



POLICY FOR THE MORE ABLE

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Bentley Wood High School Policy for More Able Students

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Introduction

At Bentley Wood High School, our mission is to stretch and challenge all students while providing specialised support for our more able students to ensure they achieve their highest potential. We recognise that more able students have unique educational needs that require tailored approaches if they are to meet their potential.

Much of what is detailed below will apply to all our students whether they be so-called high, middle, or low attaining groups. It is our aim to challenge, stretch, and enrich the cultural capital of all our students. This policy, however, is an acknowledgment of the attention our school specifically pays to our highest-achieving cohort as a discrete group with their own special needs.

Vision

We aim to identify, support, and challenge our more able students to maximise their potential. We strive to create a culture of high expectations that benefits all students, raising overall school standards.

“All young people – regardless of their background, context, attainment levels or any other labels they may acquire – can benefit from and deserve to have their specific needs catered for. This is no less the case for the more able than for any other group. We must ensure that these learners experience high-quality challenge and support to develop their abilities.”¹

¹ <https://www.nace.co.uk/blogpost/1814360/374979/Why-focus-on-more-able-learners>

Our provision for the most able students in our school builds on the best research and evidence for supporting this demographic.

See Appendix 1 for summaries of this research.

Identification

- Initial identification is made based on prior KS2 data, followed up with the outcomes of Year 7 assessments, including GLS tests
- Departments identify More Able students which are subject specific.
- This is recorded in Arbor as a discrete cohort.
- In Years 7-13, teachers identify students excelling in their subject areas through assessment data, classroom observation, and specialist judgement. We are mindful of avoiding unconscious biases in this process and that not all more able students present in the same way ***See Appendix 2 for why a quantitative approach is insufficient***
- We do not just rely on data, but use teacher expert-judgement to get more accurate identification. Relying on mere assessment data alone *“carries the risk of overlooking the many highly able young people who may, for a range of reasons, be underachieving.”*²
- We look at achievement in broader areas like music grades and sporting success.

The register of most able students is updated as necessary and used to inform provision and interventions.

Recognition: Who Are More Able Learners?

More able learners may display a selection of the following characteristics:³

Personal Traits

- Inquisitive, curious, alert, and responsive to new ideas
- Quick and agile thinkers
- High self-motivation and initiative; can work well independently
- Socially adept
- Show leadership qualities
- Good or unusual sense of humour
- Sensitive and empathetic with others

² <https://www.nace.co.uk/blogpost/1764163/327555/Identifying-more-able-learners-beyond-the-numbers>

³ *‘Identifying more able learners: general characteristics’* NACE publication

- Socially immature or isolated; may, for example, prefer computers to people

Learning Ability

- Learn new ideas and concepts quickly, easily, and readily
- Good at reasoning, logical, and analytical thinking
- Good at dealing with abstractions and abstract thinking
- See relationships between things; can generalize from specific facts
- Good at understanding things and meanings; show unusual insights
- Able to memorize quickly and easily

Definitions:

More Able:

- Refers to students who demonstrate the **potential or capacity for high attainment or who already show high levels of performance relative to their peers within the same year group or school**. This can apply across all areas of the curriculum or be specific to certain subjects. The term emphasizes the possibility of latent abilities that have not yet fully manifested, allowing for the inclusion of underachievers who may have the potential to excel.
- **We do not just mean Higher Attainers (HAs) when we refer to the more able**, though there will be large crossover. *“More able pupils do, for the most part, perform highly and, if they don’t already, we want them to. However, where such statements comprise the sole or main focus of the definition, it becomes far too restrictive – a definition of “higher attaining” pupils rather than “more able”.*⁴

Exceptionally Able:

- Designates learners who demonstrate or have the **potential to demonstrate extremely high levels of ability compared to their peers nationwide**, not just within their own school. This term often includes students whose needs exceed those typically met by standard curriculum extensions and enrichment, requiring more tailored educational provisions to cater to their advanced capabilities.
- Exceptionally able students are often described with terms like “genius”, “high flyers”, and “very bright”. A quantitative measure once proposed as an indicator is *“the top 2% nationally for one or more academic and talent areas.”*⁵

⁴ ‘More Able Learners: Definitions and Terminology’ NACE Essentials series, p.5

⁵ ‘More Able Learners: Definitions and Terminology’ NACE Essentials series, p.8

Curricular Provision

Every department focuses on stretching the most able within their subject. A selection of our provision includes:

- General strategic expectation of offering enrichment and extension opportunities in and out of the classroom
- Departments curating their own 'stretch and challenge toolkits' (Scholar's Toolkits - resources for stretching the more able students and helping them attain their potential)
- Developing and promoting their subject-specific Cultural Capital Passports to stretch all students, including the more able, and to guide them to great books, art, podcasts, films, and so on connected to their subject
- Extension resources hosted on our Student Extension and Enrichment Team; each Dept responsible for curating and updating their own channel using Subject Ambassadors where appropriate
- Curriculum plans and lessons explicitly include opportunities for 'thinking hard', ensuring cognitive challenge for the most able, such as 'challenge' questions and tasks
- A broad and rich curriculum extending beyond exam specifications to enrich most able students – we don't reduce our curriculum to merely an exam board specification
- Mentoring of selected KS4 students aiming for top grades or Russell Group universities
- Selected KS5 students are put forward for the social mobility programme to increase awareness of developing their subject expertise relevant to their career paths
- Optional extension element included in the setting of all homework

Co-Curricular Provision

Bentley Wood provides a range of clubs, societies and programs to stretch our most able. While aimed at them, they benefit students of all abilities. A sampling includes:

- The Scholar's Program run by the Brilliant Club to expose students to university-style learning
- The St John's Inspire programme
- Oxbridge preparation groups
- Partnerships with high-achieving peer schools to collaborate on academic events
- Science Club;
- Classics Club;

- Choir;
- Orchestra;
- Performing Arts;
- Department Extension and Enrichment Passports
- KS5 Russell group activities and mentoring;
- Oxbridge tutoring.
- The Ethics Cup national philosophy debating competition
- Collaborations with other high-achieving local schools like North London Collegiate School and Harrow Boys School

Leadership and Management

The Senior Leadership Team oversee strategies and provision for the more able students, including having a designated senior lead with key oversight of this strategy (AHT). Provision for the more able was a renewed focus in the School Improvement Plan (SIP) for the year 2024-2025. This focus was continued in 2025-26 (phase 2). Middle leaders ensure provision for the more able in their subject areas through their curricular and co-curricular provision.

Professional Development

The school promotes and provides professional development opportunities on pedagogy and other strategies for supporting the more able. These include:

- Staff lead CPD through Teach Talks, Teaching & Learning Forums, and CPD Days
- Engagement with expert organizations like NACE dedicated to more able students
- Investment in the National College CPD platform which includes training webinars on teaching the more able
- Occasional guest speakers on research-based strategies for challenging the most able
- Sharing resources through our Staff Enrichment and CPD Teams channel
- Sharing of best practice research from the Chartered College of Teaching, and other sources, via our Staff Enrichment and CPD channel, staff Bulletin, and other avenues

Monitoring and Evaluation

A range of measures are used to monitor provision and outcomes for our most able students:

- Targets are set and tracked for 9-8 / A-A* grades, with underperformance addressed

- Department self-evaluations and improvement plans have a most able focus
- More able outcomes are integrated into staff appraisals and assessment points where appropriate
- New staff are inducted in more able policy and best practices on staff induction days
- Middle and Senior leaders analyse the more able cohort data to action interventions
- Most able students are a focus in quality assurance like lesson observations, learning walks, and focus groups

Policy Review and Development

Bentley Wood is committed to enhancing provision for most able students as part of our school ethos of high standards for all. A dedicated school improvement group (SIG) – the Teaching and Learning team -, as well as other professionally interested colleagues across the school, review research and best practices in this area. We are working to further develop consistent approaches across year levels, provide impactful enrichment experiences, and improve our more able students' social mobility and cultural capital.

In summary, this policy aims to challenge and develop all our students, including our most able students, to the fullest extent possible, allowing their gifts and talents to flourish. Through clear identification, a robust curriculum, targeted co-curricular provision, strong leadership, and a commitment to ongoing enhancement, we will enable all our students, including our most able, to excel and achieve their utmost potential.

Appendix 1:

Evidence on Best Practice for most Able Students

What Does The Research Say?

Four Sources have Informed Our Most Able Strategy and Policy:

1. Ofsted – findings and proposals
2. NACE best practice study – 12 schools
3. Lancashire County Council Report
4. NACE 2020 Research findings – Making Space for the Most Able

1. OFSTED Research Report Findings 2013

- Many of the most able students are making less than expected progress - **expectations are too low**
- **Transition from primary is not effective** enough - fail to build on prior attainment
- **Work is insufficiently challenging**, especially in KS3 - too much repetition and low-level tasks
- Lesson differentiation is often poor, with **most able students not stretched**
- **Teachers lack training** in meeting the needs of the most able
- **Pupil premium funding is rarely used** to support disadvantaged more able students
- **Homework is often not challenging or interesting** enough for the most able
- Schools provide little support for more able students in **applying to top universities**
- Schools lack expertise in the entry requirements and **preparation needed for elite universities**

OFSTED Research Report Proposals 2013

- Champion the needs of the most able and foster a culture of scholastic excellence
- Ensure transition arrangements support most able students to thrive from the start of Y7
- Evaluate mixed ability teaching to check the most able are sufficiently challenged
- Provide CPD so teachers can confidently provide stretch and challenge for the most able
- Set ambitious targets for the more able and systematically track their progress against them
- Develop partnerships with top universities to raise students' aspirations

- Provide tailored support for more able students in choosing and applying to university

2. Best Practice case study of best practice in 12 schools - NACE

- Inclusive whole school ethos and shared responsibility for meeting more able students' needs
- Strong SLT commitment and high expectations for the more able
- Influential More Able Coordinator role
- Rich curriculum offer with opportunities for extension and enrichment in and out of class
- Regular monitoring and early intervention if more able students fall behind
- Strong partnerships with parents, encouraging them to support their child's ambitions
- High quality transition, especially from primary to secondary, to ensure continuity of learning
- Range of identification methods, both quantitative and qualitative, regularly reviewed
- Focus on developing independent learning skills and self-regulation in more able students
- Celebration of academic success and fostering a culture of excellence

3. 'Provision for able, gifted and talented pupils' – Lancashire County Council Study

- A whole school policy on G&T, with a named coordinator and governor
- Regular **staff training** to support identification of, and provision for, more able students
- Systematic **identification** processes, using a breadth of **quantitative and qualitative data**, regularly reviewed
- **Curricular flexibility** to allow more able students to **deepen and extend their learning**
- Regular **tracking** and target-setting for more able students, with interventions if needed
- **Challenging homework** to allow more able students to explore topics in depth
- **Enrichment opportunities** like subject-specific clubs, competitions, visits and **master classes**
- Mentoring and **pastoral support** tailored to more able students' needs
- **Guidance** for more able students on future **career** pathways and **university** applications

- **Evaluation processes to monitor** the effectiveness of G&T provision and inform future planning

4. 'Making Space for the Most Able' - NACE Research Release 2020

Three key areas

1. Design and management of cognitively challenging learning opportunities
2. Rich and extended talk and cognitive discourse to support cognitive challenge
3. Curriculum organisation and design

4.1 Design and management of cognitively challenging learning opportunities

- Acceleration - Early entry and exit by pace not age; omit year of study; content acceleration within year; advanced learning project using ICT
- Metacognition
- Self-regulation and self-reliance
- Targeted provision – tracking; assessment; target setting
- Ability groups – task groups, setting, streaming, subject groups
- Instructional Models – EEF seven-step, I/We/You; Rosenshine

4.2 Rich extended talk and cognitive discourse to support cognitive challenge

- Key is “the move from teacher as instructor and modeller to pupil as a self-reliant practitioner.” (Metacognition, e.g. EEF 7-steps)
- Questions and questioning – curiosity, motivation, challenge
- Facilitator to activator – metacognitive strategies
- Dialogic teaching – Socratic questioning / teaching
- Enquiry oriented - open questions
- Cognitive discourse – deep learning

4.3 Curriculum organisation and design for cognitive challenge

- **Knowledge-rich** and **deep** curriculum; additional enriching, culturally enhancing learning opportunities
 - Enrichment and enhancement
 - Assessment
 - Metacognition
 - Teaching and learning – thinking hard; deep subject knowledge

- Organisation of learning
- Advanced and complex content

Appendix 2:**Why is a Simple Data or Quantitative Approach to Identification Insufficient?**

- **Lack of Flexibility:** Numerical definitions often lack flexibility and may not accommodate variations in student abilities across different contexts or subject areas.
- **Overemphasis on Quantitative Measures:** A strict percentage-based definition focuses heavily on quantitative measures such as test scores, which may overlook qualitative aspects of a student's abilities, like creativity or critical thinking.
- **Potential Exclusion of Underachievers:** Relying solely on numerical thresholds may exclude students who are capable but underachieving due to various barriers, such as socio-economic factors, language barriers, or personal circumstances.
- **Misidentification:** Strict numerical criteria could lead to misidentification, where students who excel in non-academic or less quantifiable areas are overlooked.
- **Creates a Ceiling Effect:** Using a set percentage (like the top 10%) artificially limits the number of students who can be considered more able, potentially missing out on those who are on the borderline of the defined threshold.