

## Section 2

### Individual Needs

#### Key issues

- Gifted and talented pupils are a diverse and disparate group
- Individual needs may be related to the pupil (eg dyslexia) or to the specific school context (eg to the overall ability profile of the school population)
- Failure to meet pupils' individual needs can affect their motivation and lead to underachievement.

#### Background

Gifted and talented pupils, like all others, come in all shapes and sizes. Meeting the individual needs of gifted and talented pupils is therefore an issue which requires maximum flexibility and the use of a wide range of strategies. Many of them have no greater individual needs than the majority of pupils. Problems can occur where pupils experience extra pressure from teachers as a result of being labelled 'gifted' or where others expect them to be too clever to enjoy normal relationships. Freeman (1998) suggests that the myth of all gifted children having emotional problems is probably a result of early researchers having taken their data from clinical settings and case studies. Most gifted and talented pupils enjoy school, achieve highly, will contribute well in class, and are a delight to teach. In addition, they are likely to have many friends and varied interests. Their individual needs are largely related to such issues as preferred learning styles and motivational factors, in much the same way as many other pupils. They may have additional needs which emanate from their ability or desire to work more quickly or in greater depth than others. This is a classroom differentiation issue which is examined in Unit 2.

In common with other pupils, the gifted and talented need:

- an environment which is conducive to learning
- work which is focused upon their individual learning needs, and activities which include a high level of intellectual or practical demand
- opportunities for social and emotional development.

#### The environment

Gifted and talented pupils need a secure classroom environment in which they can feel at ease in displaying their ability. Like all other pupils, they need to be able to relax and have fun, and to be given lots of praise. They should experience challenge, sometimes even to the point of failure, and be recognised as individuals with strengths and weaknesses. Their relationship with the teacher is crucial to their success, and they should have firm but sensitive handling. They need to be given the confidence to ask searching

questions in the knowledge that they can rely on a considered response and a discussion to follow if they need to pursue it.

## Intellectual needs

The curriculum framework within which gifted and talented pupils learn should have challenge built into it. This challenge needs to be planned, so that the pupils are given tasks which enrich their learning, opportunities which really stretch and extend them, and the chance to explore concepts in depth. They should be allowed to move ahead at an appropriate rate. This will mean encouraging them to speculate and hypothesise, and will involve their being taught relevant skills but not required to do irrelevant practice. In recent years an increasing amount of guidance on creating challenge for more able pupils has appeared. Exemplification materials on extending the more able are included in many strands of the Key Stage 3 Strategy. A leaflet 'Key Messages for Teaching Gifted and Talented Pupils' was published in November 2004, and guidance is provided on the websites of the Qualifications and Curriculum Authority and the DfES.

Gifted and talented pupils will need to be set targets, a process in which ideally they themselves will be involved, and to be given short-term attainable goals. They should be encouraged to understand that it is the quality of the work, not its quantity, that is of value. They will also need to be encouraged to evaluate their work and become self-critical, and to take responsibility for organising aspects of their own work. Finally, they should experience the intellectual excitement that can result from working with others of like ability, and should feel free to express any special talent they may possess, such as music, drama, or the visual arts. Web-based specific guidance for the talent subjects is available at <http://www2.teachernet.gov.uk/gat/>.

## Social needs

In common with all pupils, the gifted and talented have to learn what is acceptable social behaviour. One of their most important needs is to be able to work in a team, valuing the skills and attributes of others, and seeking their help and advice where appropriate. In this context they should develop a variety of interests, both as individuals and in consort with others. Above all, they should be encouraged to believe that they are valued for themselves, not just for their abilities.

When seeking to meet all these needs it will be necessary to look at existing arrangements for whole school assessment and target setting. Are they adequate to guarantee the right kind of challenge and subsequent progress for the gifted and talented pupils? If not, assessment arrangements will need to be adjusted or supplemented, for example through Individual Education Plans (IEPs). In exactly the same way as other pupils, the gifted and talented should have their development profiled effectively and be assured of continuity of provision throughout their schooling. We shall return to the topic of tracking, monitoring and assessment in later units.

For some pupils, educational progress is less straightforward than it is for others, and their learning needs call for careful consideration. The most common categories identified in the literature are those gifted and talented pupils who:

- have unbalanced profiles, eg good oral but poor written skills
- experience motivational problems, and may underachieve or truant
- find organisation and/or time management a problem
- lack support and encouragement for their learning
- find their ability difficult to handle.

Obviously, if pupils who fall into any of these categories are to make progress, different strategies will be required for them. Some pupils may need IEPs, some may benefit from a mentor or Learning Mentor, some need the security of study support, and others need counselling. Some will benefit from a relaxation of the rules and requirements of the school, whilst others will need them rigorously enforced. The role of the co-ordinator includes responsibility for ensuring that the individual needs of gifted and talented pupils are met. It is here where the role might be said to have the most in common with the co-ordinator for Special Educational Needs (SEN), in that it calls for a similar ability to facilitate the development of 'tailor-made' solutions for individuals. Co-ordinators for the gifted and talented are not expected to provide support for each individual pupil, but rather to work with colleagues in pastoral and other support roles to ensure that individual needs are met. This process has to take account not only of the intellectual needs of the pupils but also of their social and emotional needs.

## Activity 1.2

### Reflection

Reflect upon your role as co-ordinator. How do you ensure that individual pupils receive appropriate educational provision? Who would you need to work with in the school, and how would you liaise with them to achieve this? What is the best way to monitor the pupil's progress?

## Learning outcomes

- Recognise the range and complexity of individual students' needs
- Be aware of possible strategies for meeting those needs
- Consider the strategies you will recommend in your own school and how they will be put into practice.

## References

- Freeman, J. (1998)** *Educating the Very Able: Current International Research* London: HMSO
- Leyden, S. (1998)** *Supporting the Child of Exceptional Ability* London: David Fulton Publishers
- Csikszentmihalyi, M., Rathunde, K. & Whalen, S. (1997)** *Talented teenagers: the roots of success and failure* Cambridge University Press
- Hymer, B. & Harbron, N. (1998)** *Early transfer: A good move?* in *Educating Able Children*, Spring 1998 Issue 2