

## Quick Information Guides for Parents

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### SNAPSHOT No 8

### The Scottish Education System and Highly Able Pupils.

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## About this leaflet

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If you are reading this leaflet it is likely that you have suspicions that your child or a child in your care is highly able. Meeting the needs of highly able children is rewarding, but it can also be extremely challenging to receive the help that the child requires.

This leaflet will cover some key topics in addressing the needs of highly able children in your care including:

- \* General High Ability Indicators and where to find more specific indicators
- \* The rights of your child and expectations of the school
- \* Frequently asked questions in regards to obtaining support
- \* Case studies
- \* Who else can help?

## General High Ability Indicators and where to find more specific indicators

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As with everything related to children, nothing is certain. In view of this the following list provides a good overview as to general indicators of High Ability as adapted from David George's work.

| Able Pupil                  | Highly Able Pupil             |
|-----------------------------|-------------------------------|
| Is interested               | Is highly curious             |
| Answers set questions       | Discusses in detail           |
| Knows the answers           | Asks the questions            |
| Grasps the meaning          | Manipulates information       |
| Learns Easily               | Prefers the company of adults |
| Enjoys the company of peers | Already Knows                 |
| Absorbs information         | Draws inferences              |

There are many checklists available on websites. As with any checklist, they should be used with caution. Ticking all the boxes only tells you so much about a child. This information must be used in conjunction with other evidence about the child and their development.

# The rights of your child

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Scotland provides one of the world's best educational services, and this is in part due to some of Scotland's key policies and strategies.

## *Education (Additional Support for Learning) (Scotland) Act 2004/2009*

In Scotland who might require additional support for their learning children are protected under the Education (Additional Support for Learning) (Scotland) Act 2004/2009. The Act is determined by the individual learning needs of the pupil in question, and places responsibility on education authorities to plan and make provision for children and young people with complex or multiple additional support needs. The Act protects the child's right for support for any reason, and in this way covers highly able and gifted children who may require additional support to meet their learning needs.

<http://enquire.org.uk/what-is-additional-support-for-learning>

## *Getting It Right For Every Child (GIRFEC)*

Getting It Right For Every Child (GIRFEC) was introduced in 2008 and ensures that anyone (E.g. services, professionals, etc.) providing support for any reason puts the child or young person, and their family, at the centre of their considerations. This approach was taken largely to provide a consistent way of working with children across organisations and services and as a consequence is threaded through all legislation, policy and strategies affecting children and their families.

The Scottish Government hopes that GIRFEC will allow families to understand and feel confident about the support they are receiving, be appropriately involved in discussions and decisions that affect them, rely on appropriate help being available as soon as possible and receiving a more streamlined and co-ordinated response from practitioners.

<http://www.scotland.gov.uk/Topics/People/Young-People/gettingitright/background>

A separate SNAPShot will consider the role of GIRFEC and highly able learners.

## *Curriculum for Excellence (CfE)*

Curriculum for Excellence is the Scottish Government's lifelong learning strategy which aims to ensure that everyone develops the attributes, knowledge and skills they will need for life, learning and work. This strategy is grounded in four capacities which enable each child or young person to be a successful learner, a confident individual, a responsible citizen and an effective contributor. Your child's teacher will work to build on all of these aspects within your child throughout the curriculum they teach. Of course for each child to achieve these four capacities means different things to different children and can therefore be a challenge to ensure each child is challenged appropriately

<http://www.scotland.gov.uk/Topics/Education/Schools/curriculum>

## *Expectations of the school*

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So what do these policies mean to your child? What can you expect from the school? Additional support is an all-inclusive term, and is therefore hard to define in terms of what would be best for your child, as each child will have individual needs and requirements. In terms of high ability children, as with children who have acquired any other label, it would be unethical to have a “one size fits all” solution, what works for one child may not work for another.

As the parent or guardian, you will have a great understanding of your child so try to gather evidence in terms of what support you think they would benefit from. What are their interests? What are they showing enthusiasm for? What school work are they struggling with? What are they excelling at? What can they do alone? What can they do with support?

All these pieces of your child’s history and personality can help shape and custom the support they receive from the school. It may well be that you see one side of your child whilst the school sees another.

To illustrate, let’s have a look at a case study.

Rueben\* is a child who is demonstrating high abilities in language. He is able to read at a level much higher than his peers and has a vast vocabulary. Unfortunately, his handwriting is poor and he can rush through his reading. His teacher is expressing concerns at his preference over oral tasks compared to written tasks, also noting that he rushes in his speaking. Rueben has expressed he does not like written tasks because he knows he is “not good at them” and “doesn’t want to do badly”. Rueben’s parents are now concerned he is being held back in reading groups because of Rueben’s deficit in writing and tendency to rush and as a consequence he is losing enthusiasm for reading.

How could this be approached?

We can see that Rueben enjoys reading, but that he can rush through speaking tasks. Highly Able children can have so much going through their heads that it all comes out too quickly because there is so much to get through – just think about when you get excited about something and how your speaking pace picks up! Rueben needs to learn to slow down his speech and reading pace so one suggestion may be that he practices reading aloud texts with lots of characters which may help him slow down. This is something his parents could practise with him at home if he were self-conscious in school.

We can also see his clear dislike of writing, so we should find something else he enjoys to try and motivate him to complete his writing tasks, maybe a game or activity he enjoys. His parents may be aware of something that would be an excellent motivator for him to complete his writing. He could also be asked to record his responses in note form. He could use technology to record his ideas. Perhaps Rueben and his teacher can negotiate which work will be recorded electronically and which will be in written format. Although Rueben is probably capable of producing large amounts of writing because he has lost to say, it is

important that we build up to this by asking him to complete short reports for example so that he achieves success in writing tasks. It is very important for highly able children to know and understand it is safe to fail, so helping Rueben confront and improve his writing will also benefit him in the long term.

Finally, if Rueben is reading at a level far beyond his peers it may be worth pairing him with someone older, perhaps a reading group in a class above or with readers interested in the same subjects, to ensure he doesn't get bored and frustrated with his reading level. In this way not only is he being appropriately challenged, he is also with likeminded peers which is beneficial in itself. This is something the school could facilitate for him in terms of timetabling or when different classes teach different subjects.

This is only one example, and will not be appropriate in all cases but can hopefully demonstrate how your knowledge of your child, when shared with the school, can help shape your child's support.

## Frequently asked questions

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### **The school have asked me to meet them to discuss my child, I think he might be highly able, they don't seem so sure.**

Firstly it's important to remember that both you and the school want the same thing - the best possible learning opportunities for your child. Schools of course must consider how to meet the needs of all the children in their care. Nonetheless your child is an individual and by law, in Scotland, has the right to an education that *is directed to the development of their personality, talents and mental and physical abilities*. To ensure the best possible outcome from a meeting it is important that both sides listen to each other. As a parent you are emotionally involved with your child and as such it is helpful to remember that emotions can make us do or say things in a way that is different from our normal approach. However, schools also have to remember that they do not know the pupil as well as you do. Therefore they need to listen carefully and believe parents when they tell them that their child can do something at home even if they are not demonstrating this ability in school. Where schools, pupils and parent all work in harmony, listen to each other and acknowledge and value each other's feelings and contributions then learning will become easier for all. Being able to share some concrete examples of things your child does at home without support from adults will help the school better understand your child and their abilities.

### **My child is doing very well at school; in fact they won several prizes, including the overall year prize. They also gained excellent results in National examinations. My child tells me they are bored at school. What can I do?**

This is a difficult problem. Judging by the usual standards - exam marks and prizes - this child is doing well and could even be said to be doing exceptionally well. However, top marks are not an indication of level of engagement and interest. If you have a good relationship with the school you could approach them, with the child, and explain how your child is feeling. Have your child write down or record what they think school could do to

make lessons more challenging. This is not to criticise what school is doing but it is to try to work in partnership with them. In our experience pupils have a very creative way of livening up activities and often they don't cost in terms of time and money but are about choice of subjects to study, choice of how to present work etc. Not only will able pupils benefit from challenges, all pupils will.

### **How can I best prepare to meet with the school to discuss my Highly Able child?**

It can be intimidating meeting with the school for the first time, especially if the meeting has come about due to out of character behaviour. The following are suggestions as to how to prepare for your meeting with the school and support what you are saying about your child.

✿ Firstly, start preparing evidence to take to school, try keeping a diary for at least 2 weeks, recording instances of where you think your child could benefit from additional support. E.g. Child is very good at mathematical equations, but mentioned how much they hated drawing graphs. Take along some examples of work they have done. Mark clearly what has been done without parental support. If you offered support, note what form this support took.

✿ Speak to your child, what type of things do they think would benefit them and their learning? Find a way of recording this, for example, video recording their responses or writing down your answers together on paper.

✿ Write down the concerns you have as a parent regarding your child, in an emotional situation it can be easy to forget everything you wish to say. Remember to note positive things too!

✿ Share the positive aspects of school life with the school – share with the school the times where your child is secure, happy, challenged, has enjoyed learning.

✿ Remember your child is maybe one of 30 or more pupils in a class. Try to be understanding - your child's teacher may not have noticed the difficulties as quickly as you as you see your child on a one to one basis and often in a very different context. Your child's teacher may only be seeing the negative consequences of high ability making it challenging for them to manage the class as a whole. It's also easier to focus on behaviour so information that allows schools to "look behind the behaviour" is important and useful to schools.

✿ Remember that you and the school have the same goal, to give your child the best learning experience. Working with them will achieve more than criticising them.

✿ Make sure to use positive language whilst discussing your child's needs and behaviour, try to avoid words like 'bored' instead try 'I feel they would benefit from a greater depth and breadth of learning.'

✿ Listen and make notes of what the school is saying during the meeting to keep in mind what you have both said and agreed to.

✿ Finally, your child has a right to an education that is directed to their needs, but the school will be facing pressures to meet the needs of all of their students. Both you and the school need to listen to each other to ensure the best outcome for your child.

There are a number of good websites for parents, here are two to get you started.

1. <http://www.hoagiesgifted.org> this is American so read it with a pinch of salt for the Scottish cultural and legislative context but nonetheless there are some good things to read here.
2. <http://www.potentialplusuk.org> Potential Plus are an independent charity established in 1967 which works with the whole family to support children with high learning potential.

Out of interest, you will see that these websites talk about gifted and talented. We use the term highly able in Scotland. The legislation that covers these children is the Additional Support for Learning (Scotland) Act (2004/2009). You can read more about the act here <http://enquire.org.uk/>

Local Authorities in Scotland will have webpages relating to additional support for learning. It is worth reading these and the school policies before you attend the meeting.

The non-statutory guidelines for schools are available on the SNAP website (currently being updated) [www.ablepupils.com](http://www.ablepupils.com) - they provide practical information for schools.

## Final Thoughts

No one knows your child better than you do. The school should also know them well and will be the holders of complimentary information to yours. All of this information will be invaluable to the school as you work together to ensure the best for your child. Keeping the channels of communication open between you and school is vital. Understanding each other is key to providing appropriate opportunities for highly able pupils.