



186-PP-PBS

# Policy for Gifted & Talented Students

## Rationale

Why should we at Pal Buddhist School have a special policy for Gifted & Talented students?

An essential ingredient for achieving 'personal excellence' is for learning to be challenging. Students have varying degrees of readiness for learning, with some being extremely capable of understanding difficult concepts and learning new things quickly and deeply. While the regular curriculum holds sufficient challenge for most students, for gifted students it holds insufficient challenge. There needs to be a variety of different strategies employed to ensure that these students achieve their own personal excellence.

## Aim

Our aim at Pal Buddhist School is to ensure that the strengths of all students are identified and that young students with significant potential in any area of endeavour are challenged and given the opportunity to realise their talents through flexible, student-centred provisions and programmes that are tailored to their specific learning needs.

## Definition

A gifted student has the potential to achieve at a level that is well above average in one or more areas of ability. A talented student performs at a level that is well above average in one or more areas of human performance. (*Adapted from Gagne, 1995*)

It is important to note that 'gifted children are not a homogeneous group. There are different levels, as well as different kinds of giftedness. Highly and exceptionally gifted students need a curriculum that is more challenging and intellectually rigorous than their moderately gifted classmates.' (*from Gifted Students in Secondary Schools, Differentiating the curriculum, by Miraca Gross, Bronwyn MacLeod and Marilyn Pretorius, 2003*)

An underachieving child of high potential can thus be acknowledged as a gifted student whose abilities have not yet developed as talents. The translation of giftedness into talent can be either facilitated or impeded by variables including the student's motivation and self-esteem, socio-economic and cultural factors, and the school's capacity to identify and foster his or her gifts. (*Gagné, 1995*)

## Characteristics of Gifted Students

Van Tassel-Baska (1988) has reported on three fundamental differences that stand out from research on the characteristics of gifted students. Gifted students have the capacity to:

- learn at faster rates;
- find, solve and act on problems more readily; and
- manipulate abstract ideas and make connections.

Some typical attributes of gifted and talented students include:

- a large, advanced vocabulary for their age;

- the ability to discuss complex ideas and concepts;
- quick mastery and recall of factual information;
- creativity and imagination;
- enjoyment of reading;
- the ability to work independently, to be self-critical, and to strive for perfection;
- an interest in and concern about world problems;
- the ability to apply learning and knowledge from one situation to another;
- the ability to grasp relationships and principles, and draw sound generalisations;
- initiation of their own activities and absorption in them, with little external motivation;
- wide interests, often in art, music and drama;
- the ability to relate well to older students/adults and enjoy learning from them; and
- the ability to use two or more languages.

### **Core characteristics**

Cohen (1994) suggests seven core characteristics of the gifted and talented:

- a rich memory storehouse;
- intense curiosity;
- reflectivity;
- openness to experiences;
- an ability to make relationships, generalise, and abstract;
- an ease and speed of problem solving; and
- acute sensitivity.

*For the full table of characteristics of gifted students, see Appendix 2 (adapted from Clark, 1983 and Baska 1989).*

### **Identification**

It is important to identify gifted & talented students as early as possible, so that learning programmes can be developed for them that focus on their needs and provide the opportunity for them to reach their potential. The true abilities of highly gifted children are not identified in tests that have been designed for their age group. A balance of objective and subjective approaches is most appropriate for the assessment of the gifted and talented. These approaches may include:

- professional observation of performance;
- parent observation;
- peer observation;
- checklists of traits and characteristics;
- cumulative school history;
- anecdotal evidence;
- interviews;
- interest surveys;
- standardised achievement tests;
- tests of cognitive/intellectual ability;
- above level testing;
- results in competitions; and
- teacher-devised tests.

At Pal Buddhist School parents will be asked to complete a survey (see Appendix 3) when their son/daughter joins the school. This information, along with previous school reports and knowledge gained from interviewing the student, should help with initial identification. Students who are identified to be possibly gifted and/or talented will be observed and checklists of characteristics completed by

their first teacher.

Testing via standardised achievement tests can also undertaken to confirm the degree of giftedness/talent and point to specific areas of strength, by an outside agency such as GERRIC.

## **Strategies for meeting the needs of Gifted and Talented students**

### **Whole School strategy**

#### **1. Streaming**

Streaming occurs in the core subjects to reduce the range of abilities in a class and to allow for students in one or two groups to work more quickly and at greater depth than in other groups. The structure of streaming used for each year group varies according to the needs of the group.

For high achieving students, being in a group of like-minded students is very beneficial. The level of competition is heightened, syllabus content is covered at a faster pace and/or in greater depth, students' learning is stimulated by the enthusiasm of other students and there is more time for enrichment and extension activities.

This strategy goes some way towards meeting the needs of high achieving students, but for gifted and talented students a more specific and individual programme is needed to facilitate their achievement of their potential.

#### **2. Strategies for individuals**

Each gifted and talented student is an individual and will have differing needs. A programme will be developed for each identified gifted and talented student that will best meet his/her needs.

Enrichment, extension and acceleration are the three main methods of catering for the intellectually gifted child. Mentoring is another strategy that has worked very well in a small number of instances.

#### **3. Enrichment and Extension (Differentiating the curriculum)**

'Enrichment' activities add greater breadth to curriculum content and are suitable for all students. 'Extension' activities allow students to explore areas of study or interest in more depth. Most students will benefit from these activities.

Gifted and talented students should be challenged through the provision of learning experiences that provide the most appropriate combinations of:

- enrichment at the same level of challenge;
- more work at a higher level of challenge;
- work that meets the specific needs and interests of the particular student;
- the opportunity to spend time, where possible, with others of like ability and interests. (Benbow, 1998)

Possible strategies for enrichment and extension include:

- The use of specialist teachers in the early stages of schooling in Language, Music and PE to encourage the development of expertise;
- The use of higher-order questions/projects with Bloom's Taxonomy and/or Multiple Intelligences to scaffold;
- Individual research or projects of a challenging nature;
- Open-ended questions;
- Solving complex problems;

- Extended competitions for Gifted students (e.g. Tournament of Minds, Olympiads, Euler & Noether Series for Mathematics, Da Vinci Decathlon); and
- Distinction courses.

#### 4. Acceleration

‘Acceleration’ permits a limited number of students to move through content at a faster rate.

For a very small number of high ability students — the outstanding and the exceptional — this may mean acceleration beyond their enrolment cohort into a higher cohort, either:

- in all subject areas (i.e. grade advancement), or
- in one or more subject areas in which the student is particularly talented (i.e. partial acceleration).

The aim of acceleration is to ensure a stimulating and challenging learning environment for the student. It also provides them with further opportunities in the later years of their schooling, such as the opportunity to undertake a Distinction course or a broader/deeper selection of subjects.

Accelerated progression involves the promotion of a student to a level of study beyond that which is usual for their age. As an intervention tool for gifted and talented students it has been well-supported by research literature.

In selecting appropriate students for accelerated progression, a wide range of factors need to be considered including:

- academic capacity;
- school performance;
- early achievement of the required outcomes stated for their particular curriculum stage in Board of Studies, Teaching & Educational Standards (BOSTES) NSW syllabuses;
- social adjustment;
- emotional readiness for the acceleration proposed;
- future patterns of study; and
- issues centred on school staffing and resources.

Measures that may be used to assess capacity for acceleration may include:

- standardised tests of achievement and general ability
- multi-dimensional testing
- behavioural checklists
- reports from class teachers
- products and performance
- class grades
- a report from the school counsellor
- recommendation of a psychologist
- interviews with the student
- interviews with the student’s parents/guardians
- anecdotal records
- evidence of any academic prizes or awards the student has received
- evidence of the student’s co-curricular and out-of-school activities, interests and abilities.

Students who are accelerated take less time to attain the outcomes required in the Board’s syllabuses and do so earlier than other students. They should not be accelerated if they have not achieved at a very high standard in most of the required outcomes at their current level.

Acceleration is on the basis of compression of the curriculum, or curriculum ‘compacting’, not

omission. Students who have been accelerated in all courses to a cohort ahead of their enrolment cohort (grade advancement) will be exceptional students. Students who are accelerated in one or more courses will be outstanding students within the subject candidature. It is expected that accelerated students will present at the highest level of the accelerated subject when they sit the HSC examinations.

In the school setting, the students must be considered holistically and be socially and emotionally ready for acceleration, as well as intellectually advanced. Care should be exercised not to build up excessive expectations from grade advancement that would make the student feel that they are a failure if it does not go well. *(Adapted from the Board of Studies, Teaching & Educational Standards' Guidelines NSW for Accelerated Progression)*

## 5. Mentoring

Some gifted and talented students would benefit from working with a mentor. This person should be someone who can identify with the student and who has expertise in a particular field that is relevant to the student's interests and capabilities. An outside expert, such as a University lecturer or business person, could be the ideal person for this role. Care needs to be taken to carefully match the student and mentor, and to ensure that all procedures relating to Pal Buddhist School's Code of Conduct are followed. If students are to travel from school to meet the mentor in their place of work, the procedures for Excursions and Work Experience should be put in place, re duty of care.

## Conclusion

In implementing this policy for meeting the needs of Gifted and Talented students, issues of Welfare of students and Professional development of staff will be important. The School will recognise these issues and support the continued commitment to providing high quality welfare for these students, as well as a strong programme of Professional Development for teachers.

### Revision History

Rev.	Date	Description of Modifications
1	10/02/2015	Initial policy