



ST MARY'S
Catholic College



HIGH POTENTIAL LEARNERS



RATIONALE

St Mary's Catholic College's policy on High Potential Learners is set within the context of the Catholic Education's mission to enable all students to achieve the 'fullness of life' (John 10:10). Our College's "educational program is intentionally directed to the growth of the whole person" (The Catholic School, 1977, para. 29): intellectually, physically, socially, emotionally, morally, and spiritually. Therefore, the inherent dignity of each young person is recognised and their unique potential is fostered. The High Potential Learners Program forms St Mary's strategic response to the meet the educational needs of all students with particular attention to High Potential Learners.

The aim of the policy is to inform our community of the beliefs, understandings and agreed practices behind school-based decisions for high potential learners. This policy ensures St Mary's curriculum is inclusive and pedagogy is purposeful, meaningful and relevant. The intellectual and imaginative capacities of all learners are nurtured and challenged, transforming potential into high performance.

DEFINITIONS OF HIGH POTENTIAL LEARNERS (GIFTEDNESS AND TALENT)

St Mary's High Potential Learners policy adopts Gagne's definition of giftedness and talent as identified in his Differentiated Model of Giftedness and Talent (2012, DMGT 2.0) (see insert).

According to Gagne, giftedness is described as distinctly above average in one or more of the following domains of human ability:

- intellectual
- creative
- social
- physical

Gagne's Differentiated Model of Giftedness and Talent (2012, DMGT 2.0) describes how natural ability in different domains (giftedness) can be developed into high achievement (talent). Giftedness corresponds to competence which is distinctly above average in one or more domains of ability. Talent refers to performance which is distinctly above average in one or more fields of human performance.

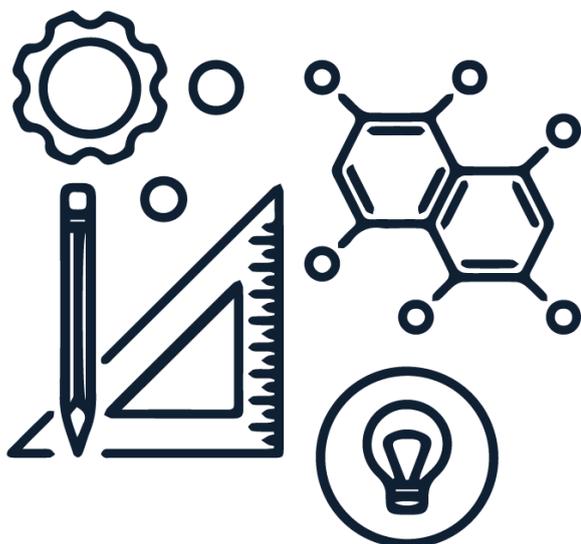
THE HIGH POTENTIAL LEARNER

High potential learners vary in terms of the nature and level of their abilities. These students:

- are not always visible or easy to identify, this can be impacted by cultural and linguistic background, gender, language and learning difficulties, socio-economic circumstance, location, and lack of engagement in curriculum that is not matched to their abilities.
- exhibit an almost unlimited range of personal characteristics in temperament, personality, motivation and behaviour — no standard pattern of talent exists among gifted individuals.
- vary in abilities and aptitudes — they may demonstrate gifts and talents in a single area or across a variety of domains; they may have a disability or diverse learning needs.
- vary in their level of giftedness — this means that two students who have gifts in the same domain will not necessarily have the same abilities in that domain.
- vary in achievement — while having gifts is often associated with high achievement, achievement can, and does, vary across high-potential students and over time. Some gifted students underachieve and experience difficulty translating their gifts into talents.

WHAT WE KNOW ABOUT GIFTED LEARNERS

- Giftedness is present in every culture and socio-economic context and domain. All learners have the right to an education that is responsive to their needs and the provision of an appropriate educational curriculum for the gifted/high potential learners is an issue of equity.
- Communities have a responsibility to identify gifted and talented students and schools play a crucial role here.
- They have diverse learning needs and require educational adaptations in order to develop their potential.
- They may have different academic, creative and social/ emotional needs to their age peers. They require an educational program that also supports these needs.
- Early identification enables timely intervention to support optimal development.
- They may be twice exceptional, their giftedness may mask their disability or their disability may mask their giftedness.
- The development of gifted students tends to be asynchronous and requires understanding and support in circumstances where emotional and social development does not match cognitive abilities.
- The distinction between giftedness as outstanding potential, and talent as outstanding performance, is important. A student can be gifted without being talented, and requires an educational program responsive to her/his needs to catalyse potential into performance.
- Gifted learners are best placed academically, socially and emotionally when they are with like-ability peers for a significant proportion of their time at school.
- Gifted learners require curriculum appropriate to the students' needs. This includes differentiated curriculum within the classroom and extension and accelerative practices where appropriate.



IDENTIFICATION

Early and ongoing identification of high potential is crucial to improving learning outcomes for these students. Identification is a complex process and professional learning for teachers is essential. The quality and scope of the school curriculum, classroom organisation and high potential curriculum should enable outstanding abilities of students to be recognised.

Schools are required to have a high level of knowledge and understanding about their students, along with an effective identification process.

The following guidelines underpin the process of identification of gifted / high potential learners:

- Early identification of gifted/high potential students could commence prior to enrolment and be ongoing thereafter.
- Identification processes should be inclusive so that equal opportunity, regardless of gender, ethnic background, disability, geographic location or cultural or socio-economic background is achieved.
- Evidence based identification data will be used to profile students' learning needs and provide direction for classroom instruction.
- Research-based assessment tools that provide both qualitative and quantitative data will be used, data can be triangulated.
- Off level testing can be utilised, as can portfolios of student work.
- Emotional, social and affective characteristics of high potential learners should also inform the identification process.

THE LEARNING ENVIRONMENT

High Potential Learners should thrive in environments that are safe, supportive, secure and responsive to their needs. This is evident when:

- schools adopt the Gagne's Differentiating Model of Giftedness and Talent (2012, DMGT 2.0).
- the learning environment is appropriately challenging and complex.
- there is a shared understanding of and commitment to evidence based practice.
- the school culture encourages and celebrates learning and high achievement is valued
- explicit instructional practices that meet the identified needs of high potential learners are adopted.
- teachers understand the characteristics of gifted and talented learners and contribute to the identification processes.
- the design of differentiated educational programs, aligned to the Australian Curriculum, are in place.
- flexible grouping options are utilized.
- schools implement appropriate accelerative options where needed.
- schools understand and respond to the socio-emotional characteristics of all students.
- schools review and evaluate their educational options to ensure they are informed by ongoing assessment data and current research.

INFORMED TEACHING PRACTICES

Teaching and learning at St Mary's is informed by the four critical questions of learning. These questions underpin our identification of gifted students:

- What do we expect our students to learn?
 - Goals/Expectations
- How will we know they are learning?
 - Assessment
- How will we respond when they don't learn?
 - Intervention.
- How will we respond if they already know it?
 - Extension and enrichment

ASSESSMENT MONITORING AND FEEDBACK

Assessment and reporting practices for gifted learners must be relevant, valid, reliable and ongoing.

Formative and summative assessment are integral to the learning process. Tools, such as off-level (also known as above-level) testing, differentiated pre- and post-performance based assessments, product-based assessment and standardised assessments should be included in assessment practices.

LEADERSHIP FOR LEARNING

In schools that are responsive to the needs of gifted/high potential learners, the principal and leadership team set challenging goals for all in the school community. This includes supporting teachers to adopt rich, diverse and agile instructional practices that will cater for the needs of gifted/high potential learners. This is evident when the leader(s):

- support professional learning and collaboration for teachers in gifted education.
- support and monitor the implementation of gifted education/high potential learner initiatives and curriculum options.
- support processes of communication among stakeholders in gifted education including schools, families and Catholic Schools Office personnel.

PROFESSIONAL LEARNING

Teachers with training in gifted education are more likely to foster high-level thinking, allow for greater student expression, consider individual variance in their teaching, and understand how to provide rich and challenging tasks. This professional growth is evident in our schools when:

- the professional learning enables teachers to enact St Mary's Strategic Plan.
- informed by learning needs of all students and evidence based practices.
- the school actively seeks external professional learning as needed and provides opportunities for leaders and staff to engage in appropriate, planned professional learning.
- all staff are supported in employing best practice pedagogy to teach high potential learners.
- all staff learn from expert teachers through collaboration, shared learning and modeled practice.
- teachers adopt differentiation, backward design and reflective practices enabling students to reach their potential.

PARENT PARTNERSHIPS

The educational decisions for gifted students is the responsibility of all stakeholders. Parents of gifted students are usually excellent identifiers. Schools have a responsibility to work in partnership with parents to encourage/ support the development of giftedness in all domains.



High Potential Learners Program

ST MARY'S Catholic College

THE AUSTRALIAN PROFESSIONAL STANDARDS FOR TEACHERS

The Australian Professional Standards for Teachers (2012) sets out a public statement of what constitutes teacher quality. The Standards state that quality teachers know how to structure their lessons to meet the social and intellectual development and characteristics of their students. It recognises the need to differentiate for 'specific learning needs of students across the full range of abilities' (p. 9). Responsive to the needs of gifted students, teachers need to be skilled in providing these learners with a curriculum that is differentiated in pace, depth and degree of complexity.

GLOSSARY

ACCELERATION

Acceleration is a collective term for a variety of strategies including single subject acceleration, curriculum compacting, designed to meet the needs of highly gifted students who are not being fully engaged and/or extended by differentiated curriculum offerings at their year level. It is for students who have been identified as having demonstrated age appropriate standards in at one area of the curriculum. Research shows that for carefully selected gifted students there are no adverse social or emotional consequences associated with acceleration. However, it is not an appropriate strategy for all gifted students - each case is to be considered individually.

DIFFERENTIATION

Differentiation is a targeted process that involves forward planning, programming and instruction. Teaching, learning and assessment strategies are fair and flexible and provide an appropriate level of challenge and engage students in learning in meaningful ways. Differentiation is employed at different lesson points to cater for the range of student learning needs.

GIFTEDNESS

'The possession and use of outstanding natural abilities, called aptitudes, in at least one ability domain, to a degree that places an individual at least among the top 10% of age peers.' (Gagne, 2008, p.1)

GROUPING

Grouping by ability or achievement is a form of instructional management that can be used flexibly in conjunction with accelerated progression, differentiation of the curriculum and interventions to improve the learning outcomes for gifted and talented students. Learning gains are more likely to be maximised when gifted and talented students spend the majority of their learning time in the academic core areas with others of similar abilities.

HIGH POTENTIAL LEARNER

An inclusive term to describe gifted students whose potential may or may not yet be realised into talent.

OFF LEVEL TESTING

Off-level testing involves using a test developed for older students, with younger students. Off level testing helps to identify the extent of a student's knowledge or skill in an area of giftedness or talent. Off-level testing allows us to assess students' knowledge or skill base beyond their grade placement. The purpose of such testing is to determine whether the student has knowledge and/or skills that you would expect of a student in a higher year level. The information gathered from such assessments can help teachers make decisions regarding appropriate curriculum delivery and programs for high potential students.

TALENT

'Outstanding mastery of systematically developed abilities, called competencies (knowledge and skills), in at least one field of human activity to a degree that places an individual at least among the top 10% of age peers who are or have been active in that field' (Gagne, 2008, p.1)

Key reference:

Gagne, F. (1985). Giftedness and Talent: Reexamining a Reexamination of the Definitions, *Gifted Child Quarterly*, 29, 103.