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Developing school policy

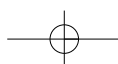
Institutions developing effective policy for AG&T recognise that:

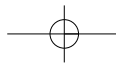
- Policy is the key to establishing and safeguarding effective practice
- There is no 'one-size-fits-all' solution to policy development and discrete AG&T policies can either stand alone or be linked to more generic teaching and learning and/or inclusion policies
- Policies need to be as unique as the institutions in which they are formulated. 

All schools have a policy for their able learners, even if the policy is not to have a formal policy. Such an approach is not necessarily an indication of institutional inertia or complacency but can derive from the sincerely held educational philosophy that the most educationally advantaged youngsters will automatically gain most from the provision on offer and that diverting attention, effort and resources from the more needy is both unnecessary and, to the degree that it is socially unjust and elitist, potentially wrong.

The expectation that cream will automatically rise to the top, however, is not endorsed by experience. As with all learners, the more able, the highly able, those with marked aptitude(s) for particular area(s) of study, the gifted, the talented (to use only some of the more common designations for youngsters with high potential and/or attainment), vary significantly in their progress, self-awareness and overall performance in school.

Some of the reasons underlying the phenomenon of gifted underachievement will be examined in chapters 2 and 3 of this book but the trend for able, gifted and talented (AG&T) youngsters generally to feature as an underperforming pupil group in our schools and colleges is well recognised. At the time of writing, for example, a controversy has arisen in England regarding the reported one in seven (11,500+) GCSE students on central government AG&T programmes nationally who failed in 2007 to achieve five subjects, including English and mathematics at grade C or above – a level of attainment generally associated not with high ability but with performance at expected levels.





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To enshrine the view that young people of all abilities are entitled to equal consideration as learners, the 1988 Education Act in England decreed that an acceptable curriculum must be 'broad, balanced, relevant and *differentiated*' (emphasis added). This emphasis on individual entitlement prompted schools to consider the different learning needs of pupils across the whole ability range when drawing up policies to ensure the effective delivery of the curriculum. In common with many other countries, this drive to give pupils access to an education that matches individual requirements and guarantees continuity and progression in learning for all has since been at the heart of many schools' development of policy and practice in relation to their AG&T youngsters. In 2004, for English schools, the Children's Act and Every Child Matters legislation consolidated this principle by adding the concept of *personalisation* to that of differentiation as a guarantor of a child's right to an education that takes account of his or her strengths and weaknesses as a learner.

Can Quality Standards provide a starting point?

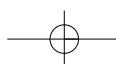
For English schools, National Quality Standards have been released which may have a broader currency elsewhere. These are broad benchmarks against which schools can audit and assess their current level of provision for AG&T. In essence these standards provide a range of performance indicators and descriptors against which to measure institutional development. The school policy standard outlines three levels of acceptable performance:

- *Entry level.* The gifted and talented policy is integral to the school/college's inclusion agenda and approach to personalised learning, feeds into and from the school/college improvement plan and is consistent with other policies.
- *Developing level.* The policy directs and reflects best practice in the school/college, is regularly reviewed and is clearly linked to other policy documentation.
- *Exemplary level.* The policy includes input from the whole school/college community and is regularly refreshed in the light of innovative national and international practice.

For settings seeking more detailed progression lines for policy development the National Association for Able Children in Education (NACE) has a comprehensive Challenge Award package (see www.nace.co.uk for details).

What factors should be taken into account in developing policy?

Clearly, any whole-school policy needs to be informed by the school's own profile with regard to pupil ability and performance as well as by its wider approach to learning, teaching and school improvement. There is no 'one-size-fits-all' policy document that can be bolted on to a unique organisation to ensure that the specific needs of its more able cohort will be appropriately met. There are, however, a



number of common considerations to be taken into account in developing a document that aligns the school's individual requirements to the overall objective of establishing an environment where high achievement is expected, planned for and celebrated. Any development of policy should:

- Be in line with the wider Teaching and Learning (T&L) Policy and/or any departmental or subject-specific curriculum policies (e.g. literacy or science) that seek to define and establish the organisational view of best practice in curriculum delivery and pupil engagement. It is even possible for the AG&T policy to be an integral part of the T&L and subject specific policies and, for example, specify the particular approach to AG&T provision within individual curriculum areas
- Take account of the audit/analysis of pupil performance data and other assessment evidence revealing the impact of current provision on pupils' learning to identify and plan to address area(s) of relative weakness and/or underperformance in the overall profile of more able learners across the school (see Chapter 3)
- Be informed by the aims and objectives identified through the annual process of school self-evaluation and formalised in the appropriate whole-school improvement planning document
- Establish an agreed definition of able, gifted and talented pupils within the context of the school and its overarching educational ethos (Chapter 2)
- Provide clear identification strategies for the pupils who are to be the subject of modified and/or enhanced provision (Chapter 3)
- Support whole-school and classroom-based strategies for securing inclusion and appropriate levels of challenge for AG&T learners (Chapters 4 and 5)
- Explicitly establish that supporting AG&T pupils is the responsibility of all staff and not simply that of specific post-holders
- Specify any particular provision to be made for exceptionally able or talented individuals
- Clarify the nature of the provision to be made to support target groups, reflecting the development of a personalised, flexible and differentiated learning experience for all pupils
- Take account of the views of parents/carers and other stakeholders and partners, including evidence derived from pupils' own perceptions of learning in the school (Chapter 6)
- Include an action plan to map out and establish roles, responsibilities and monitoring/evaluation protocols with regard to the plan to ensure that it is driven through the organisation and updated as appropriate.

Audit or why is the policy needed?

What a policy needs to achieve is directly linked to the problems it has to address. This is why a starting point for policy creation is an audit to identify key issues relating to AG&T learners in the school. Data relating to pupil starting points or prior attainment at the start of school or key stage, to pupil progress or achievement over time and to attainment in national or school-based assessments will provide an important body of information about the size of the AG&T cohort, the nature of the progress made by individuals and groups both generally and in particular subject areas and about the impact of the current provision on the measured outcomes for target pupils. Clearly, the nature and extent of the available data will differ between settings but an audit will certainly reveal important information about the effectiveness of the school in supporting the achievement and attainment of its AG&T pupils relative to other pupil groups. Typical findings could include:

- A lower or higher number of pupils with above average scores either across the board or in particular areas on entry to the school
- Below average attainment at the higher levels at the end of Key Stage or public examination assessments when compared to that of schools in similar statistical contexts
- Relatively limited progress for pupils with high starting points, for example across a phase of education when compared to similar pupils in more effective schools and/or to other, more rapidly progressing pupil groups in the focus school
- Significant imbalances in attainment or progress at the highest levels among pupils of a particular gender or social or ethnic group contrary to national contextual value added trends or to the performance of this/these group(s) in other curriculum areas within the school or in other statistically analogous schools
- A decline in attainment and/or progress patterns over time for pupils with the highest starting points suggesting that school improvement targets set for the most able on the basis of traditional value added expectations are unlikely to be realised
- Evidence that individual youngsters on the school AG&T register or with the highest starting points/baseline assessment profiles make relatively less progress and/or attain less well in one particular curriculum area or age range than in others
- Evidence that particular public examination or assessment questions in a subject have been relatively poorly answered by otherwise able pupils in comparison to other questions in the test or to similar pupils in other schools.

It is impossible to be precise about the amount and quality of the performance data available to individual settings but for those schools within the jurisdiction of the UK Office for Standards in Education (Ofsted), the interactive Raiseonline software supports a wide range of school-level analyses relating to overall progress and attainment patterns, group monitoring, individual pupil tracking and performance

analysis within a sophisticated contextual value-added formula providing schools with an accurate picture of their performance on a relative percentage scale across a wide range of indicators. Where Raiseonline is not available or appropriate, other performance data such as setting-specific baseline assessment information taken on entry to nursery, Early Years Foundation Stage Profile Assessments taken at rising 5, predictive IQ testing or summative end-of-year tests, should also be used as part of the wider audit process.



Case study

The following case studies, one primary, the other secondary, exemplify information drawn from audit. Consider the following questions:

1. What is the data telling the school about priorities for improving AG&T performance?
2. What additional information would it be useful to know before deciding on appropriate action?

Primary

At age 5 assessment consistently shows over 50% of children achieving in the top 20% of the assessment scale in all elements of communication, language and literacy. A smaller percentage (over 25%) consistently achieve at the highest point on the scale in the three elements of problem-solving, reasoning and numeracy. These outcomes show no clear gender, sub-group or ethnic bias.

End of infant phase assessments (age 7) at the highest level available – have been consistent for the past four years and this year at over 50% are more than twice the national average (n/av) in mathematics (48% of girls; 52% of boys).

In English 23% achieved highest level in reading. This was just on n/av for girls and slightly below for boys. In writing 25% achieved highest level, almost twice n/av with 28% of girls (n/av 17%) and 22% of boys (n/av 9%).

In terms of national attainment tables the school is:

- in the top 5% for mathematics – at the highest level compared to similar schools
- in the lowest 40% for reading – at the highest level with boys in the bottom 25%.

End of junior phase assessments (age 11) at the highest level available – were well above average in mathematics with 66% overall (40% girls; 83% boys).

In reading 70% overall achieved highest level (85% girls; 57% boys).

In writing, 52% were at the highest level (80% of girls (n/av 24%); 22% of boys (n/av 15%)).

In terms of national attainment tables for comparable schools the school is:

- in the top 10% for mathematics attainment (boys top percentile, girls top 50%) and in top 25% for progress with girls on the 50th percentile, boys top percentile

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- in reading in the top 10% for attainment (girls top 5%; boys top 25%) and for progress in the top percentile overall and for boys and girls separately
- in writing in the top 5% overall for attainment (girls top percentile; boys top 40%) and for progress girls top percentile and boys on the 50th percentile.

Secondary (girls school)

Girls at the **highest level on entry at 11** = well below n/av over last five years. Mathematics 7% (n/av 33%); reading 15% (n/av 50%); writing 7% (n/av 19%); science 18% (n/av 45%).

School entry baseline testing = verbal reasoning 36% at 100+ with 11% at 120+. Non-verbal reasoning 31% at 100+ with 9% at 120+.

At age 14 figures show declining trend over last three years despite stable baseline figures on entry. In English highest level outcomes are 6% this year, down from high of 22%. This puts the school in the lowest 25% for similar schools nationally. In mathematics 39% reached the highest level which reflects a year-on-year increase and the school now features in the top 25% of similar schools. In science 13% reach the highest level (just above the lower quartile for similar schools). Progress is therefore unsatisfactory for those more able in English and above expected levels in mathematics.

Attainment age 16 shows 10% achieve five or more highest grades (including English and mathematics) and 37% achieving five or more passing grades. This is below n/av for attainment but shows above expected levels of progress for upper ability pupils from age 11 to 16 and from 14 to 16, where well above expected levels of progress were made in English.

Commentary

There are many things that could be said about each example but the following points should be considered:

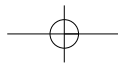
1. The **primary school data** suggests that within the context of a highly advantaged intake there are clear issues about the progress of more able children in reading age 5–7 (particularly for boys), suggesting that this is an area where challenge, higher order reading skills and perhaps gender appropriateness within the curriculum could be improved. Gender continues to be an issue age 7–11 where girls do relatively better in reading and writing than boys while the reverse is true for mathematics.
2. The **secondary school data** shows a more disadvantaged intake generally with issues relating to attainment and progress of the more able in English age 11–14. This is reversed age 14–16 where challenge would seem to exist. Although comparatively few numerically, the school appears to be supporting the progression of its able pupils (approximately 1 in 10 on entry age 11).
3. Beyond the story told by the data it would be useful to know:
 - What assessment data reveals about achievement in foundation areas (e.g. humanities, art, etc.)

- What type(s) of learning experience produced positive and more negative outcomes for AG&T pupils/groups (including standardised assessment tasks that were well or poorly done)
- Information about provision for high achievement/talented behaviour currently existing in areas beyond the core curriculum
- Examples of excellence or individual AG&T behaviour which reveal the success or the limitations of current provision
- The views of staff, AG&T pupils and carers with regard to the current provision and how it might be improved.

What further information can be gathered through audit?

Data on pupil performance is clearly an important factor in determining the key issues for school policy to address. It will often (as with the primary case study) reveal that underperformance (or lack of satisfactory progress) as opposed to underattainment (not achieving high grades) is a significant factor among pupils of high potential. Audit, however, also requires more qualitative information if it is to provide a fuller picture of the needs of the school and the AG&T individuals within it. The following list itemises some of the ways in which a review of provision can lead towards a fuller understanding of an organisation's current practice and the developments necessary for AG&T policy to underwrite its practice:

- An examination of work produced by a sample of AG&T children from across the school (particularly where data has revealed areas of concern, areas of conspicuous success and areas in which data is unavailable or inconclusive). This will give a clearer understanding of the type of work/questioning, etc. which produces the most positive responses (see Chapter 4 for an appropriate framework of evaluation)
- A question-level analysis of standardised assessment tests (available to English schools through Raiseonline) revealing areas of relative weakness in AG&T response to questions
- A survey of departments, post-holders, teachers and staff to identify, collect and collate provision for AG&T currently operating either formally or informally
- Focus group discussions with AG&T pupils to ascertain their views on their academic and other provision: what they enjoy, what they find less successful and areas they would like to see improved to better meet their learning and developmental needs. A similar focus group with parents/carers could also be considered
- A programme of lesson observations (where time is short, concentrating on areas of relative weakness, success and curriculum areas from which little objective information is available)



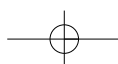
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- Pupil shadowing whereby a representative sample of AG&T children or one focus child are/is tracked/observed and interviewed as follow-up across a period of time – a day, a week, in a particular curriculum area, in individual lessons across a half-term, etc. – with the aim of drawing up an evidence-base and/or individual case-studies for professional examination on issues such as level of challenge, degree of engagement, etc. (see the suggested observation pro forma, Figure 1.1)
- Whole-staff discussion of the issue(s) of AG&T across the school (informed by evidence from preliminary audit findings) with a view to soliciting opinion, gathering evidence, reviewing/developing case studies and defining parameters.

How does the policy relate to the school's aims and values?

Whatever the audit reveals about the developmental needs of the school with regard to its AG&T pupils, there are usually several legitimate ways of addressing the emergent issues. Here are some common findings:

- The need to raise attainment generally, through increased challenge and opportunity
- The desire to attract a greater proportion of more able children to the school to secure a broadly mixed-ability intake
- The need to develop pupils as independent learners and so more actively develop their academic potential
- Concern over underachievement and/or low levels of value-added attainment at higher performance levels
- Concerns relating to a particular group of pupils whose potential is less likely to be translated to performance than others
- Concerns linked to low(er) attainment in a particular curriculum area
- The need to improve high-level provision to meet advanced needs in a particular target area (e.g. technology, sport, music)
- The need to ensure equality of opportunity within an inclusive curriculum for able pupils whose learning entitlements generally are not currently so explicitly met as those of other (groups of) children
- The desire to provide a greater variety of learning styles to meet the needs of learners whose aptitudes are not met by current provision
- The need to improve school performance figures and hit targets set by heads and governors, the local authority and central government.



Lesson Observation *Pro Forma* (Able, Gifted and Talented focus)

Class/year group	Lesson/subject	Period/Time	Date	Male	Female
Teacher	Focus of observation (e.g. pupil tracking, ILP, challenge, personalisation, etc.)				
Context of lesson (e.g. practical skills, group activity, independent research, etc.)					

Learning (Gains in skills, thinking, knowledge and understanding? Do pupils meet the lesson's learning objectives, make appropriate progress, understand what they have learned and know how to improve?).

Teaching (Comment on differentiation, personalisation, higher order thinking, open-endedness, advanced skills, appropriate challenge, high expectations, pace and variety, quality of questioning, assessment for learning)

Attitudes (Comment on levels of application, concentration, consistency, cooperation, collaboration, enthusiasm, self-awareness and motivation, etc.)

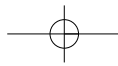
NB: Judgements of (1) good or better; (2) satisfactory; or (3) unsatisfactory may be made for each of the criteria.

Note the impact of any AG&T initiative observed in the classroom (e.g. mentoring).

Figure 1.1



Teaching Able, Gifted and Talented Children © Clive Tunnicliffe 2010 (SAGE)



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While most of these objectives are not mutually exclusive, they do suggest contrasting approaches and values. Whatever else a school seeking to recruit more AG&T learners might do, it will certainly need to consider staging various high-profile events to attract the attention of parents and the local community. Some raising-achievement initiatives, however, may be better served by the steady promotion of curriculum change from within the school.

Some issues, however, can be addressed in a variety of ways, which will often depend on philosophical views of education and child development. For example, should a 7-year-old who is very able in mathematics be allowed to do her mathematics lessons with the class above or will her needs better be met through enrichment/extension work undertaken with her own peers? Clearly, the needs of children should come above any educational orthodoxy and one answer to this question resides in discovering exactly how exceptional this individual girl is. Equally certainly, however, the overriding values or ethos of the school will also be a consideration in this matter. Does the school freely support the principle of accelerated setting or is the view taken that children will generally be more emotionally secure among their peers in all but the most compelling cases? It is issues such as this one that will need deciding upon and incorporating into the policy as part of a statement of key values before any decision is made on the exact nature of the provision to be developed.

For this reason, it is vital that policy making is explicit at first about the aims, values and philosophical rationale that underpin the provision that it is the job of the policy to outline and secure.



Activity

Read the following statements which might form the introduction to a whole school policy on AG&T. Decide which is the closest fit to your own school's ethos with regard to this area of provision. You might wish to note down or underline parts of any statement that accord with your own thinking. Feel free to add any missing element of provision. This should allow you to come up with a model close to the one you would want to inform your policy.

NB: This activity can be productively undertaken during a professional development session.

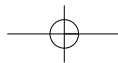
1. At [School X] provision for more able pupils will be as inclusive as possible and seek to provide for the needs of this group of children (both identified and those as yet unidentified) through appropriate differentiation, and extension opportunities developed and delivered through the mainstream curriculum. It will be the responsibility of each subject area to provide appropriate challenge for high-attaining pupils within that area. In addition, a programme of enrichment opportunities based on lunchtime and after-school clubs will be made available to all children. Such activities will further broaden the provision made by the school to help children develop individual interests and personal skills.

2. At [School Y] pupils identified and placed on the Gifted and Talented register will be eligible for one hour's targeted support each week with a trained learning mentor. This will allow time for an individualised learning plan (ILP) to be drawn up to address identified needs. In conjunction with the class teacher(s) provision could include:
 - Individualised work set by the class teacher in line with the ILP
 - Withdrawal from target lessons to receive advanced tuition in a particular area alongside similarly targeted pupils
 - Acceleration in an area(s) of particular strength by taking lessons with a higher year group and so securing a better match of content to learning need
 - An invitation to attend the school's Gifted and Talented Saturday classes
 - In exceptional circumstances the promotion of not more than one academic year.
3. At [School Z] in line with a personalised approach to learning, AG&T pupils will be encouraged and facilitated in developing flexible pathways to learning. A personalised approach to learning will be available in which an extended school day will allow for a wider range of study and recreational options; the use of ICT and subscription to virtual learning environments will facilitate a closer match of study to ability; learning partnerships with neighbouring schools and/or higher educational institutions will allow for greater breadth of opportunity and a significantly enhanced faculty of creativity and thinking will support students in developing their own ability to apply learning in a productive manner.

What does the school aim to provide for gifted and talented pupils?

Although the three ethos statements above can to some extent merge within a comprehensive whole-school provision it is clear that each represents a particular conception of how best to meet identified need. If the aim is to focus on an identified 5–10% pupils for targeted support, it is still legitimate to ensure that 100% of pupils have access to teaching strategies designed to promote higher level thinking. One legitimate response to the range of possible approaches is to say 'well it all depends on what you mean by gifted and talented'. Chapter 2 will discuss issues of definition and Chapter 3 those of identification. Chapter 4 will look in detail at the strengths and weaknesses of particular types of provision. At this stage, it is important to recognise that all children, not just the AG&T, will benefit from good practice in teaching and learning, from effective differentiation, from assessment for learning, including individual target setting; personalised learning and appropriate study support.

Accordingly, as schools consider their provision, the following generic strategies should be of relevance to the review:



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- The processes of differentiation and personalisation, particularly in settings where the range of ability in classes is very wide
- Developing self-awareness among learners (learner identity), a range of learning styles to match all aptitudes, higher order thinking and independent learning skills as this all helps pupils make more effective use of the taught curriculum
- Linking self-awareness to developing procedures to foster 'student voice', whereby learners have the opportunity to express opinions on their learning and contribute to the school's self-evaluation processes
- Offering a broader curriculum beyond the statutory requirements, either through extra-curricular opportunities or an extended curriculum offer
- Providing some additional pastoral and/academic support (e.g. a learning mentor) particularly for pupils whose abilities make them exceptional within the context of their own peer group
- Incorporating enrichment and extension opportunities into schemes of work and programmes of study to routinely secure additional levels of challenge
- The role of setting and/or ability grouping within mixed classes
- Curriculum flexibility, where appropriate or possible, to allow learning pathways which genuinely meet individual need rather than administrative convenience (e.g. acceleration, promotion, short-term grouping for particular projects, partnership working, etc.)
- Assessment for learning giving pupils an ownership of their strengths and weaknesses and what they need to do to improve (using, as appropriate, individual target setting to secure improvement).



To think about

- What would be a realistic timetable in which to draw up an appropriate AG&T policy?
- Should the lack of a completed policy halt development of practice and provision for AG&T pupils or can the two go hand in hand within an action research context?
- Who will be involved in steering the development process – a single post-holder, a group of interested parties, the Senior Leadership Team, delegated area representatives?
- What role will there be for pupils and parents to contribute (pupil voice)?
- What professional development will be required to initiate, develop and sustain provision and how can this be built into the ongoing cycle of school improvement?



Summary

Some key points and suggestions have been made in this chapter in relation to developing school policy for AG&T learners.

- Policy making for AG&T is intrinsically linked to the drive to improve Teaching and Learning in the school.
- Drawing up policy is not about ticking boxes to ensure compliance with external expectations but about securing the entitlement of a significant group of learners to an effective education.
- Audit should precede policy formulation to target areas of need but audit needs to be both quantitative (based on performance data/indicators) and qualitative (drawing on stakeholder interviews, work scans, lesson observations and desk-top review of current curricular planning).