

Raise the bar and mind the gap

Potential Plus UK's Manifesto for supporting children and young people with high learning potential 2015

Why this is important

There is a strong case for supporting high potential learners on the grounds of:

- **Equity** – fair treatment regardless of prior attainment.
- **Excellence** – the need to raise education standards.
- **Economic value** – the need to contribute towards human capital and economic growth.
- **Social mobility** – to ensure that every child is allowed to progress regardless of background or income levels.

Who are children and young people with high learning potential?

Children and young people with high learning potential include those who have been formally identified as 'academically more able' within the school setting, those who have not been formally identified but who have the potential to achieve in a wide range of academic subjects, the arts or leadership, those who are dual and multiple exceptional (high ability coupled with a disability or learning difficulty) and the profoundly gifted.

According to Article 29 of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, every child has the right to an education which develops their personality, talents and mental abilities to their fullest potential. It is enshrined in English law as section 7 of the Education Act 1996, which requires the parent of every school age child to ensure that they receive an education that is suitable to their age, ability and aptitude and to any special educational need that they might have.

This is critically important for UK plc for a number of other reasons including:

- the growth of UK plc in terms of its 'brainpower' through the utilisation of its natural resources (people) creates a thriving, innovative and profitable economy which it would be irresponsible to ignore; and
- without the right support from the education system, children with high learning potential can develop behavioural problems and emotional health issues, and can be excluded from or drop out of school.

All of these issues have potentially damaging consequences both for the child themselves and for the economy as a whole.

Current education policy confuses high ability with high attainment. That is wrong. High ability does not automatically mean high achievement. Many highly able children, if they are not recognised or supported in the right way from the early years, can underachieve and fail to maximise their potential.

Government must not ignore the needs of this country's high learning potential children.

This Manifesto offers practical, workable solutions for our education system. These are no more onerous than the support provided to those children with special education needs or disabilities. In a society where all children should be treated equally, the needs of children with high learning potential must be included in any national education strategy.

Potential Plus UK urges government to consider this plan and to support improvements in the education of our high potential learners.

A summary of our Manifesto

Potential Plus UK is looking for government and others to support the following recommendations:

1. There must be a shared understanding of high learning potential and of effective practice in meeting the needs of children and young people with high learning potential, at home and in school, from birth through to adulthood.

This must recognise that, even though it is an important aim, sometimes high ability and achievement levels are not the same thing and some of our most able children will, for a variety of different reasons, not be achieving what they are capable of in the education system. **This issue must be addressed within schools as a matter of urgency.**

2. We must be more ambitious for children and young people with high learning potential.

In schools and colleges, this must include:

- a collective belief in and efforts to improve the standard of whole school/college provision for high potential learners, responding to shortcomings identified by OFSTED and similar organisations, with the aim of eradicating the underachievement of children and young people with high learning potential;
- ensuring that wider education reforms (especially those impacting on classroom practice, the curriculum and assessment) fully reflect the needs of high potential learners so that ceilings on their achievement are removed;
- a universal commitment to high quality staff awareness – training and development as well as the provision of guidance and support; and
- piloting and evaluating innovative approaches to teaching, learning and support which can be shared between schools as examples of good practice.

3. Increased priority must be given to particular groups of children and young people with high learning potential, including:

- **children with special needs and high learning potential (Dual and Multiple Exceptionality)** who should be given statutory recognition. As a first stage towards this, a research-based audit should be undertaken to determine the number of Dual and Multiple Exceptional learners along with the development of and investment in a range of strategies to support them in the education system;
- **children with high learning potential from disadvantaged backgrounds, especially those in receipt of Pupil Premium.** There should be renewed efforts to close the gap between high attainers from advantaged and disadvantaged backgrounds to ensure that both groups are equally able to progress to selective higher education and equivalent; and
- **advanced early readers.** Every early reader must have advanced, content- appropriate reading support to meet their needs. To enable schools to coordinate this work, consideration should be given to the establishment an 'Every high learning potential child an advanced reader' scheme to mirror the approach taken in the 'Every child a reader scheme'.

4. Government commitment and support should be provided to pilot new approaches to teaching children with high learning potential.

Access to such approaches should be made available to all children with high learning potential, including those who are home educated or excluded from school. We are not advocating the return to a top-down approach, however. Although the model developed may be delivered and driven by the market, experience over the past five years indicates that a completely schools-led approach is not working either and requires some coordination, facilitation and a framework to improve the quantity and quality of provision. This should be spearheaded by Government.

5. Parents and carers should be recognised for the important role they play in the education of their child.

There must be a universal commitment to parental engagement and partnerships with parents and carers for all children, including parents and carers of children with high learning potential. This could include encouraging schools and colleges to provide information to parents of children with high learning potential about their child and how best they can be supported at home and at school.

We believe that all of this can be delivered by the next government without additional funding but through the redistribution of existing budgets.

Potential Plus UK can help by:

- providing advice and expertise on the strategy which would need to be implemented by the next government;
- providing case studies of good practice on a range of issues including parental engagement and teaching in schools;
- sharing our assessment model to support children with high learning potential from 3.5 years old, which is of benefit to both parents/carers and schools;
- sharing with schools our 'Gold Standard' framework for implementing a strategy for supporting children with high learning potential in schools;
- helping government to develop an 'Every High Learning Potential Child an Advanced Reader' scheme; and
- advising on the research and development of a strategy for Dual and Multiple Exceptional children.

About Potential Plus UK

Potential Plus UK (the operating name of The National Association for Gifted Children) is a not-for-profit organisation which supports the social, emotional and learning needs of children of all ages and backgrounds with high learning potential. Our aim is to enable every child with high learning potential to grow in confidence, thrive and achieve fulfilment.

Established in 1967, we provide parents, carers and professionals with the confidence and tools they need to help these children thrive. We give them support and specialist advice covering a wide range of issues such as lack of self esteem, underachievement or challenging behaviour.

In addition, we provide opportunities for fun, friendship and challenge outside the classroom. Most importantly, we celebrate the achievements and potential of these amazing children.

Potential Plus UK supports over 15,000 young people each year directly through the services and activities we run, including:

- telephone support for members
- an information and advice service
- an assessment service
- family enrichment weekends to enthuse, educate and entertain
- 'Parent Matters workshops for parents and carers'
- research
- publications
- professional training
- awareness raising campaigns (such as 'It's Alright to be Bright!'), and
- lobbying on behalf of children with high learning potential.

Since we were established, we have engaged with more than one million children and young people, parents, carers and professionals.

Interested in finding out more?

Contact

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Calling all those who believe in supporting children with high learning potential and want real changes to be made at a national level:

Send a copy of this Manifesto to your MP, MEP or to the parliamentary candidate standing in your area in the next election. Ask them for their views on the Manifesto and how they will support improvements in the education of our high potential learners.

To download a letter for you to use, click [here](#)

Publicise this Manifesto on social media and to your friends and colleagues.

Ask them to sign up to support a new approach in this country towards our most able children. They can lodge their support via [this link](#)

Change is needed.

Together we can make a real difference.

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