

Gifted and talented

Information for Parents

Parents play an essential role in the development of their gifted and talented children, a role which the school supports but cannot displace. There are a variety of ways in which parents can facilitate the development of their children but as each child is unique then factors which help one child to develop will not always be appropriate for facilitating the development of other gifted and talented children. Nor will it always be the case that a gifted child is developing in every cognitive respect at the pace that would normally be expected. A child may well develop in some respects 'faster' than expected and in other respects 'slower' than is expected.

Below are a few general principles about how parents can support the development of their child in respect of:

- General Cognitive Development
 - Language Development
- Logic and Numerical Development
 - Development at School
 - Concerns about School

General Cognitive Development

There is increasing evidence that the intellectual development of children is supported particularly well when they are regularly exposed to intellectual stimulation which promotes a growth of knowledge and problem solving skills. But as equally important as the stimulation is the opportunity to experience unstructured 'free time' where children have the responsibility to amuse themselves and so typically develop their imagination and creativity skills.

Parents can support their children by helping them to encounter intellectual stimulation in reading and in new experiences through visiting museums, galleries or through interacting with other venues and situations with which they are less familiar. Some parents arrange additional formal studies for their children and that too can be helpful, although it is important to ensure that the children do not become intellectually exhausted. Sometimes the most effective support that a parent can provide may be actually limiting the number of engagements and formal activities that their child is exposed to, in order to ensure that the child has the intellectual space and 'free time' in which to play, experiment and develop hobbies and interests of his/her own.

Language Development

Some gifted and talented children manifest a particular love of, and aptitude with, language. They enjoy learning new words and phrases and perhaps like to use unusual forms of expression. Parents can support their children in the development of their language skills by reading with them and in particular by talking about and discussing what they are reading.

Some children respond particularly well to different types of literature and schools and libraries are usually only too pleased to offer advice about how a child's reading can be broadened and varied. Some children enjoy and show an aptitude with oral language but are less interested in formal reading. Where this is the case the most effective support can be helping the child to gain in confidence with material he or she feels comfortable with, rather than in trying to move the child onto more complex material than he or she is ready for.

Logic and Numerical Development

Some pupils have a particular interest in numbers and logical reasoning. They will typically enjoy exercises involving these aspects and may well enjoy talking about problems involving calculations and conversions.

Parents can support their children by trying to ensure that they enjoy any additional logic and numerical work that they are doing at home. Making games and playing games are good examples of ways in which children can do this. It is also important to balance activities which acquire new knowledge and new skills with activities which provide an opportunity to strengthen already existing skills by focusing on ways of applying logical and numerical

Development at School

Schools aim to support the intellectual development of children in a holistic framework which takes account of intellectual needs as well as PSHE (Personal Social and Health Education) needs. Some gifted children have developed intellectually in terms of knowledge and understanding which would normally be expected of much older pupils. Other gifted children can show significant reading or numerical abilities in circumscribed aspects of the subject whilst others can seem to be making significant progress through curriculum materials but are doing so in terms of learning to perform functions and activities rather than actually understanding the material and its application.

As every child is unique there can be no single way of meeting the needs of a gifted child, but in determining provision that is appropriate for your son or daughter a school will typically aim to ensure that the pupil is intellectually challenged and making progress in terms of understanding as well as knowledge whilst also working in an environment which meets their PSHE needs.

All schools will use differentiation with gifted and talented pupils and parents should be able to see evidence of challenging activities in their childrens' exercise books. All schools should have monitoring procedures to ensure that gifted and talented pupils continue to make appropriate progress. In some schools gifted and talented pupils are supported through the use of an IEP (Individual Education Plan) especially where they are working through materials or at a level which requires significantly different planning from the class teacher. At present there is no additional funding available for gifted and talented pupils.

Concerns about School

Sometimes parents may feel unsure of whether a particular teacher or school is really pushing their child forward at a pace that they feel is appropriate. Where this is the case it often arises because the school is trying to meet the pupil's intellectual needs for a growth in understanding rather than merely an increase in knowledge. Sometimes it arises because a school is trying to support a pupil with PSHE needs as well as academic ones, encouraging the pupil to work in groups to develop communication skills, imagination and creativity.

Where parents are concerned about the provision for their children it is very important to communicate immediately with the school so that any misunderstandings can be addressed and resolved. In communicating with the school the most effective approach is to:

- Contact the class teacher first to register concerns and ask for the rationale underpinning the current classroom approaches. If as a result of discussion teacher and parents feel that a slightly different approach would be useful then agree the precise format of the new approach and the time frame in which it will happen. It can sometimes be worth agreeing a formal review meeting later in the term at which progress with the new format can be discussed.
- If contact with the class teacher does not resolve parental concerns then the next step would be to contact the school's 'gifted and talented co-ordinator. In some smaller schools that do not have a separate gifted and talented co-ordinator, it would be appropriate to contact the head teacher in order to discuss the situation
- Discussing the situation with the head teacher is absolutely crucial as the head teacher will have a strategic overview of matters relating to staff allocation and curriculum planning. It is important to bring to the meeting any concerns that you have as well as results of discussions with the class teacher. As a result of discussions with the head teacher it should become clear either why the school is doing what it is doing and why it will continue doing so; or instead a different course of action may be proposed.
- If subsequently there are still concerns, and a further meeting with the head teacher fails to resolve those concerns, then a parent may feel that it is appropriate to submit a formal complaint to the governing body. Procedures outlining how to do this are available at reception upon request in each school.