Argyll and Bute Council Community Services: Education.

Foreword – To be added

1. Context, Background and Aim

Why do we need to consider the needs of highly able pupils?

The Standards in Scotland's School's Act 2000 (p1) states that it is the responsibility of all schools to provide education directed to the "development of the personality, talents and mental and physical abilities of the child or young person to their fullest potential". The Supporting Children's Learning Code of Practice (Revised Edition, 2010, p 13) which accompanies the Education (Additional Support for Learning) (Scotland) Acts 2004 and 2009 specifically includes "particularly able and talented' pupils in the list of examples of pupils who may have additional support needs.

Education Scotland in its online briefing page on Highly Able Pupils acknowledges that:

Many learners need additional support to make the most of their education taking account of their individual circumstances and abilities. This includes learners who show particularly high abilities in one or more areas.
Challenge and enjoyment, personalisation and depth are important principles for all learners. Enhanced and augmented provision may be necessary to ensure highly able learners make the most of their education.

We Count Too: Highly Able Pupils in Scottish Schools (Stack and Sutherland, n.d.) is a report on provision for Highly Able Children and Young People in Scotland produced by SNAP (the Scottish Network for Able Pupils) and supported by the Scottish Government. The document highlights in its introduction the need to differentiate between Universal Support and Targeted Support for learning and draws attention to advice that addressing learning needs of the Highly Able pupil should be linked to the principles of Staged Intervention and Girfec (Getting it Right for Every Child).

SNAP has done much to promote good practice within Scotland in relation to provision for Highly Able Pupils and the SNAP website is full of exemplification of this practice. Indeed, there has been significant work in Argyll and Bute including a project to pilot TASC (Thinking Actively in a social context) in Cowal in 2006/07, various whole-authority awareness raising initiatives and a partnership between the Authority and SNAP to train up to five associate tutors each year.

However, in a report on a study published in 2015, *Seeing beyond statistics: Examining the potential for disjuncture between legislation, policy and practice in meeting the needs of highly able Scottish students* Dr Margaret Sutherland and Dr Niamh Stack from the University of Glasgow conclude that:
While at the legislative and policy level the results from this study were encouraging, it suggests there is a need for the Scottish Government, Education Authorities, educational psychologists, schools and teachers to explicitly consider and share their understanding of the needs of this group of learners. (p152)

And:

…in order to ensure that children and young people with additional support needs benefit fully from school education directed to the development of their personality, talents and mental and physical abilities (Education (Additional Support for Learning) (Scotland) Act 2004/2009) it is crucial that highly able learners are considered to be part of the educational milieu. In Scotland, the policy/practice landscape offers opportunities for this to happen but careful attention is required to ensure that highly able pupils do not slip between the cracks". (p 153)

Thus, the aim of this policy is to facilitate, within Argyll and Bute, explicit consideration, sharing of understanding and raising awareness of this area to ensure that practice reflects the requirements and aspirations of legislation, policy and pedagogy.

2. Issues

2.1 Definition of Highly Able Pupils.

In a recently published book - *Educating the Most Able* by Martin Stephen and Ian Warwick (2015), it is suggested that the issue of naming or defining our most able pupils has detracted from the real task of addressing and meeting their needs
There is further discussion around this issue in the foreword to the Guidance for addressing the needs of highly able pupils produced by SNAP.

The definition adopted for the purposes of this policy is taken from Education Scotland as based on recommendations from SNAP:

We have assumed that the term highly able pupils refers to pupils who are working or have the potential to work ahead of their age peers. We will also assume that the term includes pupils who are highly able across the curriculum as well as those who are highly able in one or more particular areas.

Guidance for addressing the needs of highly able pupils, Scottish Network for Able Pupils, p 10

2.2 Assessment
The questions "but how do I know that a pupil is highly able?" and "what evidence should I be looking for?" are commonly heard in relation to the assessment and identification of highly able pupils.

Often educators are anxious about getting it wrong or allocating labels where empirical evidence may seem to be lacking.
Warwick and Stephen (2015, p5) discuss this issue in Part 1 of their book and conclude with a strong feeling that we should trust teachers to know their pupils:
 Many articles suggest, implicitly or more rarely explicitly, that no mere teacher can be trusted to identify able children: they need a battery of tests and, even better, an army of university-based academics before any such judgement can be validated. The day may come when we can slam electrodes on a child's head and no instantly if they are 'gifted'. In the meantime, perhaps we should trust teachers to know their children. Academic measurement through tests dates back only 50 years.

As is, choosing who your most able students are by a combination of all existing methods, plus a healthy dose of teacher instinct, is untidy in academic terms but seems to work.

This recommendation fits clearly with the principles of Assessment within Curriculum for Excellence and which are outlined in the pamphlet on ['What assessment is and What it is not'](#) (n.d. Education Scotland, produced in response to the report 'Curriculum for Excellence Working Group on Tackling Bureaucracy').

The role of parents/ carers in identification is also viewed by Warwick and Stephen (2015, p43) as important and it is noted that:

 …many of the most effective schemes in the world for teaching the most able reckoned that parents who thought the children were in the most able category was subsequently proved to be correct. Parents are in contact with the children for significantly more time than teachers.

Once again, there is detailed discussion around this issue of assessment in pages 8 to 10 of the [Guidance for addressing the needs of highly able pupils](#) produced by SNAP. The document suggests that one first important step for us as education practitioners is to reflect on our own pre-conceptions around ability; it recognises that, if our own personal definition of ability is too limited, it may prevent us from seeing high ability across a range of areas. In simple terms, if we were to judge high ability only through a high IQ score, we may well miss seeing the high ability of a talented sportsperson, artist or, indeed, test-phobic but highly intelligent pupil. The Guidance suggests a shared belief activity to be undertaken as part of staff development. It also includes checklists which will be of use to staff looking for criteria against which to assess highly able pupils. (pgs 13 to 30)

There are also useful prompts for self-reflection in relation to our personal beliefs about ability within the revised [National Framework for Inclusion](#), developed by The Scottish Government, through the Scottish Teacher Education Committee (STEC, n.d.).

It is worth noting that the 2009 Additional Support for Learning Act strengthened the rights of parents and carers in terms of requesting an assessment in relation to their child's education. The [Supporting Children's Learning Code of Practice](#) (Revised Edition, 2010) states on page 16/17:

12. The Act introduces new rights for parents and young people. Parents have rights (and young people have these rights on their own behalf) to:
- *request the education authority to establish whether their child has additional support needs*
- *receive advice and information about their child's additional support needs*
- *request, at any time, a specific type of assessment and/or examination for the purpose of considering the child's additional support needs as well as when the education authority propose to establish whether a child or young person has additional support needs or requires a co-ordinated support plan (or where a plan is being reviewed)*

Finally, in relation to assessment and in line with the principals of Assessment within Curriculum for Excellence, it is crucial that learners themselves are part of the assessment process and have regular opportunities to reflect on their learning and identify next steps.

Warwick and Stephen (2015) also emphasise the need for learners to engage fully with the process of assessment and self-evaluation:

"The student portfolio is crucial, as the individual documentation of a student is crucial to every successful scheme studied in this book. There has to be a record kept of a gifted student's work and progress, not in an over-bearing regulatory way, but simply as a health and progress check that is the equivalent mentally of the physical checks a baby undergoes..." (pg 37).

2.3 Intervention

Intervention in relation to highly able pupils should be in line with Argyll and Bute Staged Intervention Policy and Practice.

Stage 1 - the class teacher or key worker (Early Years) identifies a need for some additional support. The Named Person is notified and the teacher /key worker makes some changes to the normal routine or gives some extra attention so that the child can get the best out of the work of the group or class.

CfE outcomes means that challenge for all pupils can be built in at the initial design stage. Thus the learning opportunities that children will be offered in order to achieve the outcomes will have opportunities for extension, elaboration, enrichment and enhancement already built in.

All children and young people need opportunities to:

- formulate and reflect on personal knowledge and viewpoints,
- explore diverse viewpoints,
- consider difficult questions,
- problem solve and enquire,
- make connections between past and present learning,
- regularly engage in higher order thinking (analysis, synthesis and evaluation), and
- engage in independent thinking and learning.

There should be opportunities for working in a range of ways. Grouping by ability and mixed ability groups have their place. In addition opportunities for both collaborative and individual work are also important.

ICT offers endless possibilities for individual and group challenge. Online providers such as NRICH offer many opportunities for additional challenge.

Stage 2 –There is an identified need for targeted planning and intervention to address additional support needs.

A Universal Child's Plan will be in place outlining the specific targeted interventions required and detailing long- and short-term outcomes and timescales.
Timescales for review of the interventions will be built in to the plan. There are likely to be termly reviews of short-term targets and annual reviews of long-term targets.

Strategy examples:

Curriculum compaction - This is a way of making curricular adjustments for pupils in any curricular area and at any stage. As much as 50% of traditional classroom material may be compacted for some students. It is a three stage process.

1. Define the aims and outcomes of the unit or topic.
2. Determine and document which pupils have already mastered most or all of the outcomes. This can be, but does not have to be, a formal 'test'. The information required can be gathered through a more informal pre-assessment process using discussion, mindmaps etc.
3. Provide, higher challenge, replacement or 'instead of' activities for those bits of the unit or topic that they can already do.

The Additional Support coordinator within the school or Area Principal Teacher, where appropriate, could offer the class teacher support in deciding how to assess and how much of the curriculum to compact.

Projects – A way of supporting individual children with particular abilities while also offering opportunities to other to develop their strengths is through whole school activities such as a regular school newspaper, radio or television show, enterprise activities and charity events. This approach lends itself well to A Curriculum for Excellence.

Pull-out programmes/masterclasses – Pupils who would benefit from a short term specialised programme of work are identified and extracted from the mainstream class to work together as a group. This group could be across a year group or across stages. Such opportunities are offered at regular intervals in the academic year. Such programmes are offered in a revolving door format. With this format groups of pupils will be formed and reformed at different times depending on individual need. The identification is a very fluid affair as it gives the opportunity for different children to be identified for different activities depending on the requirements of the task and on the individual's profile of abilities. Each child will only be in a programme for a limited (short) period of time. It will not always be the same group and thus different pupils will be part of the programme at different times for different reasons.

Mentors and mentoring systems – This is useful for individuals. Mentoring can be offered by parents, older children; learning assistants; volunteer adults and organisations and other staff in the establishment.

Cross-stage setting - This involves the creation of greater homogeneity through the formation of classes or groups across stages on the basis of attainment. While there can be certain advantages to setting pupils on the basis of attainment there are also disadvantages.

After school activities – For many children a range of after school opportunities such as clubs are ideal ways of recognising and challenging particular strengths. Chess; local library projects; maths; sports; school orchestra; debating etc are all clubs that pupils can find outlets for their particular strengths. It does not always have to be a club offered and run by the school. It may be that the school can direct children to local community clubs and activities. After school clubs can augment and enhance the opportunities and experiences available to individual pupils and will compliment appropriate recognition and challenge within the curriculum.

Stage 3 - There is an identified need for more targeted intervention and / or specialist provision and interventions including:
- a high degree of individualisation of learning and/or;
- access to a different learning environment and / or;
- substantial adaptation to the curriculum and/or;
- substantial adaptation to the learning environment.

A Universal Child's Plan will be in place outlining the specific targeted interventions required and detailing long- and short-term outcomes and timescales. Where there is multi-agency involvement, a Lead Professional will co-ordinate this support. There may also be a Co-ordinated Support Plan in place.

At this stage, the Area Principal Teacher may arrange:
- a. Training for school staff in providing for able pupils;
- b. Liaison with relevant outside agencies;
- c. Direct intervention by specialist team members;
- d. Group work with individuals across the authority e.g. masterclasses involving intellectual peers in key subject areas and/or cross curricular themes
- e. Involvement in special projects organised at authority level
- f. Enrolment in local, national or international online learning opportunities.

Example:

Able pupil individual plan: education objective	Link with agency such as university, voluntary organisation, sport, art, music academy
Will produce a portfolio of work for presentation to the Glasgow School of Art by April of her second year	Tutor from Glasgow School of Art will provide advice via VC to art teacher who will provide a suitable programme in class and in study support.

3. Support for Interventions

The Education Manager ASN and Early Intervention and will have the overview of implementation of this policy, related practice and support issues.

As with all matters relating to Additional Support, schools and ELCC (Early Learning and Child Care) units should direct requests for advice and support to the relevant Area Principal Teacher and/or Principal Teacher Early Years in the first instance.

4. Recording and Monitoring

Sutherland and Stack (2015, p147) note that:

There is a legislative requirement for the Scottish Government to collect and publish data annually in relation to pupils with additional support needs (Section 23 of the Education (Additional Support for Learning) (Scotland) Act 2009). This pertains to the number of pupils recognized as requiring additional support in their learning and in the Scottish context this includes the needs of "highly able" pupils.

Within Argyll and Bute, data is gathered via SEEMIS in relation to this reporting on Additional Needs. The way in which this and other data is gathered is currently under review and new guidance will be issued on this in the coming months. This will take account of the revised framework for Staged Intervention and the recommendation of the [2015 Review of the Curriculum for Excellence Tackling Bureaucracy Working Group](#) (p10):

"Local authorities and schools should regularly review the efficacy of ICT systems for planning and reporting to ensure that they are fit-for purpose and do not unnecessarily take time away from teaching."

5. Equality Impact Assessment.
This policy is in accordance with Argyll and Bute Council's Equalities and Diversity Policy. It supports the Council in its duty to eliminate discrimination, treat people fairly and with respect and promote good relations between diverse groups.

6. Policy Review.
This policy will be reviewed during session 2018-2019.

Thanks – to the Short-Life Working Party on meeting the needs of Highly Able pupils:

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Terms:

ABC – Argyll and Bute Council

ASN – Additional Support Needs

ELCC –Early Learning and Child Care

Girfec - Getting it Right for Every Child

SALi - Sharing Argyll Learning Intranet

SNAP – Scottish Network for Able Pupils

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