



# The Gifted Education Centre

*To Go Beyond the Known*

## WORKING WITH YOUR SCHOOL

Following are notes prepared to support a workshop held during Gifted Awareness Week a couple of years ago. It was facilitated by Veronica van der Straaten, who was at that stage AP of Owairaka Primary School, and Sandi Purdie, Lead Teacher for the Centre. We felt it both valuable and important to have the school perspective as well. These notes are shared now in the hope that they may assist parents and schools to develop positive relationships, with the view of a 'win-win' situation, and a positive outcome for gifted children in their regular schools.

Please feel free to contact Sandi directly with any further questions you may have -

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### Notes start:-

Many parents ask us what they can do to work with their schools to help their gifted child enjoy school and reach their potential. Veronica and I met and have come up with the following information.

*What do I do if the teacher doesn't see my child as gifted?*

### **Barriers to being identified:**

\*\*The teacher may not have knowledge or training to identify gifted children. One of our ODS teachers is working in the state school system and has found it much more difficult than she expected, and she has 5 gifted children of her own, and has worked with gifted children for over 10 years. It is not easy.

\*\*It is important to remember that many teachers are doing the best they can for a class of 30+ students. They need to deal with learning disabilities, behaviour problems, social issues, and the students who are working in the average range. Your child may well be very important to the teacher, but he/she may not have the time and resources to cater for your gifted child. **It is very important to remember this when you meet with the teacher to discuss your child.**

\*\*This may be the time to write to your MP and ask for Gifted Education to be given priority. Some personal examples for your child will also help them to understand your child's and family's struggles.

Remember that your child's teacher only sees what your child does in class. If your child is underperforming, the teacher may not have seen any evidence of what your child is capable of. There are a number of issues that may be masking your child's true ability.

\*\*If your child struggles with writing, then their written work may not reflect their knowledge or thinking ability.

\*\*Some students find test taking very stressful, so their marks will not accurately reflect their true ability.

\*\*Gifted children often struggle to write down all of their ideas that are racing through their heads. The result can be a more simplistic version of their thinking.

\*\*Some children do not see the value in writing a test that does not challenge them, so they score poorly.

\*\*An underachieving student may be put down a group based on poor test results, so the work is more boring and useless, so they do less work. This trend may continue to spiral downwards.

\*\*Some gifted students are afraid to be different. They don't want to be the geek or nerd, so they purposely underscore.

\*\*Some gifted students are afraid to take risks or make mistakes, so they won't try the more challenging work. **FEAR OF FAILURE AND PERFECTIONISTS** - Does your child's teacher know about these traits in your child? I have seen students crippled by this.

### *My child complains of being BORED at school:*

\*\*If they are underscoring, the teacher will not see the need to move him up a group, as he cannot handle the work now.

\*\*You may want to ask for him to be tested at a higher level to see if he can cope with the work.

\*\*Or you may ask for the testing to go beyond the age/year range as the top test may still not be enough to challenge him.

\*\* If your child is not being challenged, you may want to investigate why.

### *What programmes are in place at your school? What is the selection process?*

#### *What do the PAT (Progressive Achievement Tests - based on performance) scores reflect?*

Each school has the opportunity to extend their students. You need to be aware of what is available at your school and what the selection process is.

\*\* If your child did not score well on PAT tests, they may not be selected to participate in extension or gifted programmes at your school.

\*\*Some GC do not see the point of doing well on PAT scores, so do not try hard to achieve on them. Also, if your child finds them stressful or has been ill, it may result in lower scores.

\*\*Ask if the PAT scores are **part or all** of the criteria used to select students for the programme.

\*\*Remember that the GATE person in your school is often the person responsible for selecting students for programmes. They may not be trained in this area.

### *What's your child gifted in?*

The Woodcock Johnson 3 test is a standardized cognitive ability test, which tests for potential rather than performance. If a child falls within the top 5 % overall, then they are gifted. A twice exceptional or mixed ability child may have scored in the top 5% for specific areas of giftedness, yet their overall score may be below the 95% range as a result of their weaker areas. If your child is gifted in Maths or Science, then most schools find this easier to cater for. They can put them in advanced or extension classes. However, if your child is gifted in other areas, it becomes harder for them. How do you mark a poem? Do your child's reasoning skills show up in a regular class? These children are gifted in their cognitive thinking ability and therefore need differentiated programmes to meet their needs. The NAGS 1 states that all children's needs should be catered for in the classroom.

### *The best way to approach the school and IEPs - Veronica's perspective*

Selection of where your children are to go for their schooling is an important decision for parents. The choice of school needs to be considered carefully. Parents need to ask questions and select a school they feel will meet the needs of their child/children on many levels- academically, socially, distance from home, extension and remedial programmes, programmes outside of the classroom setting. In selecting the school parents need to:

- Do a site visit, meet with senior management, discuss your child, what you are looking for in a school and ask for a tour/preschool visit. Get a feel for the school.
- Ask what programmes they offer to extend children and how children are selected for these programmes.
- Ask whether they are happy for children to attend the Gifted Education Centre one day a week if their child is accepted.
- Talk with parents in the community who have chosen to send their children to the school. Talk also to parents who have chosen not to and ask why.

1. Where the child is already in a school and is clearly showing signs of giftedness it is important that parents are informed about the programmes to meet the needs of their child and how the child is progressing. To do this we need to develop positive two-way communication. To develop this:

- Keep in regular contact with the class teacher about your child, how they are doing in class, any areas of need, what you as a parent can do to support the teacher and the child's learning. Keep all conversations polite, show interest and discuss. In my experience a two way conversation never works if one or both parties aren't listening to each other. A parent will not see a favourable result if they go into the discussion making accusations, are pushy, demanding and threatening.

- If a parent feels the teacher is not listening or that their child is not benefitting from the classroom programmes being offered then make an appointment with a senior management person to discuss concerns. This could be the senior teacher of the team, an assistant principal, a deputy principal, the principal, the teacher in charge of the extension programmes or the RTLB for the school (Resource teacher for learning and behaviour). Bring any evidence with you to this meeting. In selecting the person to speak to, ask parents/ the class teacher who would be the best person. Take a support person with you to this meeting who knows the child and can support you in what you say.
- In speaking to senior management don't complain about the teacher- keep the objective in mind- a programme that will better meet the learning needs of your child. Discuss what you notice regarding your child and his/her learning; present any evidence around ability/giftedness. Do not expect an answer then and there. Senior management will need time to talk with the class teacher, review samples of the child's work, discuss with other members of staff who work with the child, review standardized test results, talk with the person in charge of the extension programmes etc...in other words gather information. Suggest to the senior management person that you don't need an answer just yet but you would like to meet with them in a couple weeks once they have had a chance to get to know their child further. Set an appointment time.
- At the next meeting **listen** to what is said. Remember that the schools role is to do the best for your child but there are restrictions to what they can do e.g. funding, number of teaching staff, knowledge around giftedness, large class sizes, a mixture of abilities and needs within a classroom. If the school has extension classes for gifted and talented children ask if your child could have a trial period and then ask for a meeting with the extension teacher to review his/her findings.
- Often, if the previous step is successful a relationship has built between parents and school for the benefit of the child. Thank the person for listening and ask if you could contact them in future if you have any questions. If the teacher and the parent aren't communicating well it can be easier to have someone work on behalf of you and the child. This person will also support the teacher.
- If you are still not satisfied that a programme is in place to assist with meeting the learning needs of your child, ask if the teacher could meet with you and the school's RTLB to develop an I.E.P (individual education plan). In the IEP parents and any teacher who works with the child develops agreed goals around the child's learning and considers strategies for achieving these goals. Teachers use these goals to plan programmes around the child's learning. Traditionally an I.E.P is completed twice yearly. These are very beneficial but require extra paperwork and reporting by the teacher on top of an already crowded workload. So goals need to be specific and main areas targeted. It does not have to include every curriculum area and every aspect of school life.
- If parents have no satisfaction with regards to discussing their child's needs with the class teacher and/or senior management then I would suggest they look at their choices as parents. Each school will have a complaints procedure parents can follow in order to lodge a complaint and work towards a resolution. My concern with this is that if it gets to this point perhaps the relationship with the school is not on a positive note and therefore positive two way communication may not be occurring and the outcome may not be in the best interests of the child. So if at all possible think of alternatives.
- Complaints process for schools usually involves talking to the following people in order:  
Class teacher  
↓  
Senior Teacher and/or AP/DP (and the RTLB can be included in these meetings).  
↓  
School Principal  
↓  
Letter to the Board of Trustees  
↓  
Ministry of Ed and/or Education Review Office

It is necessary to check with the school their complaints procedure prior to writing to the Board of Trustees or going further. At each stage the family must give the school an opportunity to meet and discuss the concern raised, to investigate the concern and to consider if and what their response will be. Remember also the school does not have to comply to the parents' wishes. However, the school does have an obligation to cater as best as they can within the constraints of the organization of the school for the individual learning needs of the child.

*Sandi's miscellaneous notes are:*

\*\*COG and IQ tests may be read and shredded, so Parents, do not assume that the teachers have read past reports, test results, etc.

\*\*The GEC does not send your child's assessment reports to the school. You may want to give a copy to your child's teacher, and to anyone who is responsible for the Gifted Programmes and Extension Programmes at your school.

\*\*Dispel the myth that the child has to catch up all work that they have missed while attending ODS. Some teachers may be waiting for parents' permission for them to do this. Other teachers will insist that it is done. Parents, I strongly suggest that you find out how this is done.

\*\*Ask the teacher if they can find a few minutes to ask your child about what they did at ODS.

\*\*All students need to bring their ODS Homesheets to the teachers. [We want them to know what we are doing.](#)

\*\*When you tell a teacher "My child is gifted". What are you expecting? Remember the teacher needs time to process this information.

\*\*Ask for a follow-up meeting to discuss the assessment report. This gives the teacher time to investigate, read, and think about your child.

Parents - highlight any information in the Assessment Report that you feel is important for your child's teacher to be aware of. The recommendations section often gives useful/practical advice for teachers.

*When you do meet with the teacher, please remember:*

\*\* Don't bring past baggage to P/T meetings.

\*\* Use a positive tone of voice and approach.

\*\*Don't talk negatively about the teacher in front of the child.

\*\*Ask what extra-curricular activities and groups are offered at the school.

\*\*Teachers may not know or understand that we have many mixed ability or twice exceptional students attending ODS. They often don't see the giftedness that is being masked.

\*\*Gifted children often do not have the communication skills needed to share their ideas or to write what they know. We need to build on these skills.

\*\*Your child's behaviour will often influence their inclusion or exclusion in extension, accelerated, or gifted programmes. Ask what your child is doing in class and what you can do to support them in moving forward. Remember, Giftedness does not excuse rudeness.

\*\*\*\*\*If you are going to ask for your child to be accelerated or switch classes, be sure to **ask the child first**. They should have some say in this.

**Public or Private School?**

\*\*Choice is yours. See the article on our website. (Choosing a School by Rosemary Cathcart <http://www.giftededucation.org.nz/documents/choosing-a-school-doc.pdf> )

\*\*What would best suit your child?

\*\*Prevention is better than a cure.

\*\*Ask questions on the NZAGC forum to get feedback from other parents

\*\*How do they cater for gifted needs? Accelerated programmes? Streaming?

Parents please remember: **CRC - Commend-Recommend-Commend**

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