

HIGHLY ABLE POLICY

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MONITORING AND REVIEW

Staff Responsible	Deputy Head (Academic)
Reviewed by	SLT
Approved by	SLT
Frequency of Review	Yearly
Date of Last Review	November 2025
Date of Next Review	November 2026

The School refers to all staff and students in St Mary's School, which includes the Early Years/Foundations Stage (EYFS), the Preparatory Department (Years 1-6), Senior House (Years 7-11) and the Sixth Form (Years 12-13).

The term 'parent' refers to those who have parental responsibility for a child.

AIMS

St Mary's School is committed to providing the best possible care and education to all its learners and seeks to stretch them to reach their full potential. This policy aims to ensure that Highly Able learners at St Mary's School will:

- Be identified using a range of appropriate information by Heads of Department, Senior Leaders and other teachers
- Be provided with opportunities in school and in lessons to allow learners to reach their highest potential
- Be given the opportunity for their curiosity to be fostered, their love of learning to be inspired and for their sense of enquiry to be stimulated
- Have opportunities, within and beyond the curriculum, to develop their skills and talents
- Have their emotional/social needs considered alongside their intellectual needs
- Have their progress monitored and reviewed regularly both in department and at a senior leadership level
- Be supported by appropriately trained staff

The Policy aims to ensure that all teachers understand that they have a part to play in providing an environment in which highly able learners are able to thrive and achieve their highest academic potential.

WIDER REFERENCES

This policy has been created within a wider framework of advice:

- Ofsted: The Most Able Students 2013
- National Association for Able Children in Education (NACE)
- Potential for Success- Fulfilling the promise of highly able students in secondary schools. Sutton Trust July 2018

RELATED POLICY

This policy should be read in conjunction with:

- Equal Opportunities Policy
- Teaching, Learning and Assessment Policy
- SEND Policy
- Behaviour, Rewards and Sanctions Policy

OVERVIEW

St Mary's School is committed to continuous improvement in all areas. We believe that all children are entitled to an excellent education that will enable them to develop their full potential, be that

intellectual, physical, aesthetic, creative, emotional, spiritual or social, finding appropriate challenge in our learning environment.

St Mary's learners have a wide range of abilities: we aim to provide a culture of aspiration and attainment for all. The school aims to personalise learning for all, acknowledging that our learners will have talents in different areas of the curriculum, academic and non-academic. We strive to ensure that we identify and nurture these talents to enable every learner to achieve their potential and then reach beyond it.

All lessons should provide an element of challenge for all learners, via effective instruction and well-planned curriculum programmes and lessons. It is important that this HA Policy is seen in the context of the promotion and development of a culture of aspiration and attainment for all learners, and that there is a balance between opportunities for all those that seek academic enrichment and development with opportunities and consideration of the needs of pupils who are identified as highly able. The school continually works to achieve the best possible outcomes for learners in external examinations and support learners to prepare applications to prestigious universities, apprenticeships or other aspirational courses e.g. conservatoires and Art foundation both in the UK and internationally.

DEFINITION

The Department for Education describe more able learners as those whose progress and attainment significantly exceed age-related expectations. The National Association for Able Children in Education (NACE) extends the DfE definition to those who demonstrate, or have the potential to demonstrate, high levels of performance or attainment - either across the curriculum or within specific subjects, including the arts and physical activities - and who show abilities that are significantly above those of their peers within their year group, class, or school.

St Mary's school define more able learners as

Highly able learners are those who show, or have the potential to show, high levels of performance across the curriculum or in specific areas, including academic subjects, the arts and physical activities, and whose abilities are significantly above those of their peers.

IDENTIFICATION AND MONITORING

We acknowledge that baseline scores are only part of the picture, and we place great emphasis on the importance of the professional judgement of teachers, as well as feedback from parents. We aim to have an ongoing and flexible method of identification. There is no set percentage or limit to identifying a HA cohort. Therefore, the HA cohort will vary between classes, year groups and wider school intake and it will be reviewed twice a year: in November and in June. As talents and abilities emerge and dissipate at different times due to developmental issues, inclusion in the HA cohort may not be permanent.

Our approaches aim to identify and support high ability learners at risk of underachieving, including those with special educational needs and/or disabilities.

Underachieving highly able learners are those whose prior attainment or learning behaviours indicate high potential, yet whose current performance does not reflect this ability. Such underachievement may arise from a range of barriers, including socio-economic disadvantage, social, emotional and mental health (SEMH) needs, language and communication difficulties, or dual and multiple exceptionality. Highly able learners may be more likely to associate success with self-worth, can be perfectionists and may struggle with increased expectations from themselves or from others. They can experience fear of failure and consequently have an aversion to risk.

In keeping with the NACE recommendations, the key is to focus on the opportunities provided for learners to reveal their abilities. The process is ongoing: provide – identify – provide. There is a checklist of possible criteria for identification in Appendix 1.

Highly able learners have a great thirst for knowledge and it is vital that this need is identified as early as possible so that parents and teachers can give them the required level of support in order that they may develop their talents. As there is no single tool for the identification of highly able learners, these learners will be identified at a departmental level. We acknowledge that an individual learner may be highly able in one or several domains but not in others; for this reason it is important to consider each subject or area of attainment separately by making a judgment based on an analysis of various sources of information including:

- Quantitative data including available test data and results of teacher assessment (including CAT4, GL Progress Tests , Midys, Yellis, Alis, GCSE scores)
- Qualitative information, including teacher assessment, learner, peer and parent nomination and examples of learners' work
- Rate of progress, including value-added data and reference to prior attainment and/or achievement
- Primary school recommendation
- Teacher or Departmental recommendation

Each department handbook should identify the criteria they use to identify a learner as Highly Able within their subject.

Through the Pastoral team and tracking systems, all learners, inclusive of the more able, are monitored carefully along with all learners to ensure that they develop the resilience needed to embrace intellectual challenge.

DUAL EXCEPTIONALITY

Dual or multiple exceptionality refers to learners who have a high learning potential and are also classed as having a special educational need. Having dual exceptionality may be accompanied by a particular set of emotional challenges, which staff should keep under consideration. Praise and encouragement is used to acknowledge these learners' individual successes and talents.

RESPONSIBILITIES

This section outlines the roles and responsibilities of key staff in supporting Highly Able learners.

Head

The Head is responsible for:

- Ensuring the school's strategic vision includes provision for Highly Able learners
- Monitoring whole-school progress and outcomes for Highly Able learners
- Supporting and resourcing initiatives that promote stretch and challenge
- Leading on a whole-school culture of aspiration and achievement

Deputy Head (Academic)

The Deputy Head (Academic) is responsible for:

- Overseeing the implementation and review of the Highly Able Policy
- Coordinating training and professional development for staff on adaptive teaching and enrichment
- Working with the pastoral team to ensure pastoral tracking systems are used to give learners emotional support in their intellectual challenges
- Overseeing identification processes and monitoring consistency across departments
- Liaising with Heads of Department to ensure provision is embedded in schemes of work and in the wider work of academic departments

Heads of Department

Heads of Department are responsible for:

- Identifying Highly Able learners within their subject area using agreed criteria
- Ensuring schemes of work include stretch and challenge for Highly Able learners
- Creating opportunities outside of lessons for highly able learners to engage in to foster curiosity, academic resilience and creativity
- Ensure Highly Able is a standing item on department meeting agendas in order to share best practice and strategies for adaptive teaching within the department and provide the best support for highly able learners
- Recommending learners for enrichment opportunities and monitoring their engagement

Heads of Section

Heads of Section are responsible for:

- Tracking academic progress of highly able learners and working with Heads of Year and Tutors to support progress and offer pastoral support where necessary.

Teachers

All teachers are responsible for:

- Identifying Highly Able learners using baseline data and other relevant quantitative and qualitative data
- Ensuring learning activities are adapted so that they are sufficiently challenging for the most able learners in the classroom
- Monitoring progress and providing feedback to their Head of Department, including for highly able learners who are underachieving
- Encouraging participation in enrichment activities and fostering intellectual curiosity
- Monitoring attendance at co-curricular clubs and activities by highly able learners

PROVISION

We ensure that our more able learners enjoy and achieve. High quality provision is the best method to achieve this. High quality provision is defined as developing higher order thinking skills and problem-solving skills. Provision is split into two distinct areas:

Adaptive Teaching

- We provide intellectual challenge through adaptive teaching, ensuring appropriate scaffolding, support and stretch (“teaching to the top”), using a range of strategies outlined in Appendix Two.
- In some subjects, grouping by prior attainment (e.g., setting or streaming) may be appropriate to maximise progress.
- The school promotes a culture of sharing best practice in adaptive teaching across all departments.
- Schemes of work are planned to ensure that all learners, including those identified as highly able, experience consistent stretch and challenge.
- Teachers are supported through ongoing professional development to build skill, confidence and understanding in meeting the needs of more able learners.

Extension and Enrichment

- We seek out opportunities for stretch and challenge beyond the classroom through trips, competitions, lectures, masterclasses, independent study and self-selected research projects. In the case of our Prep department, we do this through trips, competitions and collaborative projects/activities with local schools
- Our Scholars programme involves a combination of masterclasses, lectures and project based work. This is open to all learners, and highly able learners are encouraged to attend, whether they are a Scholar or not
- Leadership both within the classroom and in co-curricular activities in order to encourage more able learners to make a positive contribution e.g. the Subject Ambassador Scheme.
- Through our Careers and Enterprise programmes, we ensure that the learners are aware of the opportunities available to them to use their talents in the world beyond school and in order to achieve economic well-being

Counteracting Difficulties

- We recognise that some highly able learners may experience low self-esteem or pastoral problems relating to their academic performance. We provide a supportive environment for learners to make mistakes and see these as part of the learning process
- We support resilience by recognising that excellence is related to process rather than just the final outcome
- We recognise success e.g. through Praise Points and Heads Commendations
- We work with learners, and their parents where required, to help them overcome social or emotional difficulties if they arise
- Our school culture champions an ambitious and resilient mindset in all learners

PREP DEPARTMENT PROVISION

A sample of some of the HA enrichment opportunities are:

- Youth Speaks
- Spelling Bee
- The Great Debate
- Speakers Corner
- STEAM Day
- CORI Project including leadership opportunities
- ISA writing competitions
- ISA Sporting opportunities
- Maths Challenges

SENIOR HOUSE PROVISION

A sample of some of the enrichment opportunities for highly able learners are:

- Subject-specific master-classes using staff expertise or external organisations (for which HoDs could be asked to recommend further pupils to be invited)
- Debating competition
- Essay competitions
- Involvement with MUN
- CREST awards Trips/visits
- STEM competitions e.g. Top of the Bench and the Olympiad
- Maths Challenge
- Subject specific recommended reading list and viewing lists

SIXTH FORM PROVISION

Further opportunities are available to more able learners in Sixth Form including taking part in national essay competitions to extend and enrich their subject knowledge and the Extended Project Qualification.

We support Oxbridge entrance and those wishing to apply for competitive degrees such as Law and Medicine through our Super Curricular Programme which shows learners how to prove their interest in the chosen subject and provides preparation for interview and entrance examinations.

EVALUATION OF PROVISION

Evaluation of the HA provision is important to ensure that it is effective and continues to evolve. Evaluation focuses on the provision and its impact. Evidence used to evaluate provision will come from learner voice, work scrutiny, monthly departmental reports or line management meetings. Evaluation of impact will come from learner voice, internal and external exam data, teacher observations.

APPENDIX ONE – HIGHLY ABLE CHECKLIST

Highly Able learners may be identified through the use of baseline data such as CEM data. Qualitative data from teachers observations and assessments is also integral. This appendix provides context to the more subjective teacher-based assessments of highly able learners.

When Highly Able learners are engaged in their area of expertise, they will tend to display specific characteristics that differ from most of their peers. Broadly speaking these learners will tend to:

- Show a passion for particular areas of interest and seek to pursue them
- Analyse their own behaviour and hence use a greater range of learning strategies than others
- Make connections between past and present learning
- Identify a vision for where their learning might lead them in the short-term and longer-term
- Demonstrate intellectual curiosity
- Show intellectual maturity and enjoy engaging with in-depth subject material
- Actively and enthusiastically engage in debate and discussion
- Produce original and creative responses to common problems

As these learners progress through the secondary and tertiary phases of education, they may develop further characteristics such as:

- A tendency to question rules and authority
- A well-developed sense of humour
- Growing self-determination, stamina and powers of coordination
- Superior powers of reasoning
- Demonstrate originality and initiative

APPENDIX TWO – TEACHING STRATEGIES

Some of the teaching strategies that may be employed at St Mary's to ensure that all learners are stretched and challenged, including the more able.

- Stretch/challenge tasks (rather than extension tasks) for most able learners (but open to all)
- Encourage learners to apply prior learning within a new context / subject area
- Test learners to devise success criteria for a topic e.g. create 5 success criteria for a car engine
- Ask open ended questions and incorporate higher-order questioning for extended discussion
- Offer creative tasks to test learners' in depth understanding of a topic
- Share model exemplars with learners and ask them to identify examples of success criteria being met
- Provide opportunities for self and peer assessment
- Ensure time is given for improving work after teacher assessment
- Provide tailored independent learning
- Enable learners to study material/topic prior to the class so that lesson activities build on prior knowledge and support greater understanding within the classroom

- Ask highly able learner to play role of leader within the group or pair work
- Use talk as a rehearsal for writing – encourage learners to always use standard English and academic terminology within class discussions
- Allow independence and space for learners to make mistakes and work through them themselves
- Include learners in lesson delivery
- Set clearly defined research projects with success criteria as independent learning to allow learners to explore subjects/topics further
- Include activities that encourage problem solving and enquiry and higher-order and abstract thinking (e.g. handling ambiguity and paradox)
- Give restrictions/parameters so the task is more challenging, for example not being allowed a calculator or only being able to answer in words that are 5 letters or more
- Transfer of knowledge across disciplines. Encourage learners to use knowledge from other subject areas e.g. asking learners within a Science lesson to come up with Economic arguments for and against environmental action
- Encourage out of school interests
- Work with parents
- Mentor with older learner/adult
- Development of advanced language skills, to include accuracy, precision and fluency
- Development of metacognition
- Provision of leadership opportunities