

### Further reading

Eyre, D., *School Governors and More Able Children*, DfEE/NACE, 1995.

Eyre, D. and Majoram, T., *Enriching and Extending the National Curriculum*, Kogan Page, 1990.

Freeman, J., *Highly Able Girls and Boys*, DfEE/NACE, 1996.

George, D., *The Challenge of the Able Child*, David Fulton Publishers, 1992.

Howe, M.J.A., *The Origins of Exceptional Abilities*, Blackwell, 1992.

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## Raising awareness of more able children

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### AIM

*To identify more able children and help them to achieve their full potential.*

### SUMMARY OF FINDINGS FOR THIS CASE STUDY

- ★ Working on identifying more able children increases their confidence and creates greater acceptance of their needs.
- ★ Verbal skills are of key importance in helping to achieve this.
- ★ Providing a greater depth of study rather than a quicker progression is an issue for the whole school to consider.
- ★ There is a greater need for enrichment, extension and more probing questioning.
- ★ With training, support staff can play a key role in facilitating more developed responses to more able children.
- ★ There is a need for records to convey specific information while still being manageable.
- ★ There was significant awareness among teachers of parental concerns.
- ★ The underachievement of some more able children may, in part, be due to a failure to identify their potential by using oral as well as written skills for assessment.
- ★ The achievements of all children may be affected by the month of their birth, depending on LEA intake procedures.

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## Explanation

During the course of the research, the number of children identified as more able increased from 13.2 per cent to 15.1 per cent of the school population (see back-up data). This followed clarification of terminology and definitions. While attempting to identify more able children, teachers noted an increase in their curiosity. This was often evident in the questions the children asked. A Year 6 teacher commented on a question one pupil put to her: "Why does  $\pi r^2$  give you the area of a circle?"

Appropriate means of differentiation can result in deeper enquiry, which allows for opportunities to consolidate and extend learning, and faster progression. This has implications for planned schemes of work across the school and demands thorough record-keeping.

There was acknowledgement among staff of too great a dependency on differentiation by outcome and rate of progress. Deeper levels of enquiry were believed to be encouraged by enrichment, extension and more probing questioning. A commitment was made to try to increase this provision.

Views on the role of support staff with more able children varied according to year groups. Lower down in the school, support staff directly assisted more able children. Higher up the school, concerns were raised about subject knowledge. The practice of two Year 1 staff having a teaching assistant introduce and explain tasks to more able children from both classes was not common.

The value and importance of record-keeping was widely accepted by staff. A Year 2 teacher spoke of frustration with records because they seemed to be the same for all children, even though they were of

varying abilities. This view was shared by many staff who expressed a desire for specific and concise information to inform planning and provision for the next year.

Parental concerns expressed about recognition of and provision for their "more able" children caused frustration and anxiety for

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teachers on some occasions. Nursery staff, in particular, found some parents had unrealistic expectations of their children. Other staff shared parental concerns and were keen to ensure the work was appropriate.

Emphasis on verbal skills to identify more able children is not always reflected in assessment activities. This can lead to discontinuity. Investigation into summer-born children's SAT results may inform this view further.

A greater number of more able children were found to have birthdays in the autumn and spring terms than in the summer (see back-up data). This may be a consequence of the LEA's intake procedure, which is staggered according to which term the children reach the age of five. Further research would need to be carried out to confirm this is a result of varied school experience.

## Back-up data

NB All statistics were examined with regard to gender balance, racial balance and home language spoken.

Identification of more able children (summer term)			
Year group	Number of children	Children identified	Percentage
N	120	11	9.2
R	56	3	5.4
1	86	4	4.7
2	96	16	16.7
3	89	12	13.5
4	78	12	15.4
5	81	11	13.6
6	91	23	25.3
<b>Total</b>	<b>697</b>	<b>92</b>	<b>13.2</b>

Identification of more able children (autumn term)			
Year group	Number of children	Children identified	Percentage
N	119	12	10.1
1	98	5	5.1
2	87	14	16.1
3	95	15	15.8
4	85	19	22.4
5	74	13	17.6
6	76	18	23.7
<b>Total</b>	<b>634</b>	<b>96</b>	<b>15.1</b>

## Month of birth of children identified as more able (summer term)

Month	N	R	1	2	3	4	5	6	Total
January	2	1		2	2	1	1	3	12
February		1		1	1	2	2	1	8
March			1	1	1	1	2	2	8
April	1		1			1		4	7
May	3			1	1	1		1	7
June				1		1	1	1	4
July	1						2	3	6
August				1				2	3
September	1			3	2	3	1	1	11
October	1		1	2	2			1	7
November	1		1	2	2		1	4	11
December	1	1		2	2		1	2	9
Autumn months									41.3 per cent
Spring months									38.0 per cent
Summer months									20.6 per cent

## Month of birth of children identified as more able (autumn term)

Month	N	1	2	3	4	5	6	Total
January	2			1	4	1	3	11
February	2		2	1	1	2	2	10
March	1		1	2	1	1	2	8
April	2	1	1		2	1	2	9
May	1		2	1			2	6
June				1	1	1	1	4
July			1			3	1	5
August			2	2		1	2	7
September		1	4	3	3	3		14
October	2		1	2	2		1	8
November	1	2		1	2		1	7
December	1	1		1	3		1	7
Autumn months								37.5 per cent
Spring months								39.6 per cent
Summer months								22.9 per cent

## Notes about methods

The research project was carried out at a large primary school in an outer London borough. The research consisted of four parts:

- ★ *statistical information;*
- ★ *pre-observation interviews;*
- ★ *observations;*
- ★ *post-observation interviews.*

The research was carried out twice, once in the summer term and once in the autumn term of the following year. Every year group from Nursery to Year 6 was involved in the collection and analysis of the information. Semi-structured interview questions and event-sampling observation sheets were used to help ensure reliability. Interviewees were asked to read the research findings to check the validity of interpretations. Feedback from the project was given during INSET.

As a researcher involved in researching my own organisation and colleagues, I was very aware of potentially sensitive issues. While it was a luxury to be able to spend time in various classrooms and talk in depth to different colleagues, it was also tremendously hard work.

Undertaking this research project made me question and examine children's entitlement to a curriculum appropriately pitched to their needs. The outcome for the school has hopefully been an opportunity to reflect deeply on issues and practice. The support and positive feedback from colleagues was encouraging and the intended improvements in practice arising from this project will be monitored carefully.

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