

Enjoy your **G and T!**

'Gifted and talented' is a term used to describe children who show a high level of ability in one or more areas of the curriculum. It's estimated that around one child in every class is '**G and T**'.

There is widespread concern that if these children are not sufficiently stimulated in the classroom, they may become bored and develop negative attitudes towards learning. Teacher **Robert Watts reports**



Measuring intelligence

IQ (intelligence quotient) tests were designed by a psychologist in 1912 to establish the 'mental age' of the participant. The final IQ score is reached by dividing the person's mental age by their chronological age and multiplying the answer by 100.

IQ tests might be used by teachers to supplement the evidence they gather on their pupils, but they are unlikely to be the central means of assessment. Howard Gardner's theory of 'multiple intelligences' is currently regarded as a more appropriate method of measuring intelligence.



As parents we are easily persuaded that our child is a high-flyer. One faultless performance of the three-times table and we're ready to register young Jamie as a contestant for Junior Mastermind. One well-aimed penalty in the park and we half-expect Sven Goran Eriksson to call before tea-time. But parents who have an able child on their hands often find the prospect brings challenges as well as rewards.

It's important to recognise that no two gifted children are alike. Some children are all-rounders, excelling in several areas, others specialise in only one. Some may have a short attention span and be difficult to motivate or reluctant to demonstrate their abilities. Others will launch into a task with the energy and commitment of Wayne Rooney bearing down on a helpless goalkeeper. Some may be shy and inarticulate; others will have their eyes fixed firmly on the prize and will be practising their award acceptance speeches before they're out of nappies. The many different ways that gifted children demonstrate their abilities can make them hard to identify.

In recent years there has been a move away from using IQ tests to measure children's intelligence. A typical IQ test

question is: John is 12 years old and is three times as old as his brother. How old will John be when he is twice as old as his brother? Those of you who joined in with the IQ tests screened on TV last year will know that this is a type of question that you either (a) understand and enjoy working out, or (b) don't understand and has you reaching for the remote control. This is because the question appeals to people with a specific kind of intelligence – in this case, logico-mathematical. Psychologist Howard Gardner argues that intelligence is too complex to be measured by an IQ test and his theory that there are 'multiple intelligences' is currently influential in educational thinking.

Top of the class

Teachers are usually capable of identifying pupils with special abilities in the core subjects of English and maths. But children who are gifted in other curriculum areas may, consciously or otherwise, be hiding their lights under their little bushels. So what are the signs parents and teachers should be looking for? (And what exactly is a bushel?)

Every classroom has its little team of bright sparks + the children who are confident, who enjoy learning and

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who are keen to make progress. Gifted and talented children are different, and their abilities may not be so easy to recognise.

A bright child will know the answers to most questions he is asked. A gifted child is likely to be the one asking the questions: he has already processed the information and wants to know what's next. A bright child will be quick to learn his four-times table. A gifted child will not need to learn the four-times table: the day he learned his two-times table, he understood that this knowledge could now be used to work out his four-times and his 20-times tables. He is using what he knows to work out what he doesn't know.

A bright child might be able to copy a picture accurately: a gifted child will have little desire for repetition and will prefer to create something more original, more complex or more inventive. A bright child will absorb information and grasp the meaning from a story. The gifted child will use the story as a starting point. He will express strong opinions about the characters, propose alternative endings or possible sequels. In short, bright children are a joy to teach – gifted children can be a challenge

Helping hands

While gifted and talented children are likely to be left to work alone for longer, they also need to be integrated into the classroom. Encouraging able children to help others is more than a case of many hands making lighter work. A gifted child who is asked to support another with reading will respect the fact that the teacher is acknowledging his expertise and that he is trusted to take on a teaching role. He will be learning how to communicate more effectively with his peers. In turn, the children he helps may find admiration replacing resentment and are less likely to ostracise him.

Government initiatives have begun to address the needs of able children. Schools receive funding to support gifted pupils and they must demonstrate that they are meeting their educational needs. Your child's school should have a written policy on effective strategies for teaching able pupils. Ask for a copy of it, and arrange a meeting with your child's teacher. Describe exactly why you feel that your child needs further challenges – emphasise that it is not a case of you being competitive – and look for solutions both from within and outside of the school.

Schools increasingly employ teachers to work with small groups of children outside of the classroom once a week. Traditionally these classes have been aimed at

lower-ability pupils, but there is a growing awareness of the needs of their able classmates. Your child's school should have a teacher who co-ordinates learning for gifted and talented pupils across the school.

Special talents

If your child has a specific talent, perhaps art, music or PE, this may have been overlooked. Identifying able pupils in these subjects can be more problematic, as they are taught less frequently and teachers typically have limited expertise in them. Attending an after-school club in the subject is a partial solution, but these are often popular with pupils of all abilities, which means the able child may not get the sort of attention he needs. Every school should have a teacher responsible for each curriculum area.

Make contact with her, ask for advice and find out about opportunities for music tuition, football clubs, etc.

There are both practical and philosophical objections to 'streaming' children. If a school has only one class in each year this will be impossible, while children placed with older children are likely to be less emotionally mature and may find it harder to integrate with their peers.

Private schools are an option for some: class sizes are likely to be smaller and less likely to include disruptive pupils. There is usually more specialist subject teaching for younger pupils, and the system for awarding scholarships means that progress in the foundation subjects, such as art and music, is valued.

It might be tempting to ask your child's teacher to set extra homework. But consider the message you are giving your child – the harder you work, the more work you get. The quantity of work your child does is less important than the kind of work he does. Talk to your child about what he is doing in school and what he enjoys. Able children often have a need to study subjects in greater depth – museums and galleries are increasingly aware of the needs of young children, so plan regular visits. Encourage your child to develop extracurricular interests, to join a club or learn a musical instrument. Children love the challenges presented by puzzles, quizzes and games, all of which offer opportunities for social interaction. Remember that whatever your child's ability, learning should be fun.

Essential websites

www.nagc.org

www.teachingthinking.net

www.ablepupils.com/articles-list.php

