

## Frequently Asked Questions about Gifted Education

**Summary:** This section contains many of the most commonly asked questions about gifted education by teachers, parents and students. It contains some examples of appropriate answers and makes reference to sections within this policy where additional support information can be found.

### Possible Teacher Questions

*“Why have a gifted education program?”*

A Gifted Education program is necessary for the following reasons:

- gifted students are seriously at risk of underachieving and account for approx. 10% of the student population. Gifted students who are not engaged in a rigorous and challenging curriculum are at risk of seriously underachieving, disengaging with the curriculum, masking their abilities, becoming socially and emotionally isolated, developing poor self esteem and adopting inappropriate behaviours due to boredom and resentment. It is therefore essential that their curriculum minimizes repetition, supports student negotiated outcomes and appropriate extension, enrichment and (where appropriate) acceleration
- gifted students require their curriculum and learning pathways to be differentiated in a range of ways and to varying degrees to ensure that educational programs are relevant, challenging and rigorous. The LSA Gifted Education Policy and subsequent implementation of it within individual schools is the most effective and efficient means of providing, supporting and documenting these pathways for this cohort of students throughout their years of schooling
- a whole school approach to gifted education enables individual members of staff to be supported and resourced and provides a framework for schools to offer a breadth and depth of curriculum offerings to gifted students and their teachers
- as Lutheran Educators we are required to provide a curriculum that “aims to encourage and support students, informed and sustained by the Word of God, to develop their God-given talents so that they may shape and enrich their world.” LEA Curriculum Statement

*Refer to the following Policy sections: Rationale, Identification, Curriculum Differentiation*

*“Whose opinion matters if a parent thinks their child is gifted and a school does not?”*

The following considerations are important when faced with the dilemma of a parent believing their child is gifted and a school does not:

- parents generally know their children well and have a wealth of experiences and knowledge they can draw on to discuss why they believe their child may be gifted. In many cases parents are correct, often on the basis of a gut feeling, anecdotal records and comparisons with developmental milestones. There are, however, a minority of parents who would like their children to be gifted and tend to be hard “task masters” with their children from a very young age. Students in this category often are able to perform well in standardised achievement tests, but may lack creative and reflective thinking skills, or be reticent to take risks or demonstrate initiative
- a range of assessment types will be useful in determining a position for schools to take with this dilemma. It is important that the school acknowledge the parent’s opinion (parent nomination form), administer a range of gifted identification tools, and eliminate the possibility of the student being gifted and learning disabled (in which case non-performance based assessment information may indicate a notable discrepancy with performance based assessment results). Schools should consider and incorporate several of the following:
  - parent nomination form
  - raven’s Standard Progressive or Coloured Progressive Matrices assessment (non performance based)
  - collation of student work samples

- standardised assessments in the areas parents or staff may feel are either gifted indicators or areas of concern (e.g. Westwood Spelling Test, Neale Analysis, PAC Maths etc)
- if on the basis of these assessments, and over a period of time, the school's position differs markedly from that of the parent, schools could recommend that parents obtain a formal Educational Psychologist's assessment. Parents who wish to pursue this path are able to pay for and obtain the professional opinion of a professional Third Party and as a result their stance will either be supported or not. Schools can request that Educational Psychologist reports include recommendations for the child's educational program within the school.

*Refer to the following policy section: Identification*

*"How do you tell a child he/she is gifted? What do I call gifted kids? How private/public is this information or label?"*

The term "gifted" should not be viewed as an elite term. However, schools need to have clear and unequivocal evidence of giftedness before using the term with students or parents. This will require either an Educational Psychologist's report or a range of assessment data. Discussions with parents concerned also need to occur whereby assessment results are presented and if relevant are cross referenced with IQ/levels of Giftedness tables such as those contained in the policy section "Definition". The term "gifted" may need to be explicitly referred to in some discussions – particularly for highly/exceptionally/profoundly gifted students for whom there may be social and emotional implications impacting on the degree of differentiation required to meet their educational needs (e.g. year level acceleration etc.) For some students, the knowledge that there is a reason why they are "different" can be very reassuring and assist them to make sense of their own uniqueness. For others, the use of the term "gifted" may in fact be counter-productive. It is therefore important that informative and supportive discussions occur with parents about this issue. Students should otherwise be referred to in the same way any other students would be addressed. Schools need to have an agreed terminology that staff feel comfortable using when referring to gifted students, just as they do when referring to students requiring learning support. Extra-curricular programs may be labelled as Extension or Challenge programs, however the emphasis in identifying gifted students should not be on labelling them, but rather on the educational implications of their identification. As such, it is useful to have open discussions with both the child and parents re their strengths and areas that need to be developed – as we would with all students. Whatever outcome schools and individual parents and students negotiate on this issue, the same privacy principles apply to "gifted" student information as per all other student records.

*Refer to the following policy sections: Definition, Identification*

*"Wouldn't it be easier to accelerate a gifted student?"*

Acceleration is one of many strategies for addressing the needs of gifted students. Its prime function is to allow a student to move through the curriculum faster and with less likelihood of repetition. However, it can have social, emotional and far reaching implications for students in the short and long term – particularly during the middle years of schooling (puberty, being in different age groups for sporting groups, different levels of social and emotional maturity, etc). It is also a strategy that is recommended only for highly/exceptionally/profoundly gifted students. (The incidence of such giftedness decreases markedly as IQ levels rise. Highly gifted students- 1/1,000, exceptionally gifted students- 1/10,000, profoundly gifted students-1/100,000). Acceleration by itself therefore is generally not applicable to moderately gifted students-1/100 or mildly gifted students-1/10. Acceleration also is a small part of the bigger picture of educational needs for gifted students. Enrichment (whereby students explore the breadth of the implications and applications for knowledge and skills) and extension (whereby students explore in more depth the implications and applications of new knowledge and skills) are the most effective tools for engaging and developing the thinking and learning skills of gifted students. Teachers and schools should also explore other areas such as explicit teaching of a thinking skills based curriculum, teaching methodologies, student groupings, interest groups, mentoring systems, and other intra and interschool options.

*Refer to the following policy sections: Acceleration, Early Entry, Aims, Curriculum Differentiation and Methodology, Whole School Documentation*

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*“Does it matter that a gifted child chooses to be alone? Does he/she have to work collaboratively?”*

Gifted students will present with as varied a range of personality traits as any other students. However, one characteristic that can often be present in gifted students is that of being “a loner”. There can be many and sometimes quite contradicting reasons for this. Many gifted students will gravitate towards older students and adults for company in order to converse and interact at a level that befits their IQ functioning. In schools where play time and areas may be organised according to age/year levels, this can be quite isolating for such students and limit their social opportunities. Other gifted students seem to “live in their own world” and either not appear to need other students or not be able to maintain long term relationships with them due to differences in their social, emotional and intellectual needs within the relationships. Parents of gifted students often report that their children are loners actively choosing their own company as opposed to being lonely. Teachers need to explore the reasons for gifted students being alone and pursue opportunities that may encourage friendships and interactive options for them with their intellectual peers – eg. extension groups, interest groups, mentors, lunch time opportunities such as chess or strategic games clubs, broadening some of the school structures to enable students to interact with their preferred peers. Teaching methodologies that provide for gifted students to engage with other students and people within the community in debate and dialogue from a range of perspectives, negotiated student learning outcomes and projects which can be completed collaboratively in pairs or small groups can also provide broader options for gifted students. However, depending on the reasons as to why a gifted student is choosing to be alone, and the degree of their giftedness, he or she may still choose to maintain a singular mode of operating. Open discussions with parents and gifted students, and social and emotional nurturing of the gifted student and their family are also important aspects of understanding the nature of giftedness for these students.

*Refer to the following policy sections: Differentiation and Methodology, Whole School Documentation*

*“What do we do with perfectionists?”*

Perfectionism is a common trait in gifted students. Many gifted students experience from a very young age praise and positive attention for the visible achievements and success that their higher abilities enable them to demonstrate. This can unfortunately result in some students making the inference that achievement = success, therefore mistakes = failure. This kind of distinct connection and value judgement can alienate the role of risk taking and making mistakes from the learning process. Therefore students with a perfectionist trait will often very quickly either refuse to attempt, or give up on, any efforts with a given project or new area of learning that is outside of their known achievements or areas of expertise. By doing this, they can protect their talents and hide their vulnerabilities. The following are suggestions for redressing this situation and working with gifted students who demonstrate perfectionist traits:

- explore what messages we may be giving students with our praise and comments as teachers and parents
- ensure the task or new knowledge is relevant and meaningful
- chunk information and tasks for new areas of learning. Task analysis requires breaking tasks down into small manageable pieces that minimise the magnitude of any possible mistakes and still allow students to make adjustments and corrections without jeopardising the outcome or their credibility
- assist students to make a “plan of attack” for the new project or task
- ask where they would feel comfortable beginning the task
- reward and have dialogue about new learning, “distance travelled” and progression within the task rather than focussing on the requirements of the end product
- define, debate and reward the value of persistence, amount of time required and effort
- ensure that the task includes elements of fun and enjoyment
- model all of the above as educators

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*“What if gifted kids fail?”*

Gifted students will experience success and failure as do all students. Having achieved highly in many areas from a young age, some gifted students may experience failure more intensely. It is important that as educators we don't assume that “giftedness” automatically results in “demonstrable higher skills” or talents. The following represent a range of reasons for gifted students “failing” to demonstrate their abilities:

- students who have been accelerated at a subject or year level may have gaps in their demonstrable knowledge due to reduced amount of time in formal educational settings. For example, students with high maths ability may demonstrate excellent skills in number, but have unexpected gaps in fractions. If they have skipped a year level they may have missed out on the foundations for manipulating fractions. Teachers need to be aware of this and put in place steps to address any such gaps via assessments prior to accelerating the student and explicit teaching as they arise
- some gifted students may mask their true abilities and choose to underachieve in order to “fit in” with their chronological peers. Careful social and emotional counselling and discourse, and a classroom environment that encourages individual abilities and effort, may be necessary to assist gifted students to demonstrate their actual abilities
- some gifted students may be gifted and learning disabled. Students falling into this category are seriously at risk of being unidentified, not realising their potential as a result of not receiving the appropriate support, developing extremely low self esteem and demonstrating inappropriate behaviour due to frustration. It is critical that these students have a range of assessment tools utilised that are not necessarily performance based and may also have limited literacy components within them. Depending on the nature of the learning disability, appropriate educational strategies can then be negotiated and activated
- any accelerative measure that gifted students embark upon needs to be carefully debated and negotiated with parents and students, and incorporate a transitional period with a planned review. This enables students, parents and teachers to make adjustments and change course should a student appear to be “failing” or not coping

*Refer to the following policy sections: Identification, Acceleration, Curriculum Differentiation and Methodology.*

*“What’s going to happen when gifted students move to the next teacher or into secondary school?”*

Long term planning and whole school documentation of educational pathways is critical for gifted students. Educational transition is potentially daunting to any student, however the implications for a gifted student can be far reaching. It is critical that documentation of successful programs, teaching methodologies and strategies for the gifted student, as well as a range of assessment information is passed on to the receiving school. Schools that incorporate Individual Education Plans already have a process in place for engaging key stakeholders in meetings to review and plan for gifted students. Inevitably, planned transition results in more successful educational outcomes for all students, including gifted students. It is advisable for Kindergartens and Primary schools to look ahead with parents of gifted students to future middle and secondary options, and to begin the discourse with possible receiving schools early.

*Refer to the following policy sections: Acceleration, Early Entry, Role of Parents, Role of Staff.*

*“Having identified a child as profoundly gifted, how do we plan for his/her long-term future plans?”*

The incidence of profoundly gifted students is approximately 1/100,000 people. Therefore this is a rare situation. However, profoundly gifted children usually require greater curriculum differentiation, acceleration, connecting with educational pathways outside of those normally offered within schools and catering for the social and emotional implications of the widening gap between chronological age and intellectual abilities. The higher a student's intellectual level, the greater the degree of differentiation required. Schools will need to work in very close partnership with parents, local community and extended national and global community to consider the following options:

- early entry to kindergarten & school
- acceleration – subject & year level

- curriculum compacting
- accessing content and expertise beyond the school boundaries – e.g. secondary curriculum, tertiary curriculum, visits to and mentors from particular student interest areas- eg. planetariums, marine biologists, scientists, authors etc.
- online curriculum opportunities
- Futures Problem Solving challenges and competitions
- counselling and support for the student and family
- establishing a network of intellectual peers – online, Gifted and Talented Associations etc.

Teachers, parents, other relevant professionals and the student involved will need to work very closely to establish effective relationships with a range of possible educational channels, to predict and support transitional phases of his/her education, and to establish future educational pathways for the child. Careful whole school documentation of profoundly gifted students' education plans and regular discourse with parents and the student will be of great benefit in this process.

*Refer to the following policy sections: Role of Staff, Whole School Documentation, Acceleration, Curriculum Differentiation and Methodology*

*“How can I address the needs of gifted students in my class when I have students who have major learning difficulties in my class as well as all the other students?”*

- students who are engaged with their curriculum are going to be far more motivated, spend less time off task and have reduced time and opportunity for developing and demonstrating inappropriate behaviour
- therefore the assessment, planning and establishment time required to provide a differentiated challenging and rigorous curriculum for approximately 10% of the classroom population will automatically result in a better “playing field” for other classroom management requirements, as well as address the needs of the gifted students involved
- gifted students and students who require learning support will benefit from a differentiated curriculum. In fact failure to differentiate it to their individual needs may result in poor student achievement for both student cohorts and an increased likelihood of disruptive behaviour
- gifted students who are involved in the decision making process by negotiating their learning outcomes and pathways by which they can achieve them are more likely to develop independent learning strategies and habits. As such, this process enables teachers to assist students to own their learning
- attention to the provision of a Thinking and Learning based curriculum will also assist the learning environment and outcomes for ALL students. (Refer to LSA SA/NT/WA Thinking & Learning Curriculum Guidelines for Lutheran Schools document)
- the provision of gifted education is a whole school responsibility and should therefore not rely on the efforts of one teacher only. A coordinated approach to gifted education enables all teachers to access extracurricular options, share curriculum differentiation ideas, resources and methodologies

*Refer to the following policy sections: Whole School Documentation, Role of Staff, Curriculum Differentiation and Methodology*

## Possible Parent Questions

*“How come my child isn't gifted anymore?”*

In order to effectively respond to this question, schools need to undertake a range of assessment tools to determine if the child can be identified as gifted. There may be a few possibilities that have lead parents to this question:

- some children commence school having already received quite structured and supportive instruction for the development of their literacy and numeracy skills. As such, they may arrive in Reception already reading and writing fluently and able to perform a range of computational operations. While this obviously provides these students with an educational advantage, it does not necessarily relate to “giftedness”. As such, parents may find that as other students access formal education, over time they may appear to “catch up” with their previously more

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advanced child. Schools are able to support this if they apply a range of assessment tools to the child in question that include non-performance based tests

- some gifted students may commence school with excellent oral skills that demonstrate their giftedness. However, if they are gifted and learning disabled, then performance based assessment and presentation of work may result in scores that are depressed and underestimate the student's innate ability. For example, while literacy levels may not be a major factor in assessing student work in Reception, its influence on assessment grows as students move through the year levels. Therefore a student who is gifted but has dyslexia may under-perform as he/she moves through school. Schools should utilise a range of assessment tools in this situation, including those that may assist to identify learning disabilities and non-performance based gifted identification tools
- students who have attended more than one school may arrive at a new school and be assessed as achieving at a level below that of the previous school's assessment. This may be due to a number of factors including issues of school demographics, different emphases between the two curricula, different assessment criteria between schools, the accurateness and appropriateness of assessment tools used, and social and emotional influences on the student adjusting to the whole transition. Schools should utilise a range of assessment tools in order to establish accurate data, including a range of identification tools for giftedness

*Refer to the following policy section: Identification*

*"Should I look for a S.H.I.P. (Students with High Intellectual Potential) school?" please note: S.H.I.P. schools are now referred to as IGNITE schools*

Parents need to approach the issue of school selection on the basis of their beliefs about what is important for the education of their children. Such decisions will inevitably include family religious beliefs and values, educational needs of their children, personal curriculum preferences, school location, facilities, etc. Parents of gifted students need to also pursue the added aspect of how schools support, develop and cater for gifted students. Parents may ask for a copy of the school's Gifted Education Policy – from a System perspective and how it is being implemented at the individual school level. All schools have a responsibility to cater for individual educational needs. For gifted students this is best achieved with a whole school approach. Lutheran Education Australia's Educational Framework is very clear about schools' responsibilities to all students, (including gifted students) : *"...to encourage and support students, informed and sustained by the Word of God, to develop their God-given talents so that they may shape and enrich their world...learning is facilitated when the individual needs of the student are met...learners learn in different ways and at different rates... are authentically assessed and appropriately challenged."* Therefore, all schools have the capacity to appropriately meet the educational needs of gifted students – whether they are identified SHIP schools, Lutheran schools, large schools or small schools. Parents have a right to a copy of the schools' Gifted Education Policy and discuss with individual schools how this policy is implemented within any given Lutheran school.

*Refer to the following policy sections: Role of Parents, Role of Staff, Whole School Documentation*

*"What can I do for my gifted son/daughter at home?"*

Gifted students, as per any students, achieve best within a supportive school and home environment. It is important that the home environment is one that doesn't have ongoing high expectations of achievement as a premise of success, particularly for gifted students who may also have perfectionist traits. Students' social and emotional states need to be supported, especially if they have been accelerated beyond their chronological peers. All students need "down time" where they are able to relax and enjoy recreational pursuits, individually and as a family. However, extra curricular activities can provide gifted students with other creative and intellectually enjoyable avenues, eg. the performing arts, music, sport, interest clubs such as chess/backgammon/stamp collecting/ science clubs, etc. There are a range of clubs that also provide possibilities for gifted students such as the Double Helix Science Club, Gifted Children's Associations which facilitate a range of student workshops and speakers, book clubs, etc. Many gifted students also enjoy the intellectual challenge of learning new languages and accessing activities that are readily available on gifted education internet sites. The following represents a few other possible ways of providing for and enjoying shared

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experiences with gifted students at home:

- card games
- board games
- create new rules for familiar games and invent new games
- journaling
- commence a collection around a student interest
- visit Museums, Art Galleries, Science and Technology centres, Planetariums, Libraries, etc
- explore computer games and internet sites per student's interest
- have family debates
- plan and design new construction projects
- research and write unusual stories and illustrate them
- etc.

*Refer to the following policy sections: Role of Parents*

*“What benefit can camps and interschool workshops offer for my gifted child?”*

Some schools and Gifted Children Associations offer interschool workshops and camps for gifted students. Often schools will cluster to provide these extra-curricula opportunities for the following reasons:

- to enable interactive opportunities with other intellectual peers, to share thinking and learning strategies with them and develop a sense of belonging in a group
- to enable friendships to be developed with other students with similar interests and abilities
- to enable students to pursue particular interests in greater depth and breadth than they may otherwise be able to at school
- to enable students access to a range of facilitators with expertise in areas of student interest
- to establish support networks for students, teachers and parents involved in gifted education

*Refer to the following policy sections: Curriculum Differentiation and Methodology, Whole School Documentation*

## Possible Student Questions

*“All my work is repetitive at school. What can I do to change this?”*

Students who are gifted can become disenchanted and disengage from the curriculum when they are bored or feel that they have to complete already understood work before being able to “earn” their more appropriate challenging curriculum.

Students can discuss their frustration with having to complete aspects of a repetitive curriculum with their teacher, gifted education co-ordinator and parents. It is preferable for this to be done in a supportive manner that seeks out a resolution to the problem rather than finding fault. Students can suggest ways and areas of interest that they would like to extend and enrich their educational experience. Completing student interest inventories can be helpful. Students may also be encouraged to demonstrate what they already know, can do and understand about particular areas of study, topics and skill development activities at the commencement of a new work unit and subsequently negotiate with their teacher individual learning outcomes and pathways for achieving these. Whole school documentation of these pathways and discussions, and a process for this information to transit with the student to future teachers, can avoid students facing avoidable frustration and repeat of the process.

*Refer to the following policy sections: Curriculum differentiation and Methodology, Whole School Documentation*

*“I don't enjoy the company of other kids my age. I get on better with kids older than me but we are rostered on play areas according to year levels. How can I spend more time with older kids?”*

Schools are one of the few institutions where people are traditionally grouped together according to chronological age rather than shared interests, goals or abilities. While there are very valid duty of care and logistical reasons for this occurring – including the development of social groups for students amongst their peers - there is also a need for individual student needs to be catered for that may require flexibility with these practices. Highly gifted students can become socially isolated as a result

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of being unable to find intellectual peers from within their year level. Chronological peers often do not present the kinds of characteristics and responses that gifted students can connect with and therefore may restrict friendship options. One of the early characteristics that parents often report is the preference of their gifted children for the company of older children and adults rather than chronological peers. Schools can look at the following as a means of addressing this issue:

- lunch time interest groups that are not chronologically based – eg. chess, computer graphics, book clubs, music groups, etc
- establish older buddies for gifted students who can therefore access areas and programs with the older children
- extension groups that bring together gifted students across the school to explore and discuss a range of thinking skills and tools, problem solve complex scenarios and develop complex areas of thinking. Such groups also encourage students to share their thinking strategies and styles and engage in intellectual debate
- cluster extension groups that bring together gifted students from across several schools and regions
- gifted student camps and Gifted Children Associations based in most capital cities which run student workshops based on a wide range of interest areas
- mentorships with people within and beyond the school environment from areas of student interest – eg. local, national and international authors / artists / musicians / poets / scientists / researchers / athletes, etc.

*Refer to the following policy sections: Curriculum Differentiation and Methodology, Whole School Documentation, Identification*

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