

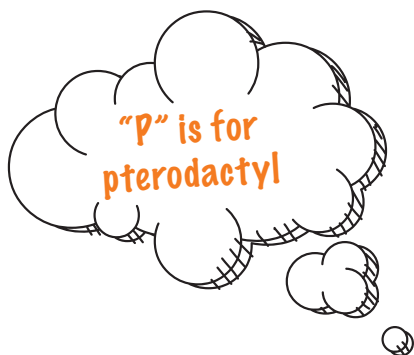


Discover.
Nurture.
Succeed.



to support and inspire their academically more able children





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Why produce a guide to high learning potential?

When you hear the phrase 'gifted and talented' what picture do you see in your head:

- a little genius, achieving success with ease?
- a child who has been hotheaded by pushy parents who have paid for the best tutors since birth to get him or her on the road to success?
- the 'swot' sitting at the front of the class eager to please their teacher, revising hard for tests and gaining top marks?
- the child who is no trouble at home, and who is well behaved, quiet, considerate and accommodating at school?



While there are many children who fit this description, only a small proportion of children with high learning potential (HLP) meet this stereotype. Giftedness can appear in many and sometimes surprising forms in children.

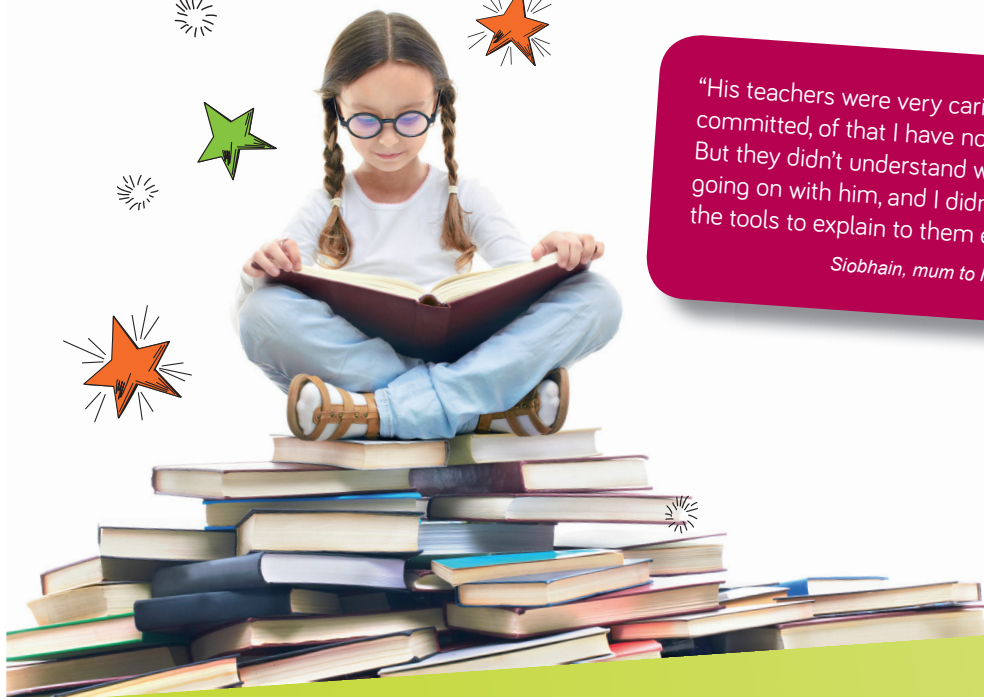
In addition, whilst some HLP children do go on to achieve success as adults, many will not do this without the longer-term support of their parents, carers, teachers or the other professionals in their lives.

In recognition of the need to convey the very real struggles affecting HLP children, some of the parents involved in Potential Plus UK decided to come together to write this practical guide to supporting those with high learning potential in school.



"His teachers were very caring and committed, of that I have no doubt. But they didn't understand what was going on with him, and I didn't have the tools to explain to them either."

Siobhain, mum to Noel, Kent



So just what does high learning potential mean?

That is the million dollar question. It is one on which nobody – whether they are academic, professional, parent, child or policymaker – can completely agree.

But the broad consensus is that high learning potential (HLP), or – as it is often called – giftedness, means those who have exceptional ability or give evidence of high learning potential in areas such as intellectual, creative, artistic, or leadership capacity, or in specific academic fields, such as English or science.

Definitions of HLP over the years have ranged from the top 2% in terms of IQ (an IQ of 130+) to the top 5–10% in a class or subject area.

Some schools separate Gifted from Talented to recognise the different kinds of support they may need, and some schools include able children within this group, or call it something totally different. Since Spring 2012 the Department for Education has used the term “academically more able”.

Potential Plus UK defines high learning potential children and young people as those

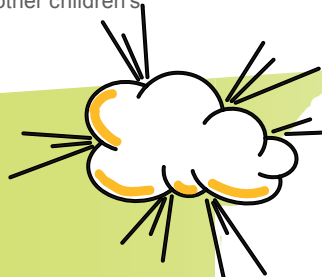
- **who have been identified as academically more able at school**
- **who have the potential to achieve through a wide range of abilities in academic subjects, sport, the arts and leadership**
- **who are dual or multiple exceptional (with a high ability coupled with a disability, learning difficulty or asynchronous development)**
- **who are profoundly gifted**

There are historical reasons for the different uses of terminology by schools, government and professionals; but it doesn't matter what these children are called. It is just essential that their needs are supported.

In any case, rather than focus on how HLP is defined it is much easier to look at the characteristics of a child with high learning potential so that behaviours can be spotted in the classroom. Even this is confusing though, as not every child will have all of the characteristics identified, which is why many of these children can appear to be enigmas.

All children, whether gifted, bright, average or below average, deserve the chance to lead happy and satisfying lives. HLP children have a great thirst for knowledge and it is vital that this need is recognised as early as possible so that parents and teachers can give them plenty of opportunities to develop their natural ability in order for their confidence and enthusiasm to flourish.

A good school will try to meet the needs of all of its pupils and should not be discouraged by believing that the support needs of children with high learning potential are any less than other children's. They are just different.



A study of giftedness

The most comprehensive study to identify the characteristics of HLP children was originally developed in the 1970s by Dr Linda Silverman. Her Characteristics of Giftedness Scale was produced after ten years of teaching and counselling experience with HLP children and was compiled as part of a study carried out on 241 exceptionally gifted children. Over 80% of the sample was reported to fit 20 of the 25 characteristics.

The following characteristics were endorsed by 90% of the parents of this group of exceptionally gifted children:

- learns rapidly
- extensive vocabulary
- excellent memory
- reasons well
- strong curiosity
- mature for age
- good sense of humour
- keen observation
- compassion for others
- vivid imagination
- long attention span
- ability with numbers
- concern with justice, fairness
- sensitivity
- wide range of interests

The following characteristics were endorsed by 80% of the parents:

- ability with puzzles
- high energy level
- perfectionism
- perseverance in interests
- questions authority
- avid reader
- prefers older companions

*Silverman, L. K., & Waters, J. L. (1984).
The Silverman/Waters Checklist for
Identifying Gifted Children. Denver, CO:
The Gifted Child Testing Service.*

Zoom



Talented children

Talented children have been traditionally seen as those children who excel at sport, art, drama and music (although there is some crossover between the two, e.g. a musician may be naturally gifted but it is only when they pick up the instrument and begin to practice that they develop a talent).

Talented children are rather easier to spot than gifted children and there is often a framework in place in school and in the community to support their talents.

Of course, in order for talent to be spotted, the child MUST have had some exposure to the activity to be able to demonstrate their natural ability. This means that providing opportunities for all children to try out new things is extremely important, regardless of socio-economic background.



"I've been asking to play the violin since I was 2, when are you going to let me?"

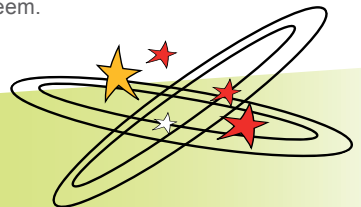
Molly, aged 3, Hertfordshire

Why is it important to stretch HLP pupils and ensure they are working at the appropriate level?

Because:

- they might get bored and become disruptive
- they need to work at an appropriate level in order to stay engaged and not become distracted
- study skills may not come naturally to a HLP child (many are easily distracted, disorganised, etc) so they need to learn this discipline and how to work hard to find answers to questions.
- this is essential to their mental and emotional wellbeing. Children who are 'HLP but overlooked' are more at risk of developing problems such as depression, addictions or eating disorders etc.

Many HLP children have gone through school finding everything easy and effortless only to discover at Higher or Further Education level that they do not know how to work out the answers that require effort. The results of this can be catastrophic for a young person's ambitions and self-esteem.



Recognising a child with high learning potential in your classroom

- **extensive vocabulary, early or avid reader**
typically child self-taught to read (but not all – especially dual or multiple exceptional children)
- **keen powers of observation, vivid imagination**
connects concepts in an unusual and unexpected way
- **sense of humour**
may be mature beyond years, odd or inappropriate
- **compulsive communicator**
if you won't listen, they will talk to somebody else...
- **inability to sit still**
fidgeting, fiddling, a master of origami and tinkering
- **ability to multi-task**
the sort that never looks as if they are paying attention, but then gets high marks in tests
- **poor handwriting**
classic case of the hand not being able to keep up with the brain
- **leader rather than follower**
hates to be one of the crowd - would rather be by themselves than "a sheep"
- **does well in tests but class work less impressive**
bright children tend to have excellent memories (although a poor short-term memory is a common issue)
- **questions everything**
including the teacher. Awkward questions a speciality!
- **unusual hobbies or interests**
may have a vast and detailed knowledge of something unexpected, or a wide range of interests
- **hates to lose or be wrong**
will refuse to take part rather than risk failure
- **difficulty in making or maintaining friendships**
potential friendship group is smaller

(Sources: British Mensa and Silverman, L. (n.d.)
Characteristics of Giftedness)



"Children with high learning potential are not any better than any others or elitist in any way; they are just different and those differences should be recognised and supported"

Mark, dad to two HLP children, Derbyshire

High learning potential – the myths and reality

As we have said, there are many popular myths surrounding high learning potential children. These myths and stereotypes really can and do stop them getting the support they need to be happy and productive. These include:

MYTH: All HLP children are high achievers; they don't have to work hard for exam success.

NOT TRUE – they just work differently. Many are perfectionists who fear failure and find it difficult to start work or produce work to their standard. Many are easily bored and get turned off by work which does not challenge (and so underachieve), or they respond best to different methods of learning.

MYTH: HLP children can accomplish anything they put their minds to; they just have to apply themselves.

NOT TRUE – many have poor organisational skills and find their minds wandering away from the task at hand, have poor memory skills and cannot apply themselves without support.

MYTH: HLP children enjoy serving as examples for other children.

NOT TRUE – many bright children find being singled out highly embarrassing and would prefer to dumb down than be shown as a 'good example'. They can also become so frightened of getting things wrong that they stop trying altogether.

MYTH: HLP children are motivated and challenged by being given more work of the same type or yet another worksheet once they have finished (i.e. extra work).

NOT TRUE – HLP children soon realise that the intelligent thing to do is never to finish before anyone else!

MYTH: HLP children are self-directed, they know where they are heading.

NOT TRUE – or why would only 3% of HLP children end up as successful high achieving adults, without support?

MYTH: HLP children don't need help with study skills, they can manage on their own.

NOT TRUE – many have problems with motivation and experience extremes of emotions which make it difficult to concentrate and study.

MYTH: HLP children have fewer problems than others; they do not need or deserve extra time and attention

NOT TRUE – they have the same amount of problems as other children, just different ones. All children should be supported to help them maximise their potential.

MYTH: HLP children will reveal their 'gifts' in school and will want to emphasise them.

NOT TRUE – many children, especially in secondary school, are frightened of being the class 'geek' and would prefer to dumb down rather than be bullied, isolated or be seen as the teacher's pet.

MYTH: 'Giftedness' is something to be envious of.

NOT TRUE – many specialists and parents think HLP should be classed as a special educational need because of the many issues it brings for both the family and the child.

Emotional & behavioural problems associated with high learning potential

There are many problems that are linked with HLP. These are some of the common issues:

- **Poor social skills:** a preference for being with older children or adults and a lack of understanding of children their own age, particularly in the early years and primary school.
- **Low boredom thresholds:** the constant need for challenge and different approaches to learning.
- **Hypersensitivity:** extreme physical and emotional reactions, from labels inside clothes to emotional outbursts over trivial issues.
- **Asynchronous development**
emotional maturity way behind intellectual ability
- **Acute perfectionism and fear of failure**
may be the cause of underperforming
- **Stubbornness and strength of opinion**
incredible persistence, arguing, inflexibility. Forward warning of change of plans is essential.

Asynchronous development

Children who experience asynchronous development are often perceived to be 'quirky', 'immature', 'interesting' or even 'odd'.

Asynchronous development occurs when a child's development progresses in different areas at different rates. The higher the child's ability, the more pronounced this imbalance can be.



Imagine a child, 7 years old.

They have the intellectual capability of a 12 year old; you are able to talk to them like a much older child and they can engage with you on that level.

But they are the one who comes in at lunchtime, crying as someone else is being bullied and it is too overwhelming for them. Or they are the one who won't go to bed without their teddy, even though none of their friends do this.

Dual and multiple exceptionality – what does this mean?

Some HLP children have a learning difficulty alongside their high ability, which adds complex issues to the development of their potential. These children are often termed 'dual or multiple exceptional' or 'DME' children. They're exceptional because they have high learning potential and exceptional because they have learning differences or difficulties.

Working with children who are both bright and have a learning difficulty can be confusing. They can seem so able and yet lack the ability to carry out basic tasks. For example, the HLP child who produces only average written work could have dyslexia or dyspraxia - this underperformance can be difficult to spot as the high ability masks the disability. Yet this is just what can happen with dual exceptional children. Often they are misperceived as lazy, stubborn, careless, or unmotivated. While teachers and parents know this isn't an accurate description, sometimes it's almost impossible not to agree. Something is not quite right, but it's hard to describe what is wrong.

Common difficulties seen alongside high learning potential include:

- **Asperger syndrome, autistic spectrum disorders**
- **ADD/ADHD**
- **dyslexia, dysgraphia, dyscalculia**
- **dyspraxia**
- **central, auditory or visual processing disorders**
- **sensory integration dysfunction**
- **non verbal learning disorder**

Dual and multiple exceptional children are very difficult to identify and good communication between teachers and parents is essential as well as an appropriate amount of investigation. This will enable everyone to get to the bottom of the difficulties the children are experiencing and allow measures to be put into place so that the children can maximise their learning potential.

Ultimately, a strategy to support the special need and challenge or stretch the high learning potential will need to be adopted.

“ A student with a 140 IQ learning in the same manner as a student with a 100 IQ (average student) is like asking the 100 IQ student to learn in the same manner as a student with an IQ of 60. (Special Education categorised as having an IQ of 70 or below).

Flynn, J. (2000). The hidden history of IQ and special education: Can the problem be solved?

Boooooom



Quick tips for supporting high learning potential in your classroom

➤ Modify

Try modifying just one lesson, not a whole unit of work. Focus on modifications in content areas most relevant to the children's strengths and interests. See what results this different approach has before modifying the whole unit.

➤ Give relevance

Many HLP children prefer real-life questions to classroom exercises, which they may see as pointless and disconnected. Create real life questions that have resonance for the child, perhaps topical or local issues. HLP children often feel strongly about the environment, political or global issues, local concerns, etc.

➤ Balance children's contributions

Keep turn-taking at answering questions fair, so that the HLP children are neither ignored nor asked all the time. **Examples:** give all the children a small white board so they can all write down the answer and put the boards up for the teacher to see, which can then be wiped. This way no one else can see who knows the answer and who doesn't. Or use lolly sticks in a jar with names on that can be pulled out when looking for answers to a question. Or ask the whole class to say the answer together, or partners to tell the answer to each other.

➤ Child self targets

Help HLP children select topics, set their own independent goals for study, and use criteria to monitor their own progress. Before setting targets, assess what the children already know and can do. But be careful to supervise individual activity: HLP children should not just be turned loose to work alone. Most need support, teachers' insights, and occasional direction.

➤ Creative extension

Take care that extension work is not just "more of the same," but rather involves tasks like reflecting, formulating individual opinions and interpretations, helping students to raise their own questions, and forming connections between past and present learning. Doing more of the same just comes across to children as a penalty!

It's a poem, sir!

It's Shakespeare's sonnet 116, sir!



.....and the things you should avoid

- picking HLP children to answer only when no-one else knows the answer
- demotivating HLP children by asking them not to put their hands up
- making children self-conscious by regularly making an example of their work
- allowing HLP children to be bored by giving them more of the same work if they finish quickly
- expecting bright children to finish the 'boring' work the rest of the class is doing before giving them enrichment/extension work
- separating HLP children into special groups ('trophy children'). They are very conscious of their differences and need sensitive adult support to fit in with others.
- assuming children who sometimes appear bright but are performing at an average level cannot have high learning potential. There could be many reasons why HLP children are underperforming.
- allowing HLP children to work too independently. They may have exceptional abilities but they still need adult guidance and insight.
- relying on a HLP child to support other children in the class room, i.e. using them as a classroom assistant.

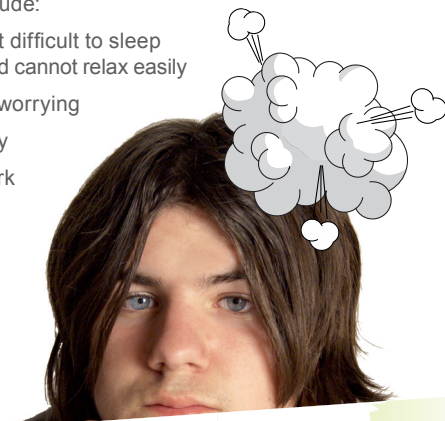
Other issues HLP children face at home

Don't forget, a teacher works with high learning potential children for five days a week, but a parent will often experience a very different 'side' to their child. Some of the common problems mentioned by parents include:

- issues with sleep – HLP children often find it difficult to sleep because their brains are working overtime and cannot relax easily
- extreme anxiety – panic attacks, excessive worrying
- challenging behaviour at home, hyperactivity
- lack of motivation about things like homework
- expressing extreme dislike of school

"Jake is usually quite considered and reserved, but increasingly his term time behaviour is in complete contrast. He is aggressive, angry, 'hates himself', doesn't write or do other work as well as he can when he's calm."

Emma, mum to Jake, Nottingham



Stanley - a case study



“ Stan wasn't the most obviously able child in my supply Year 5 group. Children had been placed in ability group tables and I quickly spotted the able students at the back of the room, willing to work hard and get the job done well. Another group at the front of the class were given different activities and worked at a much slower pace. When we began our literacy lesson my attention was drawn to Stanley: a tired looking boy in the group at the front of the class. He put his hand up often with articulate and interesting answers, often with a humour beyond his years. During a science activity I again saw an animated child making relevant connections and enjoying himself. However, during other lessons he seemed withdrawn and frustrated.

Later on when I marked Stanley's book, I had to look several times to try to find the right page. In both literacy and science the work was scant; the pages were written on randomly – a handful of barely legible words. It didn't make sense to me! What had he been doing all that time?

Over the next few days I watched Stan carefully. In the playground he was a confident, skilled football player but he would sometimes react strongly to a situation he perceived to be 'unfair' and could quickly get caught up in arguments. In class I saw a boy who frequently stared off into space, effectively 'removing' himself by daydreaming, fidgeting or reading under the table. When something caught his attention he would be animated, witty and engaged but then he would revert back to his own world.

I decided to experiment and asked the teaching assistant to scribe for Stanley. His answers showed a deep understanding of the work in the classroom. But I was surprised to realise he had also understood work during the time I thought he had 'switched off'! I decided to give Stan the same work as the able children and arranged to spend some time scribing for him each day, while the assistant supported other children.

With just a few minutes of support each day and given work that was challenging, sitting alongside children who understood his quirky sense of humour, we saw a shift in Stan's demeanour and confidence. As well as confidently offering answers he began to ask challenging questions. One morning when I sat down to scribe for him, he took the pencil calmly from my hand and began to write by himself. I walked away, thrilled to see a smile on his face.

I learnt that Stan's dyslexia had been diagnosed a few years previously but that his high ability had not yet been identified, presumably because of the difficulties he'd experienced with writing and, to a lesser extent, reading. He regularly began to use the computers, and a voice recognition programme was installed for him. His writing level jumped significantly and, more importantly, so did his self-esteem.

Being allocated work that was intellectually too easy for him and being unable to express his ability must have been deeply frustrating for him. As he began to engage more within learning at his own – much higher – level the playground squabbles also reduced.

Several months later Stan was regularly asking if he could stay in at lunchtimes to work on the novel he was writing (about a child detective)! He also began to undertake some multi-sensory teaching for his dyslexia and was now able to join in with all the enrichment activities that were offered to the 'more able' students. The following year, Stan achieved a score of level 5s across the board.

I learnt a lot from Stan. I learnt that the clever child may not be the one who produces the best work, or the one who knows how to react appropriately in the playground. And I learnt that, with a bit of knowledge, imagination and the right support, a HLP child with a learning difficulty CAN thrive in a mainstream classroom.

Gill O'Connor, teacher specialising in SEN and inclusion ”

Further resources

organisations

- **Potential Plus UK**
The not-for-profit organisation founded in 1967 to support the needs of children with high learning potential, their families and schools.
w. www.potentialplusuk.org
e. amazingchildren@potentialplusuk.org
t. 01908 646 433
- **Ofsted**
For current government guidelines search for both 'Gifted and Talented' and 'academically more able' on the website.
w. www.ofsted.gov.uk
e. enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk
t. 0300 123 4234
- **MENSA**
The High IQ Society offers Gifted & Talented Teacher Support Packs
w. www.mensa.org.uk
t. 01902 772 771
- **World Council for Gifted and Talented Children**
The World Council for Gifted and Talented Children, Inc. (WCGTC) is a world-wide non-profit organisation providing advocacy and support for gifted children.
w. www.world-gifted.org
e. headquarters@world-gifted.org
- **Profoundly and Exceptionally Gifted Youth**
PEGY is a voluntary organisation for exceptionally and profoundly gifted young people.
w. www.pegy.org.uk
e. pgconferences@btinternet.com
- **Tomorrow's Achievers**
Tomorrow's Achievers provides specialist masterclasses for HLP children in many parts of the country.
w. www.tomorrowsachievers.co.uk
t. 020 7734 0161

- **International Gateway for Gifted Youth**
IGGY is an international network of gifted students aged 13-19.
w. www.iggy.net
t. 02476 151 860
- **GIFT Ltd**
GIFT Ltd is a specialist company with over 30 years' experience of Exceptionally Able, Gifted and Talented children, that works with schools and education authorities to run courses for gifted children
w. www.giftltd.co.uk
e. enquiries@giftltd.co.uk
t. 01277 654228

websites

- **www.talentdevelop.com**
Talent Development Resources provides information and inspiration for creative expression and personal development. Includes a youth/teen section.
- **www.gifted-talented-update.com**
A comprehensive resource for schools on gifted & talented issues. Regular e-bulletins on the latest guidance, information and support from Optimus Education.
- **www.raising smarter kids.net**
Resources, ideas, support and a blog from the authors of award-winning "Being Smart about Gifted Education"

books

- James T. Webb, E. Amend, N.E. Webb, et al: *Misdiagnosis and Dual Diagnoses of Gifted Children and Adults*
- Joyce Cooper-Kahn: *Late, Lost and Unprepared: A guide to helping children with Executive Dysfunction*
- Ross W Greene: *The Explosive Child*
- Adele Faber & Elaine Mazlish: *How to Talk so Kids will Listen and Listen so Kids will Talk*
- Peg Dawson & Richard Guare: *Smart but scattered*
- Dona J. Matthews & Joanne F. Foster: *Being smart about gifted education*
- Martin Antony and Richard Swinson: *When Perfect Isn't Good Enough: Strategies for Coping with Perfectionism*
- Ian Stewart: *Professor Stewart's Cabinet of Mathematical Curiosities*
- Kjartan Poskitt: *The Murderous Maths of Everything*
- Paula Iley: *Using Literacy to Develop Thinking Skills with Children: A Guide to Developing Thinking Skills with Gifted and Talented Pupils*
- Joy L Navan: *Nurturing the Gifted Female: A Guide for Educators and Parents*
- Tracy L. Cross: *The Social and Emotional Lives of Gifted Kids: Understanding and Guiding Their Development*
- James T Webb: *Guiding the Gifted Child: A Practical Source for Parents and Teachers*
- Lucy Palladino: *Dreamers, Discoverers and Dynamos*
- Barry Teare & Tracy L Cross: *Enrichment Activities for Able and Talented Children (Practical Resource Books for Teachers)*

It's alright
to be bright!



About Potential Plus UK

Potential Plus UK is the not-for-profit organisation that supports the social, emotional and learning needs of children with high learning potential, their parents and carers and the professionals who support them.

Our aim is to enable every high potential learner to grow in confidence, thrive and achieve fulfilment. Most importantly, we celebrate the achievements and potential of these amazing children.

Our services include:

- A school membership programme
- Consultancy and training
- Confidential information and advice line
- Information and fact sheets on our website
- Newsletters and children's magazines each term
- A programme of family activities around the country
- Local clubs and parents' support groups
- A child assessment service

Visit our website to download a comprehensive range of information and advice sheets on topics such as

- Needs of a child with high learning potential
- Characteristics of a child with high learning potential
- Provision in schools for academically more able pupils
- Enrichment and extension
- Handwriting difficulties
- Ways to demonstrate learning
- Perfectionism: overcoming the fear of failure
- Social and emotional development of children with high learning potential
- Asynchronous development
- Dual and multiple exceptionality
- Hypersensitivity

Many are free, for some there is a modest fee



www.potentialplusuk.org

T: 01908 646 433

E: amazingchildren@potentialplusuk.org

Potential Plus UK, Suite 1.2, Challenge House, Sherwood Drive,
 Bletchley, Milton Keynes, Buckinghamshire, MK3 6DP