

## Curriculum Enhancement Policy (Prep School)

### 1. Introduction

- I. A very well-established aim of Bede's education has been to meet the individual learning needs of children. It is acknowledged that no single learning prescription fits all children. This calls for a breadth in our system that responds to the differing abilities, needs, interests and aspirations of all pupils. Our aim is to provide every pupil with the maximum educational experience that the child can absorb, subject only to each individual's limitations. This includes providing the maximum educational experience for fast, average and slow learners, including those children with disabilities as well as those with specific gifts for learning.

### 2. Identification of Exceptionally Able Pupils

"Children and young people with one or more abilities developed to a level significantly ahead of their year group (or with the potential to develop those abilities)." *Department for Children, Schools and Families*

- I. Children capable of high performance include those with demonstrated achievement and/or potential ability in any of the following areas:
  - a) General intellectual activity
  - b) Specific academic aptitude
  - c) Creative or productive thinking
  - d) Leadership ability
  - e) Visual or performing arts
- II. It is important to make our definition of 'exceptionally able' as inclusive as we can. There are factors that can adversely affect identification of these pupils, such as:
  - a) A too-heavy reliance on standardised tests, some of which are culturally biased;
  - b) Narrow screening and selection processes that pay too little attention to visual learning styles;
  - c) A lack of parental support or involvement;
  - d) Pupils who know the material very well but perform very poorly in tests;
  - e) The tendency to associate 'good' behaviour with being exceptionally able, and 'bad' behaviour with being unwilling or unable to learn. A selection process that looks beyond these stereotypes can lead us to identify pupils whose behaviour may be a direct result of boredom or frustration.
- III. There are positive and negative aspects of the characteristics of exceptionally able children:
  - a) They learn rapidly and easily:
    - + memorise facts and concepts easily;
    - get bored easily and disturb others or daydream.
  - b) Possess an advanced vocabulary:
    - + communicate ideas well;
    - show off and invoke peer resentment.

- c) Retain a vast quantity of information:
  - + are ready and able to give elaborate answers;
  - monopolise discussions.
- d) Have a long attention span:
  - + stick with a task or project;
  - resist class routine and dislike interruptions.
- e) Are curious about anything and everything:
  - + ask questions and get excited about ideas;
  - go off on tangents, seldom follow through.
- f) Are alert and observant:
  - + recognise problems and inconsistencies.
  - correct adults, often in a way that is or seems impolite.
- g) Are individualistic, challenge ideas:
  - + are assertive and self-assured;
  - stubbornness in beliefs can alienate classmates.

IV. Exceptionally able children in any social or economic group can usefully be identified using this set of 10 core attributes:

- a) Communication skills
- b) Humour
- c) Imagination/creativity
- d) Inquiry
- e) Insight
- f) Interest
- g) Memory
- h) Motivation
- i) Problem solving
- j) Reasoning

V. Identification of an exceptionally able pupil must be treated as a process, not an event in itself, and it is important to avoid the assumption that once a child is identified as 'exceptionally able' they will always be in that same group. The ultimate goal of 'exceptionally able' identification is to open up to a child an appropriate array of educational experiences that best serve the child's needs. An annual check-up of

- a) the identified exceptionally able pupils;
- b) the non-identified pupils who were near-misses;
- c) pupils who have transferred from other schools

will help maintain the integrity of the entire programme.

VI. It is also important not to use over-limited methods of identification. Using as many different 'voices' as possible and a combination of objective data (test scores etc) and subjective data (teacher opinion, portfolios etc) can help to identify most of these pupils, although it is inevitable when dealing with human nature and collective foibles that some will slip through the net. Problems like that can be mitigated to some extent by always being willing to take a second look at a child.

### 3. Structuring Our Provision for Exceptionally able and Talented Pupils

- I. This is very much an ongoing task, developing all the time and overlapping with identification process. Provision for exceptionally able pupils can take a huge number of forms and departmental heads are instrumental in following up ideas for stretching and motivating exceptionally able pupils. It is hoped that these include:
  - a) Ability grouping to provide accelerated learning sets in basic subjects;
  - b) Opportunities for problem-solving and open-ended project work;
  - c) Special workshops offered as enrichment;
  - d) Interest clubs (eg. maths, writing, chess, drama, technology etc);
  - e) Curriculum-compacting, which allows the student who shows expertise to skip known material and work on more advanced options. This involves pre-testing or assessing for competency and independent study, providing for some choice of independent investigation;
  - f) Working with experts, such as visiting scientists, mathematicians, writers etc;
  - g) Tiered assessments that create different levels of challenge, growing in complexity;
  - h) Variety and choice of assignments and prep, to add scope and interest. For instance, in one unit of study, pupils could be asked to write poetry, speak, draw, create a chart to compare and analyse facts, compose a song, conduct an interview and write a newspaper article etc;
  - i) Advanced computer programmes, allowing a pupil to design and solve problems or provide services;
  - j) Advanced real-life tasks in which pupils can work to solve complex problems;
  - k) Support for goal-setting and designing products, so that pupils can gain respect for their own work and find ways to share it with others.
  
- II. In the education of an exceptionally able child, considerable emphasis should be placed upon developing HIGHER-LEVEL THINKING SKILLS. This process should be designed to emphasise the following skills in curriculum planning:
  - a) Logical thinking
  - b) Critical thinking
  - c) Divergent thinking
  - d) Creative problem solving strategies
  - e) Research
  - f) Communication
  
- III. GOALS for our exceptionally able pupils should always be kept in mind:
  - a) To develop positive self-concepts and enable pupils to be successful in their interactions with others;
  - b) To develop critical and evaluative thinking so that pupils will be able to address complex issues with the necessary tools of problem solving;
  - c) To develop in pupils a love of life-long learning, by giving them the technical and personal skills necessary to achieve success, both inside and outside the classroom;
  - d) To provide pupils with opportunities to 'learn how to learn', which requires organisational skills, study skills, and persistence in the face of difficulty;
  - e) To develop the academic abilities of pupils so that they will be able to master new and difficult curriculum challenges;
  - f) To provide pupils with opportunities to learn alongside intellectual peers so that they might gain a realistic appraisal of their own abilities.

- IV. Provision for exceptionally able children that is blended effectively with the total school programme does not just happen. It must develop deliberately and gradually. In a self-contained classroom for exceptionally able pupils, children can blossom who might otherwise hold back or whose gifts lose the teacher's focus in a regular classroom. But this idea of a separate group promotes charges of elitism with feelings of superiority, it can be a logistical nightmare when there are too many or too few, can leave other groups feeling disaffected or with too few role models for other children to follow. Related to this, occasionally a teacher will conclude that without exceptionally able pupils in the classroom, there is no longer a need to differentiate the curriculum for the remaining pupils. This reflects a lack of understanding of the purpose of differentiation, which is to tailor instruction to meet the needs of EVERY child.
- V. Academic rigour is the greatest potential advantage of a 'exceptionally able' classroom. Grouping by ability for specific subjects at the top of the school and clear differentiation within all lessons while having mixed ability form groups, is the preferred method of dealing with these issues at Bede's, giving the most flexible system that is possible, whilst maintaining very high standards for the ablest pupils.
- VI. We have an annual register of pupils nominated by their teachers as very able in their subjects circulated to heads of departments. We are constantly discussing the ways in which we can refine our support for exceptionally able and talented pupils.

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