



Raise the bar  
& mind the gap

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

## **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 of 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. The model developed may be delivered and driven by the market. However, 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;
- helping government to develop an 'Every high learning potential child an advanced reader' scheme;
- sharing with schools our 'Gold Standard' framework for implementing a strategy for supporting children with high learning potential in schools; and
- advising on the research and development of a strategy for Dual and Multiple Exceptional children.



# Our 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.

Potential Plus UK believes that government has done a good job in setting challenging targets for schools. However, the decentralisation of the government's programme for 'academically more able children', enabling schools to choose for themselves which children are classified as having high learning potential, has been an unmitigated national disaster.

### **The former definition of children with high learning potential was:**

“Children and young people with one or more abilities developed to a level significantly ahead of their year group (or with the potential to develop those abilities).”

While there was some disagreement over that definition, it did at least enable one standard definition to be implemented and for there to be shared ownership of what was to be achieved between schools and across areas, leading to consistency.

Without this shared ownership, government will regret not being able to compare like with like in the future. It has already led to issues within schools. Parents and carers who had previously been told their child was identified as having high learning potential are now being told that their child is no longer able, with no explanation given except that the school's definition has changed.

**This is not acceptable and should be addressed as a matter of urgency.**

The only organisation which seems to understand the need to evaluate how well schools are doing for the most able pupils is Ofsted (and equivalent bodies in other countries). We support what they are seeking to do and believe that the bar is being raised in schools as a result.

It is, however, important for Ofsted to understand that children with high learning potential do not always achieve the best grades. It is also essential for individual inspectors to have a full understanding of what good practice is in identifying and supporting high learning potential children.

For example, we have worrying evidence that some children with high learning potential are being held back at key stages so that they can be seen to achieve at appropriate levels later on. In addition, by confusing ability with attainment, some inspectors are not picking up on what can happen in a classroom when children are not set work at an appropriate level and they therefore miss the signs of a school which is not catering for its high potential learners.

In taking forward this shared ownership of high learning potential, the removal of attainment levels and the re-categorisation of children as either having met or not met the level expected for their age is potentially very damaging for children with high learning potential.

We fully recognise that if the bar is set too high then some children may suffer by being asked to reach impossible targets. However if the level is set too low then there is a risk that teachers are motivated only to teach up to that level, meaning that additional abilities are ignored. As a consequence, children with high learning potential can suffer because:

- they are not being challenged or stretched in their education;
- the standards which are set for them are too easy; and
- they forget how to learn because they don't have to work.

All of these can cause behavioural problems in the classroom or at home together with emotional health problems such as depression or anxieties.

We believe that all ceilings for performance related to age should be removed so that a child has no upper limit to what they can achieve. In addition, rather than categorising a child simply as having achieved – or not – a level appropriate to their age or stage of education, there should be a second categorisation which outlines what it is they are capable of working up to in the classroom. This would give parents and teachers of high potential learners a greater steer about their abilities and would be easy to administer across the whole school.

In addition, at secondary school age, changes to GCSE entry with the first result counted in the league table, has deterred many state schools from entering any pupils early for exams. We believe that this is having a negative impact on potential A\* pupils who could have gone on to do more advanced subjects earlier and who may coast or even underachieve as a result. This will need to be addressed by any future government if these children's potential is to be maximised.

## What needs to happen?

We believe that:

- **the next government must lead from the front and issues a framework for all those in education to secure a shared definition and ownership of our most able pupils. Whatever else it does, this needs to clearly state that ability and attainment are not the same thing;**
- **the framework agreed should be used by bodies such as Ofsted in evaluating teaching in schools; and**
- **Ofsted and other bodies should receive appropriate training at a local level to both enable them to identify and evaluate good practice in the classroom and beyond and to understand fully what can happen when good practice is not provided.**



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

Parents/carers have repeatedly told us that the one thing they would like government to implement to improve the support for their children is more training for teachers in how to identify, educate and support high potential learners. 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- raising, 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.

This must start with training for early years' professionals in nurseries and equivalent. According to research conducted by Potential Plus UK [www.potentialplusuk.org], most parents of children with high learning potential identify their child as 'different' between the ages of two and four. In the right pre-school environment, foundations can be laid to recognise these emerging abilities and to ensure that the right framework is put in place to support them, while at the same time recognising their social and emotional needs.

Such training needs to continue within the school system to ensure that teachers and other professionals:

- recognise the signs of high learning potential;
- develop a teaching approach to support the potential of all children, including high potential learners;
- recognise the simple, no-cost or low-cost changes which can be implemented in the early years or school setting to support the social, emotional and learning needs of the high potential learner; and
- work positively with parents and carers to ensure a coordinated approach between the school environment and home.

## **What needs to happen?**

**We believe that:**

- **all nursery and teacher training routes should provide training which covers the characteristics of high learning potential children, ways of identifying them and what can be done within the classroom and the school to support them.**
- **Ofsted and equivalent organisations should evaluate the impact of teacher training on support for high potential learners within the nursery or classroom;**
- **independent in-depth evaluations of the impact of such interventions on the attainment and behaviour of high potential learners should be carried out and good practice guides issued accordingly;**
- **ceilings on performance related to age should be removed and;**
- **the system which penalises schools for early GCSE entry should be reviewed and revised to allow young people with high learning potential to make the most of the exam opportunities open to them.**

### 3. Increased priority should be given to particular groups of children and young people with high learning potential

#### (a) Children with special needs and high learning potential (Dual and Multiple Exceptionality)

High learning potential children with special needs or disabilities should be supported as much for stretch and challenge as for the help they need to support the areas in which they have difficulty.

Children with Dual and Multiple Exceptionality (DME) often lose out because either (a) the special need or disability masks their high ability or (b) their high ability masks their special need or disability. However, missing from the new SEND Act 2014 is the classification of DME as a special need. Allowing this classification would enable vital support to be provided in the classroom to meet the needs of a group of children who would otherwise disappear.

#### What needs to happen?

We believe that:

- greater awareness should be given to DME within nurseries, schools and colleges;
- training in DME should be provided to all SENCOs and MAT (More able and talented) Coordinators
- independent research should take place on the number of DME children there are and how well the new SEND system meets their needs; and
- DME should be incorporated as a category of SEND into government thinking and policy.

#### (b) Children with high learning potential from disadvantaged backgrounds, especially those in receipt of Pupil Premium

Pupil Premium funding is set to increase to £2.5 billion in 2014-5 to enable children from low income families to catch up with their peers. We believe that more support should be given to schools to help them develop and implement their Pupil Premium strategy for children and young people with high learning potential to ensure that they are stretched and challenged.

#### What needs to happen?

We believe that:

- an evaluation should take place of how Pupil Premium has been used to support children and young people with high learning potential and the examples of good practice circulated widely to enable all schools to benefit from ideas that work; and
- within the Pupil Premium Awards, which provide prizes to schools who have done the most for their disadvantaged pupils, there should be a category of award to reward those schools who have done the most for their children and young people with high learning potential who qualify for Pupil Premium.

### (c) Advanced early readers

Many children start school already able to read. Having then to begin their formal literacy education at the bottom of the 'reading tree' is not only a negative experience for them, but can also be counter-productive. Many such children end up coasting to the level expected of them or even stop reading altogether.

It is important to ensure that early readers can actually understand what they are reading and not just rely on their memory; but we believe that there should be:

- an accurate measure of ability of early and higher level readers and a programme in place to keep them enthusiastic and challenged about their reading;
- an accelerated reading scheme which enables those children who can read to move to books appropriate for their reading age as soon as possible;
- more age-appropriate books (that is, books which, while complex enough to keep the early or higher level reader entertained, are nevertheless suitable for the emotional age of the reader) available in school libraries or at the top of the 'reading tree';
- the commissioning of authors to write more age-appropriate books for early readers; and
- greater investment by schools in more 'content appropriate books' for early readers to use.

If every child should be a reader, then surely every advanced reader should be an enthusiastic higher level reader with the right support and a positive attitude towards their reading?

### What needs to happen?

We believe that:

- **a new scheme should be launched to support early readers. Potential Plus UK has been impressed with the impact which the 'Every Child a Reader' initiative has had in capturing the hearts and minds of teachers, parents and children across the country and encouraging young children to read. A new scheme should be launched entitled 'Every High Learning Potential Child an Advanced Reader'. This could involve:**
  - **running a small pilot initiative using a combination of government, charitable trust and private sector funding to look at its impact on achievement and behaviour. If successful, such work could be built into the school curriculum;**
  - **providing every early reader with an e-reading device with a range of content appropriate books for advanced readers;**
  - **incorporating a combination of classroom and school-based activities for early readers into school eg book clubs, reading circles for advanced readers; and**
  - **running a national competition for authors to provide content-appropriate stories and books to capture the imagination of early readers.**



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

Many children with high learning potential are capable of working at one or more levels above their classmates. Some schools have responded positively to this by accelerating these learners so that they can engage with subjects at a higher level. However, this may not be possible or desirable in every school or for every child.

Some schools have taken the opportunity to use e-learning or blended learning as alternative approaches, enabling pupils with high learning potential to work on differentiated higher level learning side by side with their classmates. We would like to see this approach endorsed by government as an addition to traditional teaching methods in schools.

In addition, we believe that formal support for innovative models, paid for by government and run either in schools or elsewhere, could help to increase the options for children who are excluded from school or who are school refusers and move into a growing home educated sector. The provision of a range of education alternatives would be a lifesaver for many of these families.

### **What needs to happen?**

**We believe that:**

- **government should evaluate the different models which are currently being used to educate high potential learners and provide good practice and guidance for schools;**
- **government should make a commitment to providing effective support for all children who are currently being home educated, including those who are high potential learners, through the use of different models of learning; and**
- **funding should be provided through initiatives such as free schools and different state models of education for high potential learners.**

**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 those with high learning potential children. 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.**

It is widely accepted that parental involvement in the education of their child has a significant impact on the child's achievement at school. This means that schools which want the best for their pupils have a vested interest in working in partnership with parents/carers. Schools which do this well usually:

- have an open and honest approach to working with parents/carers of high potential learners;
- understand the needs and fears of parents/carers with high potential learners;
- have a positive approach to working with parents/carers;
- are open-minded about what the parent/carer says their child needs to achieve;
- work with the parent/carer to solve any issues that arise; and
- have high aspirations for their highly able pupils.

We need all schools to be like this and for parents/carers and professionals to work together to help all children including highly able children to maximise their potential.

## **What needs to happen?**

**We believe that:**

- **parents and carers should be encouraged to work positively with schools:**
- **every parent/carer should be told what the school is doing to support their high potential learner;**
- **every parent/carer should be given the contact details of someone who they can talk to at school if they have any concerns about their child; and**
- **every parent/carer should have at least one workshop provided by the school to tell them about how to support their child with high learning potential and what the school is doing to support him or her.**

## 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 the 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.

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.**

