

SWIMMING WITH THE TIDE QUALITY STANDARDS IN GIFTED & TALENTED EDUCATION

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It was Joe Renzulli who coined the phrase 'A rising tide raises all ships'. This is becoming much closer to the real experience of a growing number of schools using self-evaluation tools contained in the National Quality Standards for Gifted and Talented Education. The original tool in the suite of three, the Institutional Quality Standards (IQS) is well-established now, developed through the Gifted and Talented Education Unit at the DfES. It has been designed for use by schools and colleges with learners aged 4 - 19 to check the quality of G&T provision and to support them in systematically planning improvement. Many institutions now have the IQS established as a sharp-edged tool that supports the SEF (Self Evaluation Form), not just in G&T but across the ability range. Based on the categories of personalisation and ratings from 'Entry', 'Developing' to 'Exemplary' schools must make realistic decisions about their standards across the board. In the past, rating yourself too highly, without robust evidence, has been as problematic as rating too low.

An example of a worked element of the IQS:

Generic Elements	Entry	Developing	Exemplary	
Effective teaching and learning strategies				
Effective provision in the classroom	i. The school/college addresses the different needs of the gifted and talented population by providing a stimulating learning environment and by extending the teaching repertoire.	x	i. Teaching and learning strategies are diverse and flexible, meeting the needs of distinct pupil groups within the gifted and talented population (e.g. able underachievers, exceptionally able).	x
	ii. Teaching and learning is differentiated and is delivered through both individual and group activities.	x	ii. A range of challenging learning and teaching strategies is evident in lesson planning and delivery. Independent learning skills are developed.	x
	iii. Opportunities exist to extend learning through new technologies .	x	iii. The use of new technologies across the curriculum is focused on personalised learning needs	x
Evidence	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Stimulating learning environment – see list in GAT folder & Governors report. • Schemes of Work - Long term & Medium term plans & Policies all show differentiation in GAT file. • School has invested in new technologies - ICT (Information and Communications Technology) information available. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Teaching & Learning strategies are evident in Schemes of Work. • Lesson plans show strategies including independent learning – see GAT samples in GAT file. • All teaching staff have had training day on Personalised Learning. Therapeutic Packages are good examples - 20 student packages. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Independent Learning is encouraged. Accreditation samples show this. • See individual subject information in GAT file. 	
Next steps			Consider Action Research for the future.	

Many schools are now using the IQS effectively, with the numbers due to increase dramatically as the tool is mainstreamed through the National Strategies in 2007/08 when all schools in England will have access to a Leading Teacher trained in use of the Standards. In the past year, almost two hundred institutions have been 'test-bedding' the IQS and sharing their analyses, views and experiences as they go through the process. In spite of many schools feeling that there has been a proliferation of new initiatives over recent years, participating institutions have been very positive about taking on the IQS. Almost all have used it as a core tool for whole-school improvement generally, not just in G&T. Many have attributed various improvements to use of the framework, from more positive Ofsted (Office for Standards in Education) reports, to improved pupil attendance, to increased skills in self-evaluation.

"Student and teacher expectations are higher – and student interviews reveal a high level of articulation about 'what makes a good lesson'. In other words, students as well as staff are 'learning the language of learning' ". (One school's experience)

The general approval applies across the various age phases. Of course, there are still refinements in terminology and use that need to be made but the reaction to the IQS is very promising. The support for the tool by the NCSL (National College for School Leadership) and QCA (Qualifications and Curriculum Authority) implies that they think the tool has potential too.

A fundamental principle of the Quality Standards is that the pupil voice makes a significant contribution to the evaluation and planning of provision. Successful learning is about pupils becoming increasingly self-determining, with schools becoming confident in taking learner preferences into account. A number of schools are developing strategies to engage pupils in the IQS processes, with the South West Regional Partnership leading a research project into this area.

The other tools in the suite are the **Classroom Quality Standards** (CQS) and the **Local Authority Quality Standards** (LAQS). While the former is designed to focus on pedagogy, acting as a scalpel to examine details of current practice in order to improve teaching and learning, the latter supports LAs in understanding their vital role in monitoring schools and mediating the self-review process (which emerged as critical in the IQS test-bedding), and in planning coherent provision across a local area.

The CQS has a 'three layer' model. The first layer identifies key features of pedagogy and invites practitioners to reflect on their own expertise in these, in relation to all pupils. The second layer drills down to the 'nuggets' of pedagogy that particularly apply to G&T pupils, challenging teachers to judge their proficiency across these and to plot pathways to improvement. At this layer, pedagogy specific to the various subjects is also scrutinised. The last layer seeks to exemplify the CQS through resources, research and various mini-projects. Early trials so far on the CQS have been encouraging. Although classroom teachers using the tool have often not previously encountered the formal concept of self-evaluation, with time and support with the process they have found the tool constructive and powerful. Working in small groups to compare and reflect on classroom practice has been particularly valued by teachers. As with the IQS, skilled mediation by a Leading Teacher in G&T, or local authority adviser, has added to the rigour of the process. The potential to raise the level of teacher skill significantly through the mix of innovation, research and reflection is almost intoxicating.

Add in the newly developed LAQS, developed by regional colleagues, based on the format of the IQS and there is a triangular set of mutually supportive tools. Their interplay offers symmetry and accountability at a range of levels. They also offer an enticing and significant evidence base to translate the 'rising tide raises all ships' from a tantalising theory to evidence.

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