

The Background

This course is the national training programme for teachers who are co-ordinating provision for gifted and talented pupils in Excellence in Cities schools. It provides guidance and support in the form of a basic core of knowledge, skills and understanding to gifted and talented co-ordinators. The development of provision for Gifted and Talented pupils is part of the government's agenda for raising standards, and an important element in the improvement of primary and secondary schools. It contributes to the aim of guaranteeing all pupils equal opportunities. This programme therefore represents part of the government's strategy for school improvement for gifted and talented pupils.

In the past it has sometimes been assumed that gifted and talented pupils will succeed whatever education does or does not do for them, but research and inspection evidence has discredited this view. Many teachers feel that a focus on the gifted and talented is long overdue, not because their needs are more important than those of others, but because they are equally important. If gifted and talented pupils are to reach their potential they have an entitlement to appropriate educational provision, as in the case of all other pupils. The House of Commons Select Committee (1999) pointed out that while schools saw the need for this increased emphasis, many schools and individual teachers were unsure of how to identify and provide for these pupils. The Committee found that pockets of good practice did exist in schools. They recommended that best practice, and the means of achieving it, should now be disseminated, and that this ought to be a priority for government policy. This course therefore also aims to help in the process of dissemination.

In 1997 the government's White Paper 'Excellence in Schools' made a commitment to developing a national policy for the education of gifted and talented pupils. Subsequently, Ofsted commissioned a survey into international research on exceptionally able pupils, and this drew together ideas on defining, identifying, and providing for these pupils. (Ofsted 1998). A national advisory group on the education of gifted and talented pupils was created, and the needs of these pupils became a factor in all new government initiatives, eg Education Action Zones, Specialist Schools, and the Literacy and Numeracy strategies. Excellence in Cities (EiC) is the first initiative to have a major strand dedicated to the education of the gifted and talented, and it is therefore likely to significantly influence future policy and practice. The most recent White Paper (DfES, 2001) 'Schools achieving success', the establishment of the National Academy for Gifted and Talented Youth, and the embedding of gifted and talented issues in the Key Stage 3 and 14-19 strategies confirm that the gifted and talented agenda is firmly here to stay.

The Gifted and Talented Co-ordinators Training programme

As with all new initiatives, a key point to recognise is that good provision for gifted and talented pupils does not happen by chance; it takes careful planning, development work, and monitoring. It is difficult to achieve, and needs the involvement of a wide variety of staff. But it is possible. This professional development course aims to assist co-ordinators in their quest for better provision for gifted and talented pupils in inner city schools. It draws on research into the characteristics of able pupils and how best to provide for them, and sets it in the context of the current legislation and curriculum framework. It shows practical ways to extend pupils' learning, on a sound theoretical basis. The course also builds on on-going evaluations of progress in the Gifted and Talented strand of the EiC initiative.

The course materials address key issues in 3 broad areas pertinent to the education of gifted and talented pupils:

- Definitions and Identification
- Teaching and Learning
- Managing provision

Co-ordinators undertaking the course will be in EiC phases at different stages of development and will therefore draw from the material and reflect on it according to their needs. The 'activities/reflections' in the unit sections are designed to help Gifted and Talented Co-ordinators to gain a deeper understanding of particular issues and to consider the implications for their role and for gifted and talented school improvement. Additional readings are suggested for those wishing to pursue a particular area in more depth.

References

House of Commons (1999). *Highly Able Children*. Report of Education and Employment Committee. London: The Stationery Office.

Freeman J (1998) *Educating the Very Able; Current International Research* HMSO

Additional reading

Excellence in Cities website

<http://www.standards.dfes.gov.uk/local/excellence/>

DfES publications (2001) *Schools Achieving Success* London Stationery Office

Ofsted (2001) *Providing for gifted and talented pupils: an evaluation of Excellence in Cities and other grant funded programmes* <http://www.ofsted.gov.uk/public/index.htm>