

Summary

Potential Plus UK uses the term High Learning Potential (HLP) to describe the children who we support, instead of the word 'gifted' or 'gifted and talented' or 'more able' or 'most able'; which are all terms that have been used in schools and the media in the past. This advice sheet, aimed at parents and professionals, describes why we have adopted the term and what we mean when we use it.

Introduction

There is no universal agreement on exactly what it means to be 'gifted'. In reality, 'gifted' means different things to different people; academics, psychologists, teachers, parents and children themselves all have their own perception of what it means to be 'gifted'.

Historically, the word 'gifted' is associated with high intelligence (IQ) and as such would seem to require a formal measurement of this intelligence. However, Potential Plus UK does not, and never has, required a child to have undergone an IQ assessment to access our services. This is because Potential Plus UK has always maintained that it is not a high IQ society and that a child's intelligence, talent, and abilities need distinct and proactive support in order to fully develop and reach its potential. There are many more 'gifted' children than there are 'gifted' adults who have reached their potential and achieved tangible accomplishments and high accolades in their chosen field.

The above point adds weight to what Potential Plus UK has been striving towards for 50 years: that we are committed to the process of developing a child's high learning potential and supporting parents to raise happy children who are on a life-long journey of developing and eventually fulfilling their own unique potential or personal excellence.

How do you feel when the word 'gifted' is used to describe a young child?

A little taken aback and surprised? Sceptical? Or do you take this declaration to mean that this child is somehow superior to other children and therefore this child must be a genius; not a genius in the making, but already so.

Perhaps the word 'gifted' to you means 'perfect', so in labelling a child as 'gifted', this must mean that the future prospects for this child are unequivocally bright and free from obstacles?

Take this train of thought a little further and you can easily reach the conclusion that no one need worry about this child as they will be successful no matter what life throws at them and which school they go to. Cream surely rises to the top, so the thinking goes, and a 'gifted' child is labelled as already being at the top of their class. The 'gifted' ones are already high achievers and will surely continue along that path smoothly; destined for success without the need for any further support or assistance. These so-called 'gifted' children and their parents certainly have it easy! Unfortunately, this is more

often than not, far from the truth. The reality, as always, is a little more complex. For every child who is 'formally' identified as 'gifted' or 'more able' or 'most able' (depending on the term you prefer), there are many more who unfortunately fall under the radar; who we, at Potential Plus UK, would class as having high learning potential and in definite need of extra challenge, support and identification by parents and educators.

Even for those who are formally labelled as 'most able', this identification is only the beginning. Being identified or on a register in school is simply not enough unless both the parents and the school truly understand the nature of these children and realise the importance of personalised learning and a distinct approach to parenting, education and support.

Why does Potential Plus UK use the term High Learning Potential?

Over the years, Potential Plus UK has observed that, in the UK, there is a definite social stigma attached to the word 'gifted', and that parents, teachers and children themselves feel that the word is limiting, exclusive and at times unnecessary to bestow upon a child who has as yet to fulfil their true potential.

Yet, every day, we hear from parents who have finally plucked up the courage to contact us because, for a number of reasons, they instinctively feel that their child is different to the norm. In fact, these parents are right; their children are different. The 'one size fits all' approach simply will not work for them. They don't just require more of the same work to keep them occupied; what they require is for their individual potential and talents to be recognised, nurtured, supported and challenged in order for them to feel fulfilled and to develop good self-esteem. Many children who have high learning potential also have specific weaknesses or a special educational need (thus being Dual or Multiple Exceptional or DME) that needs to be identified and supported.

What does the term High Learning Potential mean?

Potential Plus UK is always mindful of the fact that we are primarily a family-oriented organisation. The views of parents and children are of utmost importance to us. After careful consideration and consultation, we have decided to begin using the term high learning potential instead of the word 'gifted'.

We hope that the term HLP encapsulates the ethos of Potential Plus UK and brings a better understanding of these children and the support they need, as well as an awareness of their situation and needs.

Potential Plus UK believes:

- A high learning potential child will show flashes of brilliance from their earliest years and it is for parents to nurture this and for Potential Plus UK to support them in doing so.

- High learning potential children need opportunities, challenge, resources and encouragement to fulfil their unique potential.
- High learning potential children thrive on learning and new experiences, which Potential Plus UK is committed to providing to families.
- High learning potential is the very beginning and not the end product. Success, achievement and wellbeing are not determined by high learning potential alone. High learning potential is certainly a good start, but requires consistent support to fully develop.
- Through nurturing high learning potential children they will flourish, succeed and achieve; ignore their potential and they will withdraw, underachieve and lose their 'spark'.
- High learning potential children have distinct social and emotional needs which must be recognised and supported alongside providing the right challenge for their intellectual abilities and potential.
- Supporting both the strengths and difficulties of Dual or Multiple Exceptional (DME) children (HLP children with one or more special educational need or disability) is essential to their wellbeing .

Potential Plus UK has many years of experience in working with children who don't quite fit the mould. These children have surprised, entertained, informed and questioned their parents and carers from a very early age. At times, they have also exasperated, annoyed and tested the patience of those around them!

Further Information

PA102 Characteristics of Children with High Learning Potential	Parents are often the first to recognise that their children are bright for their age when they learn quickly and sometimes surprise people with their advanced thinking. However, parents may not realise that other parts of their children's personality are connected to their abilities. This advice sheet is aimed at parents of high learning potential children and also gives more information about where the list comes from, its use and why these characteristics are present.
PA103 Needs of Children with High Learning Potential	Children with High Learning Potential (HLP) often need more support than others at home and in the classroom, but this does not necessarily mean that they need more structured activities. Sometimes it means they need more freedom and a little more guidance instead. Sometimes the need is for social and emotional support. This advice sheet, exploring the general needs of HLP children, is aimed at parents of high learning potential children.
<i>Gifted Children</i> by Kate Distin	The authors give an insight into what is 'normal' for children with high learning potential, acknowledge the difficulties they experience, and offer pointers for parents on how to support them at home, in the interaction with siblings and other family members, and at school.

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www.potentialplusuk.org | 01908 646 433 | amazing.children@potentialplusuk.org
 Charity No.313182 | Company Limited by Guarantee 905037 | VAT no. 2416206947

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