, including questioning and problem-solving.

Some or many of these attributes may be demonstrated in the following ways:

- concentration and interest in reading, listening and writing
- interest in number and time concepts
- sophisticated sense of humour
- preference for the company of adults and older children
- accurate recall
- impatience with limitations, repetition and injustices
- superior organisational/categorising skills
- knowledge of cause and effect, and ability to make inferences at an early age.



How do I know which school is right for my gifted child?

As a parent/caregiver, you are able to judge which school will best meet your child’s educational needs. The first step is to look at your local school and what it has to offer. Make an appointment to talk to the principal. Make a list of the features of the school about which you would like information. The list could include the school’s philosophy, how students are grouped, and how achievement is acknowledged.

Be prepared to share knowledge of your child with the school. Talk to other parents/caregivers whose children attend the school. Perhaps attend a P&C meeting and meet others who are involved in the school. Schools have a commitment to meet your child’s needs and will be prepared to discuss any concerns that you may have.



How do I approach my child’s school?

Both parents/caregivers and teachers share an interest in enabling students to reach their potential. If you have a concern that your child’s educational needs are not being met the first port of call is the classroom teacher. Make an appointment as teachers have many demands on their time.

When you meet with the teacher, be clear about what your concerns are. Approach the teacher with an open mind and be prepared to negotiate. Offer suggestions about

how the teacher could enhance and perhaps modify your child's program in order to provide appropriate opportunities. The teacher may have 30 students in the class and will be appreciative of any insight you can offer with respect to your child.

If you still have questions after talking to the classroom teacher, the principal would be the next person with whom you could meet. Again, make an appointment and be clear about your concerns and goals for the meeting.

Further information is available from your regional office, particularly the officer responsible for gifted and talented education.

It is also important to acknowledge the efforts that schools make for gifted and talented students by providing positive feedback to them.



As a parent/caregiver, what can I do to support my gifted child?

As a parent/caregiver of a gifted child, it is first and foremost important to remember that they are children and require love and discipline.

Listen to your child's concerns and allow your child time for recreation. They do not have to be constantly engaged in formal activities but, at the same time, it is important to support them in their hobbies and interests.



What extension opportunities are available outside school hours for my gifted child?

Out-of-school opportunities for enrichment are numerous, with varied programs running throughout the term and others provided during school holidays. Additional information about some of the opportunities is available at

- School-sponsored participation in competitions, e.g. *Nestlé Writearound Australia*.
<http://www.nestle.com.au/writearound/>
- Online resources such as the *CSIRO's Double Helix Club*.
<http://www.csiro.au/helix/>
- *TalentEd* enrichment programs.
<http://scs.une.edu.au/TalentEd/>
- *NSW Writers' Centre* for aspiring writers.
<http://www.nswwriterscentre.org.au/>
- *Westalent*, a community enrichment program for gifted and talented children.
http://www.cadre.com.au/showcase/llec/html/body_westalent.html
- The *NSW Association for Gifted and Talented Children Inc.*
<http://www.nswagtc.org.au/index.html>
- *GERRIC* the Gifted Education Research, Resource and Information Centre, located at the University of New South Wales.
<http://gerric.arts.unsw.edu.au/stdt.html>

