IDENTIFYING ABLE UNDERACHIEVERS

Summary
It is widely acknowledged that there is significant underachievement among high potential learners, and that gaps exist between the progress, achievement and attainment of some of the most disadvantaged groups and their peers. This advice sheet is aimed at lead teachers or coordinators in all school stages and gives guidance about identifying highly able students who are underachieving.

Introduction
It is acknowledged that there is significant underachievement among high potential learners, and that gaps exist between the progress, achievement and attainment of some of the most disadvantaged groups and their peers.

High potential learners come from all backgrounds and have a wide range of different abilities and talent. Schools have a responsibility to actively seek high potential in all pupils and school assessment systems need to be effective in order to identify individuals and groups of students that are underachieving.

Particular attention needs to be paid to groups of vulnerable students, including:

- Low socio-economic groups
- Black and minority ethnic (BME) groups
- Those with English as an additional language (EAL), including bilingual students
- Students in small rural schools with limited resources
- Those with special educational needs
- Those with medical conditions or disabilities
- Students in public care

Students may be unidentified as high potential learners because they:

- Have limited opportunity to develop and demonstrate their abilities
- Are not supported or encouraged to take advantage of their abilities
- Have an incomplete historical record
- Have poor writing skills
- Have barriers to participation that are economic, cultural, emotional or social

Characteristics of underachieving high potential learners include:
IDENTIFYING ABLE UNDERACHIEVERS

- Poor test performance
- Achievement at or below expectations in one or all of the basic skill areas
- Daily work frequently incomplete or poorly done
- Superior comprehension and retention of concepts when interested
- Vast gap between level of oral and written work:
  - Exceptionally large repertoire of factual knowledge
  - Vitality of imagination: creative
  - Persistent dissatisfaction with work accomplished, for example in art
- Avoidance of trying new activities to prevent imperfect performance; evidence of perfectionism, self-criticism:
  - Shows initiative in pursuing self-selected projects at home
- A wide range of interests and possible special expertise in an area of investigation and research
- Evidence of low self-esteem with tendencies to withdraw or be aggressive in the classroom:
  - Does not function comfortably or constructively in a group of any size
  - Shows acute sensitivity and perceptions related to self, others and life in general
  - Tends to set unrealistic self-expectations: goals too high or too low
  - Dislikes practice or drill for memorisation and mastery
  - Easily distracted; unable to focus attention and concentrate efforts on tasks
  - Has an indifferent or negative attitude towards school
  - Resists teacher efforts to motivate or discipline behaviour in class
  - Has difficulty in peer relationships: maintains few friendships

How schools can start to identify and provide for high potential underachievers

- Identification and assessment should be ongoing
IDENTIFYING ABLE UNDERACHIEVERS

- Definition of high potential should be inclusive, flexible and adaptable to the needs of the pupils
- Regular opportunities should be provided to identify, encourage and extend a wide range of talents and abilities
- All school staff should be engaged in a professional dialogue about the nature of able underachievers
- Individual Learning Plans (ILPs) should be tailored to the needs of the pupils, providing challenge in the areas of strength and support for the weaker areas

Further Information

S11 Tackling Underachievement in the Secondary Phase

High potential learners in secondary school are often at risk of underachievement because of their different pace of learning, particular learning style, barriers to learning or social isolation. In order to combat these problem areas, five types of support have proven to be effective for high potential learners. This advice sheet is aimed at teachers and senior leadership team members in secondary schools and it shows how these types of support can be provided in the secondary school setting.

Professional development courses

Potential Plus UK has a programme of professional development for governors, senior leadership, teachers and teaching assistants: Learning Matters for the Most Able.

Supporting your ongoing work

Potential Plus UK offers a variety of support packages to suit your school's needs. Contact 01908 646433 for more information.
To give feedback on this advice sheet, please go to:
www.surveymonkey.com/s/advicefeedback