

More Able Children at St John's College School

St John's seeks to foster the individual aptitudes and meet the individual needs of each child, irrespective of ability. The school is committed to discovering the gifts and talents of each child and to helping each child discover that he or she has a gift or talent in some or many areas.

We use the term 'more able' to refer to children who are performing at the top of the cohort in any single area of the curriculum or across a range of areas.

St John's is also aware of the value and significance of **social and moral talents**, of the importance of developing these and of the contribution they make to the overall welfare and well-being of a class and of the school as a whole.

Responsibilities

Identifying, making provision for and monitoring the needs of all the most able children is the responsibility of all staff. All teaching staff have a responsibility to ensure that all children are being adequately challenged by, for example, extension tasks or opportunities to perform.

The Director of Studies, in conjunction with Heads of Department and Heads of Year as appropriate, is responsible for the implementation of the school's policy, including managing the identification of and provision for the most able children, developing resources and maintaining and communicating an awareness of national developments.

Aims

The School's aims for the most able children are the same as those for any others, as set out above.

We are aware that gifts and talents may reveal themselves in widely differing ways in different children and are conscious that while some children may be highly able in many areas, others will have very specific academic gifts or non-academic talents. We aim to make provision for the abilities of each child and, according to the school's ethos and aims, we do not seek a narrow definition or a limiting approach to identification.

Academically, children's abilities become evident through the rigour with which we attend to the progress and needs of all children. Beyond the academic classroom, abilities are fostered and become evident through a very broad range of specialist provision within the timetabled curriculum and through a carefully balanced and full range of extra-curricular opportunities.

The school's commitment to the development of talent is based on a number of beliefs: that the discovery of a talent yields a confidence that has benefits throughout the curriculum; that each child should discover the fulfilment and richness of experience that come from such opportunities; that in learning how to express themselves the children discover their best selves; that in working together and giving to others in sport or in the performing arts, children learn skills of collaboration and empathy, values of care and a generosity of spirit that inform and deeply enhance their social, moral, spiritual and cultural development.

Identifying the most able Children

In identifying the most able children, we are aware that they may well stand out from their peers for positive reasons but that there can also be apparently negative indicators.

The most able children may be rapid, efficient learners, with a high capacity to integrate new knowledge and with exceptional powers of synthesis and analysis. They may have some or many of the following positive learning qualities, characteristics and attitudes:

- ability to perceive analogies and to think laterally
- interest in abstract, conceptual thinking
- aptitude for inductive and deductive reasoning
- intellectual flexibility
- strength in problem solving and collaborative learning
- socially very well developed
- at ease with open-ended questioning
- intellectual maturity beyond their years
- breadth of interests
- highly imaginative
- highly developed reading habits
- highly articulate with an exceptionally wide vocabulary
- excitement with new ideas
- single-mindedness and ability to persevere
- quirky and off beat sense of humour, being witty rather than joke-making
- high tolerance of uncertainty and little fear of failure – accepting trial and error and the value of making mistakes

The most able children may also be identified through behaviours and attitudes that are more negative and /or challenging. Their intellectual maturity may not be matched by, and can even be in inverse proportion to their emotional maturity. They may:

- think laterally in a way that may seem to challenge, or may actually challenge, a teacher's authority, show great variations between oral and written ability
- be lop-sided, showing great variation between achievements in different academic subjects
- be perfectionists and have a great fear of failure and error
- evidence single-mindedness as inflexibility
- lack social skills, be poor at collaborating, be gauche or isolated.
- go off task or lack perseverance
- become easily frustrated. Younger children, in particular, may feel great frustration at being unable to keep up with their brains when recording and older children may write very succinctly.

In identifying the most able children, we need to be aware that the evidence of high ability may sometimes be negative and that children's ability to conform is not necessarily indicative of their abilities.

Many children at St John's are of high ability, as evidenced by standardised testing and by the school's own academic monitoring procedures.

Termly pupil reviews draw together all statistical information (including a range of standardised test results, teachers' coursework assessments and endeavour scores) and this information is considered alongside the information contained in reports and in each child's Action Plan. As a consequence of the pupil review, an action plan is determined as necessary for each child.

Complementing and building on the pupil review procedure, weekly staff meetings and tutor:tutee meetings give us the opportunity to review and make decisions about each child's needs and performance. Heads of examined subjects gather information in advance from relevant subject staff to ensure that those who show potential are receiving appropriate extension. Such meetings ensure that Heads of Department, teachers and tutors are informed and are aware of the needs of every child, including those requiring extension.

Provision for the most able within the classroom

- Differentiation within the classroom: before the introduction of any formal setting by ability, the children from Kindergarten to Form 2 are organized in mixed ability Forms. Within these Forms,

children are taught in ability groups within the classroom, for example with extension, core and support groups, and the Form Teacher has the support of a classroom assistant to ensure that children achieve at their appropriate level. Increasingly, work is set at different levels and children are encouraged to choose for themselves which level is appropriate in any one lesson. They are encouraged to work in the 'challenge zone'. Extension tasks are part of all lesson plans, providing challenge and encouraging the children to understand that making mistakes can be a good learning experience. They are also encouraged to make choices and engage in collaborative learning.

- **Setting:** when the children move to Senior House in Forms 3 & 4, there are sets in English and Maths. In the final two years, we have ability grouping by academic subject for Maths, Science, French and Latin, while Humanities are grouped together for ability setting. The setting approach allows us to accommodate each child's different levels of achievement and potential in the range of academic subjects. There is provision for the 'most able' in the top set, and this includes clear planning for the Summer examination preparation. Extension tasks form part of lesson plans in all subjects and such tasks include open ended questions to encourage investigative and exploratory thinking and, in any discussion sessions, differentiated questioning is used to direct higher order questions to the most able.
- **Tutors:** tutorial responsibility for the most able in Form 5 is allocated to specific tutors to ensure that their needs are coherently monitored.
- **Scholarships:** in Form 6, the focus is more specifically on the demands of particular scholarships but also includes the needs of the most able not attempting scholarships. Collective planning of exam preparation is carried out by the Director of Studies and Senior Tutor to ensure a coherent approach; this includes an individual extension plan, taking into account additional workload requiring an adjustment to a child's balance of studies, the planning of any additional teaching and the coherent use of practice papers appropriate to individual scholarship attempts. Curriculum time in PE, Design Technology or Art may be used to allow subject teachers to give additional extension time to the most able (this is assessed on an individual basis for each child).
- The school employs qualified specialist teachers and Heads of Department in Music, Art, Design Technology, ICT, PE and Games, Dance and Drama and these subjects remain a key part of the timetabled curriculum throughout a child's time at the school. Unusually, the specialist teachers (and some Heads of Department) work with children from the Kindergarten upwards, ensuring the best possible development of the children's talents. The school is committed to providing breadth and depth in the development of talent within the timetabled curriculum and the opportunities available, the expertise of the teaching and the continuity of specialist teacher awareness lead both to the early development and the early identification of significant talent within an approach that provides opportunity to all children.

Provision for the most able beyond the classroom

- **Maths:** participation in competitions such as the Primary Maths Challenge and the UK Junior Maths Challenge and Olympiad; the Mathematical Pie Journal provides specific extension for the most able as does the use of the web-based Mathematics resource.
- **English:** participation in Poetry competitions and performances of their own poetry in the school's Poetry Evening; publication of a selection of their work in the school magazine, the *Eaglet*; participation in the 'Creative Writing' club; completion of the 'Arts Award' national qualification.
- **Speaking and listening:** debating club and debating competitions; a wide range of opportunities for the children to read and speak in public.
- **Science:** participation in the National Prep School Science competition and Science Festival events.
- **French:** an Assistante is able to provide one-to-one and small group extension.
- **Classics:** Greek Club after school for the most able classicists who also script and perform an annual Latin play in a competition held at a local senior school.
- **Scholarship clinics:** in all exam subjects.
- **F5 and 6 Enrichment:** on Thursday afternoons, children in F5 and Form 6 take part in 'Enrichment activities'. These classes are targeted at extending children's gifts and interests.
- **Art, Music, Drama, Sport, Design Technology:** provision of extra-curricular opportunities to extend the most able, such as invitation Drama or the Jazz ensemble.

- Drama: there is at least one major production per year in which talented children are given key roles. A group of the most able drama students in F6 are also selected to take part in the 'Shakespeare Schools Festival' competition. Children with talents in drama also have opportunities to take part in poetry evenings and reading in Chapel.
- Lighting and sound: a specialist works with children backstage for each drama production to develop their understanding of lighting and sound and this is especially good for developing the abilities of children who have talents in ICT and DT.
- Sport: involvement in County level teams and training
- Art: workshops from visiting artists; completion of the 'Arts Award' national qualification
- Music: holiday orchestras, individual music lessons and instrumental ensembles and choral groups. There are also a large number of informal lunchtime concerts as well as formal evening concerts and a showcase end of year concert for the most able in West Road Concert Hall; completion of the 'Arts Award' national qualification.

Choristers

The choristers of St John's College Choir receive an exceptional musical education in the hands of the St John's College Director of Music. Children are selected for the Choir (which requires them to be boarding pupils in the school) through open Voice Trials. The Choir, in addition to singing services in the College Chapel during University Term time, records award winning CDs and tours nationally and internationally. Choristers are members of one of the world's great choirs and the enrichment and extension they experience is profound. In addition to their choral involvement, choristers will usually study at least two musical instruments to a high level, gaining Music scholarships to the best musical schools in the country.

Social and Moral 'talent'

The school believes that engagement in the performing arts and sports itself contributes enormously to the children's ability to collaborate, empathise and take responsibility for themselves and each other, and such things are incorporated into our approach to teaching in these subjects.

In addition, there is a particular focus, within the school's pastoral approach, on the development and acknowledgement of children's contribution to the school community and to the wider community.

The Buddy system, in which each older child has a younger buddy, the responsibilities given to all children in their final year, the very wide range of charitable fund raising in which we engage as a community, the committees for Charities, Environment and Community Involvement in which children are involved, are some examples of a whole school approach to social and moral development that are documented in the school's Pastoral policies.

Further development

In recent years developments with regard to the most able have included:

Speakers during 'Enrichment afternoons'

As part of the Senior House Thursday 'Enrichment afternoons' we invite a range of events and speakers from a wide variety of backgrounds and experience to work with the children. These speakers provide a rich source of extension, speaking to the children about their work, their beliefs and their experiences. Speakers and events have included the former Archbishop of Canterbury and Master of Magdalene, Lord Williams of Oystermouth; explorer Colonel John Blashford-Snell OBE; Nick Butler, an engineer for Tideway Tunnels involved in the building of the Channel Tunnel; Tulip Mazumdar, BBC world health reporter; Colonel Macintosh, British Military Attaché to Jordan and its royal family; various well known book authors and poets. Where appropriate, the University faculties, including the Institute of Education, are involved to provide events and speakers.

Staff Training

Training of staff in the identification and management of the most able will continue to be arranged to refresh and extend the staff's understanding

School Committees

The success of the children's committees will be reviewed and further plans for the development of children's responsibilities will be considered.