

Current Issues

Professional learning and development in gifted and talented education is an imperative if the Ministry of Education is to uphold its stated commitment to raise the educational achievement of **all** New Zealanders and to adhere to the subsequent priorities set to support this aim. Some of the more prominent challenges faced in responding to the Ministry of Education's priorities as they relate to teacher education in gifted education are as follows.

Priority One

Raise teaching quality and leadership

Sufficient depth of understanding about pedagogy in gifted education will strengthen the capabilities of teachers and leaders to integrate effective and fully inclusive practices within their schools and centres.

However, currently opportunities and access to professional learning and development in gifted education remain limited and economically restrictive given the current funding and professional learning and development structure and user-pay system. While the Ministry of Education's priorities are directed towards increasing the options available in post-graduate qualifications, other options such as professional mentoring, coaching and collaboration, and Communities of Learning provide a unique means to begin addressing this gap.

Recommendations to Promote Optimal Learning and Outcomes

All Communities of Learning should have a dedicated Special Education Needs Coordinator (SENCO) or a Gifted and Talented Education (GATE) coordinator who leads a sub-group which can collaborate with Early Learning Centres (ELCs) within their community to build professional connections to improve teaching and leadership for supporting gifted learners.

Priority Two

Use information more effectively to lift achievement

Improving the depth and breadth of information collected about gifted children and young people will enhance teachers' opportunities to teach directly to where the student is 'at', and effectively support the direction and pace for their learning.

Presently there is a gap in the data with no indicator for those achieving at '**well above**' and a lack of focus on progress for learners who are achieving at 'above' in their assessment measures. The current means of gathering evidence is insufficient to provide a data set that effectively informs policy makers of gifted learners' full capabilities. It therefore fails to improve either policy or practice that relates to raising the achievement of gifted and talented learners. To be effective in determining individual learning pathways an appropriate measure of progress is necessary. A mandate is required for centres and schools to collate data specifically relating to gifted and talented learners and report this to the Ministry of Education.

Recommendations to Promote Optimal Learning and Outcomes

Professional learning and development should include the understanding that for gifted and talented learners it is necessary to remove ceilings and promote fluidity between learning levels through above-level testing and teaching. All students who perform at the 'above' or 'well above' levels need to be given the opportunity to re-test at higher levels. Next steps to lift achievement should be appropriately contextualised to reflect their learning capabilities. There is a need to document those learners who are achieving at a 'well above' level.

Priority Three

Target resources to address disparity in achievement

Improving educational outcomes for all children with special education needs, including gifted and talented learners from non-dominant ethnic groups, will address the present disparities in achievement outcomes and inclusionary practices for these learners.

High-quality teaching that incorporates identity, language and culture presently does not occur in an inclusive way for gifted learners. In educational settings where Māori and Pasifika conceptualisations of giftedness and talent are not understood, there is a discrepancy between inclusive practices and policies, resulting in a disparity in achievement.

Recommendations to Promote Optimal Learning and Outcomes

All policies of inclusive practice within educational settings must show operational strategies to develop teachers' understandings of the needs of gifted learners, and specifically gifted learners who identify as Māori, Pasifika, and from other minority cultures.

Priority Four

Engage children and students, to sustain participation and transitions in education

Initiatives which promote shared understandings of giftedness within professional development opportunities - and seek to engage children, young people and their families and whānau to develop these understandings - will enable stronger levels of participation and seamless transitions between education settings.

Often children, young people and their families and whānau are not included in processes of consultation to develop policies and practices for gifted and talented education. Seamless transitions for gifted children and young people are hindered by these limited opportunities. Limited shared understandings and practices for gifted education results in gifted learners experiencing differing perspectives and approaches to their development which can have a detrimental effect upon their confidence during and after transition between educational sectors.

Recommendations to Promote Optimal Learning and Outcomes

Gifted children and young people, and their families and whanau, will be encouraged to participate in professional learning and development opportunities through the sharing of their personal experiences. This will help to develop deeper understandings of giftedness, to build positive relationships for future learning and to enable successful transitions.

Priority Five

Ensure pedagogical awareness in creating flexible learning environments

A strong understanding of gifted education is needed by both those designing and utilising digital tools and Flexible Learning Environments (FLEs) in order that such environments might successfully support gifted and talented learners.

While modernised learning environments comprise a much wider range of contexts, the focus of the Ministry of Education at the present time is on the development and use of online learning environments and digital technologies. Online learning environments and digital technologies cannot be used to appropriately meet the learning needs of gifted and talented learners unless they are embedded in appropriate pedagogy.

Recommendations to Promote Optimal Learning and Outcomes

In planning the implementation of new technology and/or the development of FLEs it is critical that the unique needs of gifted learners are considered in full. Furthermore, any professional learning and development around FLEs must explicitly include pedagogical practices relevant to the education and support of gifted and talented learners.

Priority Six

A more outward-facing and engaged tertiary education system

Increased opportunities to develop the understandings of gifted students and gifted education practices (as outlined above) within initial teacher education programmes would create a future field of educators who can meet the needs of our gifted learners.

Currently, initial teacher education programmes are ineffective in informing beginning teachers about giftedness and gifted education. Initial teacher education programmes in Aotearoa New Zealand do not include compulsory courses on understandings of giftedness in children and young people. It is more common that teachers who express interest in gifted education can only explore this in addition to their required studies. Improving teacher education for current and graduating teachers on giftedness will benefit both educators' practices and the learning outcomes for gifted children and young people.

Recommendations to Promote Optimal Learning and Outcomes

Initial teacher education programmes in Aotearoa New Zealand need to include some components of compulsory training about gifted education in their programmes. It is recommended that incentives are provided for schools to encourage teachers to engage in professional learning and development in gifted

and talented education. Another means of improving teachers' understanding is to provide formal channels for new teachers to access Ministry-funded mentoring and coaching from specialists in gifted and talented education. Additionally, there is the need to continue to support current post-graduate programmes with a focus on gifted and talented education, to introduce further programmes and to provide scholarships to increase accessibility to such programmes.

Summary

The current educational priorities of the Ministry of Education are designed to empower educators to design educational environments to enable all learners to achieve. If these priorities are to be realised there must be active involvement from professionals to respond to diversity within each learning setting. This should include understandings about the special needs of the diverse children and young people in our schools and centres who are gifted and talented.

We believe enactment of the above recommendations will require changes at all levels including governmental policy development, teacher training and professional learning and development opportunities, priority areas for Communities of Learning, and centre and school specific change. The recommendations within this Position Statement are designed to set specific, measureable and actionable goals that will have direct, positive effects on the achievement and aspirations of our gifted and talented learners.

If we are to see the aspirations and educational achievement lift for every New Zealander, **all educators need to be equipped to support the needs of all learners, including the diverse range of individuals who are gifted and talented.**

References

- Ministry of Education. (2012). *Gifted and talented students: Meeting their needs in New Zealand schools*. Retrieved from <http://gifted.tki.org.nz/content/download/2358/13915/file/Gifted%20and%20talented%20students%20-%20meeting%20their%20needs%20in%20New%20Zealand%20Schools.pdf>
- Ministry of Education. (2014). *Ministry of Education Statement of Intent 2014 – 2018*. Retrieved from <https://education.govt.nz/assets/Documents/Ministry/Publications/Statements-of-intent/2014SOI.pdf>
- Ministry of Education. (n.d.). *Professional Learning and Development*. Retrieved from <http://nzcurriculum.tki.org.nz/System-of-support-incl.-PLD/School-initiated-supports/Professional-learning-and-development>
- United Nations General Assembly. (1948). *Declaration of Human Rights*. Retrieved from <http://www.un.org/en/universal-declaration-human-rights/>