

# **NARROWING THE GAPS**

## **CLASSROOM QUALITY STANDARDS FOR GIFTED AND TALENTED EDUCATION**

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The Department for Children, Schools and Families (DCSF) has developed a suite of National Quality Standards for Gifted and Talented Education in England. This includes a whole school self-evaluation and planning tool, the Institutional Quality Standards (IQS),<sup>1</sup> designed for use by senior and middle leaders, as well as a tool to support teachers and other classroom practitioners to reflect on their own practice and to plan further development and action research – Classroom Quality Standards (CQS). A final part (still under development) is designed to be used by local Children's Services Authorities to ensure that appropriate support and challenge is provided to schools, and that there is coherent planning of provision across a local area.

All three tools are intended to provide flexible frameworks around which professionals can examine their practice and plan improvement, rather than as prescriptive models of effective provision.

### **Purpose of the CQS**

The Classroom Quality Standards have been developed in order to provide greater precision in the examination of what constitutes effective provision in the classroom, and to engage teachers in classrooms and early years settings in review of their practice – both individually and in collaboration with others – in order to identify strengths and areas for further exploration and improvement. It thus both amplifies those parts of the IQS audit tool which deal with teaching and learning, especially *Element 2: Effective Provision in the Classroom*, and provides the basis of a national action-research project, enabling us to develop our understanding of the needs of gifted and talented learners and how these may best be met through mainstream teaching and learning. It forms the basis of all advice and guidance on effective pedagogical approaches to meeting the needs of gifted and talented learners.

Along with the Institutional Quality Standards, the Classroom Quality Standards are a key tool for leading teachers for gifted and talented education. The role of the leading teacher in schools is to work with senior and middle level leaders to audit and plan development of provision as an integral part of the school improvement plan, as well as to work collaboratively with teachers to improve classroom practice. Leading teachers offer valuable mediation and moderation of judgments for teachers and other staff using the CQS. They can provide a lead in sharing good practice as well as planning and supporting professional development activities arising from the audit.

### **The 3-Layer Model**

Early discussions about the CQS with experts and practitioners were lively and challenging, bringing together a range of perspectives both about the nature of effective pedagogy for gifted and talented learners and on the requirements of a tool which be accessible to teachers with differing levels of experience and expertise. These extensive discussions gave rise to the design of a 3-layer model:

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<sup>1</sup> Für eine nähere Beschreibung der "Institutional Quality Standards" siehe news&science, Nr. 17 (3/2007).

**Layer 1** provides a starting point for staff engaging with the CQS. It is a tool for undertaking an initial review across key features essential to providing challenge for **all** learners. It identifies seven key features of effective support and challenge in teaching and learning. Within each of the features there are a set of prompts or questions designed to stimulate practitioners to reflect upon their current practice.

**Layer 2** provides further detail of the key features and prompts in relation to the specific needs of gifted and talented learners. Like the IQS, it does this through descriptors of practice at Entry, Developing and Exemplary levels, providing a rubric against which teachers can evaluate their practice, celebrate what is working well and plan steps which will enable them to progress to the next level. Like the IQS, self-evaluation is to be based upon a 'best-fit' approach.

**Layer 3** is an online Resource Base of examples of best practice, case studies of action research and other support materials. It is intended that in the main these will be generated by teachers and schools themselves.

### **How teachers have used the CQS**

During the latter stages of development of the CQS, a number of schools trialled the tool and contributed feedback on how they had used it. The process which follows represents one approach taken by a primary school, although we always stress that it is important that teachers and schools develop a set of processes which fits their own context.

- 1 Following introduction by the leading teacher, all teachers completed an individual audit, noting evidence and moving from generic learning and teaching to gifted and talented. They were encouraged to do this without too much deliberation at this stage.
- 2 Teachers worked in pairs to discuss their audits, noting differences in evaluation outcomes between generic and G&T. A composite Layer 1 record was made to assess priorities for the school overall. Agreement was achieved on a focus Feature for further investigation; this differed between year teams.
- 3 Small focus teams reviewed each prompt, breaking it down into key phrases and assessing what evidence would be used to determine whether that part of the prompt was satisfied. It was seen as important to use first hand observation or recall as evidence as well as documentary records but not to labour the process.
- 4 Staff were encouraged to tackle Features in small stages to avoid overload. One team focused on only one statement of a Feature. There is a lesson here - the process belongs to the individual teacher(s) and should be paced according to time constraints and achieving a worthwhile audit. Discussion was recognised to be a key part of the process.
- 5 Evidence was recorded succinctly and "Next Steps" determined.
- 6 To assess the progress of the school overall, a colour coded summary sheet was completed. This also summarised priorities and informed the school's improvement plan and future training.

### **Working with subjects**

One of the most exciting current developments is the production of amplification of the generic CQS within a number of subject contexts. One approach that the Standards will support is the nurturing of the learner as an "embryonic expert" within a particular domain; supporting teachers in identifying key behaviours and adopting the pedagogy that will enable these to be demonstrated by learners. Other approaches, however, are equally welcomed.

Discussion of application of the Standards to subjects provides a means of deepening our understanding of the particular nature of ability. We can now begin to identify more accu-

rately to what extent effective learning and teaching strategies are generic across subjects, and which features are subject specific, or at least more dominant within a particular subject area.

By November 2008 we shall have subject amplification available in English, mathematics, science and ICT (Information and Communications Technology), and related examples of best-practice. These will initially be available to schools as a DVD, and on the National Strategies website. However, we plan to make all Quality Standards frameworks and resources, including those produced by schools themselves, available through a resource base within the Young Gifted and Talented website.

## Case Study

Staff at a primary school in Warwickshire completed Layer 1 of the CQS together. They identified that the opportunities for pupil collaboration and independent learning were inconsistent and resulted in pupils not being able to identify effective learning opportunities. It was also noted that activities beyond the classroom did not link directly with classroom practice.

As a result of discussion there was whole school agreement to focus on Feature 2 and to combine the focus on both elements: *Development of Learning* and Feature 7 *Links beyond the Classroom*. A clear plan was established within the school improvement plan.

A partnership was set up with the local secondary school. Classes 5 and 6 in the primary school were linked with Year 8 and 9 classes in the secondary school and a model of collaborative working was developed. Classes worked together on a weekly basis. The focus was to examine jointly the impact that the refurbishment of a local theatre might have on the local community. Groups within the class had to establish the best way of working, gathering information and analysing it. A range of professionals connected with the construction company, the local council and the theatre itself, including actors were contacted. Questions were devised and posed to the relevant experts. Research was carried out with the general public out using a variety of methods. The result of this collaboration was real impact on learning both in terms of engagement and standards.

Pupils from both schools were able to identify models of learning that were most effective. They strongly identified this as being a really good way of learning and observed the following:

- **They were the teachers as well as the learners.**
- **There are no limitations.**
- **People around you are a really good resource.**
- **Teachers did not stop or redirect the learning.**
- **Investigations ranged over all sorts of different subject areas.**
- **Exposure to new opinions is more challenging than lessons.**
- **We feel more confident: "I can do this".**
- **There were many more opportunities to speak and find out what things meant.**

Staff in both schools evidenced noticeable improvements in standards of work at the top end of the ability range in all year groups in all subjects. There was more engagement and more independence of learning. The pupils were able to articulate an effective model of learning which they applied in all subjects. Staff feel very confident that they can illustrate the exemplary level of Elements 2 and 7 of the CQS.

The IQS and CQS are available at  
<http://ygt.dcsf.gov.uk/LibraryResources.aspx?libraryId=12>

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