

Special Education Support Service: Information on Exceptionally Able / Gifted & Talented Children

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Definition:

From Report of the Special Education Review Committee¹ (1993):

Pupils who are exceptionally able or talented are those who have demonstrated their capacity to achieve high performance in one or more of the following areas:

- (a) General intellectual ability;
- (b) Specific academic aptitude;
- (c) Creative or productive thinking;
- (d) Leadership ability;
- (e) Visual and performing arts;
- (f) Mechanical aptitude;
- (g) Psychomotor ability, e.g. in athletics, gymnastics.

A reasonable working definition which is accepted world-wide in educational and psychological circles is that a child who shows exceptional ability in one or more areas such as mathematical, verbal, spatial awareness, musical, or artistic ability may be considered gifted. Defining the term 'exceptional' is more difficult as this group falls in a continuum. Opinions vary on this but the majority suggest that children falling into the top 5% of the population in a given area are probably in need of some additional support.

The term 'gifted' tends to be reserved for those with an IQ greater than 130, i.e. the top 2% of the population. It is important to remember, though, that IQ scores extend to 170 and above and while the numbers of such people become progressively smaller with increasing score, the needs of these 'profoundly gifted' become increasingly acute. Within a school it would probably be reasonable to use a working definition, which would say that children with ability at the 97th percentile level in at least one area are seen as having special needs. At this kind of level, there are approximately 23,000 exceptionally able children within the Irish educational system. Such children are from all possible social backgrounds.

¹ The Special Education Review Committee was established by the Minister for Education in August 1991 and was chaired by Mr. Declan Brennan.

Common Characteristics:

Exceptionally able children are likely to show some of the following characteristics. However, it is important to remember that every child is an individual and so will have their own particular strengths, talents and weaknesses. It is also important to note that students with exceptional ability will not always achieve highly in the classroom.

1. Keen powers of observation;
2. Have learned to read early (often well before school age);
3. Reads rapidly and widely;
4. Well developed vocabulary – takes a delight in using new and unusual words;
5. Has great intellectual curiosity;
6. Absorbs information rapidly – often described as being like sponges;
7. Very good memory – can recall information in different circumstances;
8. Has the ability to concentrate deeply for prolonged periods;
9. Very good powers of reasoning and problem solving;
10. Has intense interests;
11. Possesses unusual imagination;
12. Has a great interest in 'big questions' e.g. the nature of the universe, the problem of suffering in the world, environmental issues;
13. Very sensitive – perhaps becoming upset easily;
14. Very aware of rights and wrongs, concerned about injustices.

What can I do as a teacher?

Exceptionally able children have special educational needs. Because regular schoolwork may not provide sufficient challenge they may experience boredom, which can lead to frustration at school. In addition, many may feel isolated and uncomfortable with their ability. This can lead to them under-achieving in school in an effort to conform. There are several approaches that can be of help and sometimes a combination of all of these may be needed.

(a) Acceleration: move the student into an older class for some or all subjects

Frequently high ability children find that their natural peer group are older children. Their language and interests are often more in keeping with children who are 2-3 years older or indeed adults. If a child feels more comfortable with an older group, then acceleration may be a good option. As a first step it might be worthwhile having the student work with an older group for a trial period, perhaps for a special project.

(b) Differentiation: keep the student with their usual age group, but provide different material

Differentiation can be achieved in various ways. For example all students can be given the same type of work, but a high ability child may be expected to go into the project in more depth. Alternatively, within the same group, different tasks can be given to different groups of children. This works particularly well where

there are different groups of students for different subjects. It can help to encourage all students to understand that everyone has a wide range of different strengths and weaknesses.

(c) Open ended project work

Have students working on material, which is not just a series of 'closed questions'. Encourage 'higher order' thinking – e.g. ask 'why did the character in the book behave in such way?', 'would you have acted similarly, if not why not?' Encourage students to present their work in different ways – e.g. the end product of a local history project could be to design a travel brochure for time travellers to the area.

(d) Special classes

Have special classes available for a group of high ability students, perhaps on a weekly basis. In some schools these have been given by resource teachers / school principals / parents / retired persons in the local community.

(e) Enrichment Activities

Providing access to activities such as lunchtime clubs e.g. chess, astronomy, quizzes, debates, music groups, drama. Particularly try to facilitate students meeting others with similar interests even if they are in different year groups.

(f) Outside speakers

Invite speakers to give talks in the school and use the topic as a starting point for ongoing project work.

(g) Avoid giving the student repetitious work

Most high ability children do not need a high level of repetitive work. Once they have grasped a new topic, they are usually keen to move on. If they have to do a large number of repetitive exercises it is very likely that they will become bored and resentful. Before introducing a new topic, check if anyone in the group already knows the area. If you can establish that a child understands fully the new concept, have backup material ready for them. If a child has some ongoing project work, it can be helpful to let them work on that while the rest of the class are carrying out repeated examples.

References / Extra Resources

Books:

1. Department of Education and Science (1993) *Report of the Special Education Review Committee*
Available from Government Publications 01-6476834 €12.70 Catalogue No. E/109
2. The Irish Centre for Talented Youth has compiled a detailed bibliography related to the topic of gifted & talented / exceptionally able children. The link is: http://www.dcu.ie/ctyi/resource/r_biblio.htm

Organisations / Support Groups:

a.

CTYI, Dublin City University, Dublin 9

Tel: (01) 7005634 Fax: (01) 7005693 E-mail: ctyi@dcu.ie Website: www.dcu.ie/ctyi

The Irish Centre for Talented Youth (CTYI) works with young people of exceptional academic ability. Such students have been acknowledged by the Irish Department of Education and Science as having “special educational needs”. The Centre aims to address these needs by:

- Identifying high ability students throughout Ireland through annual Talent Searches;
- Providing services for these students, including Saturday classes, residential summer programmes, correspondence courses and Discovery Days;
- Giving support to parents and teachers;
- Carrying out research in this area.

2. Irish Association for Gifted Children / An Óige Thréitheach

Carmichael House, 4 North Brunswick Street, Dublin 7

Tel: (01) 8735702 Fax: (01) 8735737 Website: <http://www.iagc.ie>

Secretary: David Temple Chairperson: Leslie Graves

The activities of the IAGC include:

- Coffee Evenings at 8.00 p.m. on the first Friday of every month at the above address
- Members Meetings every 3 months.
- A newsletter is produced by the association several times a year.
- Explorers Groups operating from Marino VEC. Tel: (01) 8332100 for further information.
- Publication: ‘Understanding Gifted Children: A Parent & Teacher Guide’

3. National Association for Gifted Children

Suite 14, Challenge House, Sherwood Drive, Bletchley, Milton Keynes MK3 6DP, UK.

Tel: (0044) 870 7703217 Website: <http://www.nagcbrtain.org.uk>

d.

National Association for Able Children in Education

P.O. BOX 242, Arnolds Way, Oxford OX2 9FR, UK

Tel: (0044) 1865 861879 Fax: (0044) 1865 861880 Website: <http://www.nace.co.uk/>

APPENDIX 1: Useful Contacts / Addresses

Chess Ireland

<http://www.irishchess.com/>

66 Kincora Grove, Clontarf, Dublin 3

(Website Newsletter with links to various other Irish Chess websites)

Astronomy Ireland

Freepost PO Box 2888, Dublin 5.

Tel: (01) 8470777

E-mail: info@astronomy.ie

Website: <http://www.astronomy.ie>

Irish Astronomical Society, PO Box 2547, Dublin 11

Tel: (01) 8641382

Dublin Naturalist's Field Club

(aim to increase awareness of natural history and environment)

Patrick Wyse Jackson, Department of Geology, Trinity College, Dublin 2

Armagh Planetarium, College Hill, Armagh BT61 9DB

Tel: (048) 37523689

<http://www.armagh-planetarium.co.uk/>

Irish Mathematics Olympiad Training

<http://www.ul.ie/~maths/imo.htm>

University of Limerick

Gordon Lessells

Tel: (061) 202018

Institute of Technology, Dundalk

Dr. Maurice O'Reilly

Tel: (042) 9370295

Maynooth College

Prof. Tony O'Farrell

Tel: (01) 7068378

University College Cork

Prof. Finbarr Holland

Tel: (021) 4902540

University College Dublin

Prof. T. Laffey

Tel: (01) 7068265

IBM DCU Irish Science Olympiad, c/o Michael A. Cotter, Dublin City University, Dublin 9

E-mail: iso@dcu.ie

Website: <http://iso.dcu.ie/~iso/>

Arranges competitions to select post-primary students under 20 years of age to represent Ireland at International Science Olympiads in the areas of Physics, Chemistry, Biology and Programming.

Irish Geological Association, c/o Dr. Julian Menuge, Department of Geology, University College Dublin.

E-mail: j.f.menuge@ucd.ie

Website: http://www.tcd.ie/natural_resources/geoscience/iga.htm

Arranges lectures on variety of geological topics usually held on Wednesday evenings at 8pm in University College Dublin or Trinity College Dublin. Caters for professional, amateur and student geologists

The Geographical Society of Ireland

<http://www.geographical-society-ireland.org/>

Contact: Honorary Secretary, Geography Department, University College Dublin, Dublin 4
Programme of seminars and fieldtrips for its members.

All things left-handed, PO Box 3471, Malahide, Co Dublin Tel: (01) 8450343

The Ark, Eustace Street, Temple Bar, Dublin 2

Tel: (01) 6707788 Fax: (01) 6707758 Website: <http://www.ark.ie>

The Ark provides cultural programmes for children aged between 4 and 14 years of age.

Irish Peatland Conservation Council, 119 Capel Street, Dublin 1

Tel / Fax: (01) 8722397 Email: bogs@ipcc.ie Website: <http://www.ipcc.ie>

The IPCC is an independent conservation charity, established 15 years ago to campaign for the conservation of a representative sample of living intact Irish bogs and peatlands looking for support.

An Taisce Environmental Education Programmes, Tailor's Hall, Back Lane, Dublin 8.

Tel: (01) 4541786 Fax: (01) 4533255 Website: <http://www.antaisce.org>

Irish Wildlife Trust, Garden Level 21 Northumberland Road, Dublin 4

<http://www.iwt.ie>

Irish Wildbird Conservancy

Southview Church Road Greystones

Tel: (01) 2875759

Rutledge House, 8 Longford Place, Monkstown, Co. Dublin

Tel: (01) 2804323

Architectural Association of Ireland 8 Merrion Square, Dublin 2, Ireland

Tel: (01) 6614100 Fax: (01) 6614150 Website: <http://www.irish-architecture.com/aai/>

The AAI was founded in 1896 'to promote and afford facilities for the study of architecture and the allied sciences and arts, and to provide a medium of friendly communication between members and others interested in the progress of architecture'. It sponsors a public lecture series and annual awards.

APPENDIX 2: Literary Competitions for Young People

Gerald Manly Hopkins Poetry Competition Contact: Mr. Richard O'Rourke, Monasterevin, Co. Kildare
Tel: (045) 525416 Deadline: June

Listowel Writers Week / Kerry County Council Creative Writing for Youth

Contact: Ms. Mary Kennelly, PO Box 147, Listowel, Co. Kerry
Tel: (068) 21074 Deadline: March

Carlingford Lough Young Writers Circle Contact: Ms. Michelle Carvin, Trinity Close, Carlingford.
Tel: (042) 9373284 Deadline: May

Cecil Day Lewis Awards, Athy Urban District Council, Rathstewart, Athy, Co. Kildare
Contact: Pat Henshaw Tel: (0507) 38968 Deadline: November

Clonmel Writers Weekend Library Competition Contact: Marie Boland, Secretary Clonmel Library
Tel: (052) 24545 Deadline: July

Craven Poetry Competition Contact: Willie Treacy, Shortstone, Hackballs Cross, Dundalk, Co Louth
Tel: (042) 9377110 Deadline: March

Feile Filiochta International Poetry Competition <http://www.dlrco.ie/library/feile.htm>
Tel: (01) 2781788 (Joe Keyes) Deadline: October

Patrick MacGill Summer School Contact: Nora Breslin, Bunclubog, Glenties, Co Donegal
Tel: (075) 51103 Deadline: June

Irish Writers Centre, 19 Parnell Square, Dublin 1 <http://www.writerscentre.ie/>

Young Business Writer Award Competition, DCU Business School, Dublin 9. Tel 7005659
Deadline: December

Young Science Writers Competition, RDS / Technology Ireland
Tel: (01) 6680866 http://www.rds.ie/rds_foundation/index_science_act.html

Very Special Arts Young Playwright Programme, City Arts Centre, 23-25 Moss Street, Dublin 2
Tel: (01) 6770643

APPENDIX 3: WEB PAGES OF INTEREST FOR STUDENTS

New Scientist Planet Science Hotspots	http://www.keysites.com/keysites/hotspots/hotspots.html
BBC Tomorrow's World	http://bbc.co.uk/tw/
Double Helix	http://www.csiro.au/helix/
Try Science	http://www.tryscience.org/
ScienceNet Information Service	http://www.sciencenet.org.uk
Science.ie	http://www.science.ie
Projects on the environment & Astronomy	http://www.theguardians.com/index.html
International Astronomical Youth Camp	http://www.iayc.org/
Odyssey of the Mind	http://www.odysseyofthemind.com
How Stuff Works	http://www.howstuffworks.com/
How Things work	http://howthingswork.virginia.edu/
Math Soft Maths Puzzle Page	http://www.mathsoft.com/puzzle.html
Maths Forum: Maths Software	http://mathforum.org/arithmetic/arith.software.html
Mega Mathematical	http://www.c3.lanl.gov/mega-math/
Mathmastery.com	http://www.mathmastery.com/dailybrains/
Tips for Children interested in Creative Writing	http://www.realkids.com/club.shtml
Ewritelife.com	http://www.ewritelife.com/
National Space Society	http://www.nss.org/
Ask an Astronaut	http://www.kingston.ac.uk/sec/aaa.htm
Ask a Space Scientist about Space Travel	http://image.gsfc.nasa.gov/poetry/ask/astravel.html
Views of the solar system	http://www.solarviews.com/
Welcome to the Planets	http://pds.jpl.nasa.gov/planets/
Physics Puzzles	http://www.afunzone.com/Physics.html
Physics Puzzles, University of Birmingham, UK	http://www.ph.bham.ac.uk/text/physics/admissions/puzzles/
Ask a Volcanologist	http://volcano.und.edu/vwdocs/ask_a.html
Ask a Geologist	http://walrus.wr.usgs.gov/docs/ask-a-ge.html/
Smart E – Irish Energy's web site for children	http://www.irish-energy.ie/Smart_E/index.htm
Irish Archaeology on the Internet	http://www.xs4all.nl/~tbreen/links.html
Wild Ireland Magazine	http://www.wildireland.ie/
National Geographic	http://www.nationalgeographic.com/
Exploring the Environment	http://www.cotf.edu/ete/modules/modules.html
Kids Domain	http://www.kidsdomain.com/
Purdue University Online Writing Lab	http://owl.english.purdue.edu/
Brain Teasers & Puzzles: Brain Bashers	http://www.brainbashers.com/

APPENDIX 4: WEB PAGES OF INTEREST FOR PARENTS / TEACHERS

Research Bibliography from Center for Talented Youth, Johns Hopkins University, Baltimore, USA

<http://www.jhu.edu/gifted/research/biblio.html>

Online Articles from Center for Talent Development, Northwestern University, Illinois, USA

<http://www.ctd.northwestern.edu/resources/articles.html>

Eric Clearinghouse on Disabilities and Gifted Education

<http://ericec.org/index.html>

Parents Newsletter, Talent Identification Programme, Duke University, Durham, North Carolina, USA

<http://www.tip.duke.edu/newsltr/index.html>

Gifted & Talented Resources Online

<http://www.eskimo.com/~user/kids.html>

The Hollingworth Center for Highly Gifted Children

<http://www.hollingworth.org/>

Roeper Review – A journal on Gifted Education

<http://www.roeperreview.org/>

Gifted Monthly newsletter

<http://www.giftedmonthly.homestead.com/>

The Council for Exceptional Children

<http://www.cec.sped.org/>

Gifted Children with Learning Disabilities: A Review of the Issues

http://www.ldonline.org/ld_indepth/gt_ld/jld_gtld.html

ScoilNet - Helpful information for parents / teachers / students on Irish Education

<http://www.scoilnet.ie>

Imagine A magazine for Talented Youth – Published by CTY, Johns Hopkins University, Baltimore

<http://www.jhu.edu/gifted/imagine/>

For further **resource material**, use the following link: http://www.dcu.ie/ctyi/resource/r_materi.htm