



Getting the most out of the most-able students

At St. Mary's we understand how to support and challenge all pupils. We use the following strategies to support all pupils including the gifted and talented pupils. Extension is a term used to include a variety of methods of providing stimulation, challenge and pace for able pupils. It involves teachers in planning appropriate differentiation for quick learners rather than requiring them to do 'more of the same'.

Extension also addresses the issue of gifted and talented students coasting along inside their comfort zone; if they aren't stretched and never meet difficulty or failure, their development as learners is impeded and they are not being prepared for adult life. Effective extension also encourages seemingly 'average' pupils to respond to challenge and demonstrate their (sometimes unexpected) ability.

Teachers provide challenge in various contexts, presenting particular problems and activities to the whole class or to targeted groups on different occasions, and ensuring that all pupils regularly experience challenge (including those inclined to be more relaxed, and the disaffected).

Planning

Extension is part of any planning system but a popular model is the 'All must, most should, some could' approach. This outlines the core concepts, skills, or knowledge to be achieved by all, with extensions that should/could be attempted by those who succeed. At St. Mary's we use a Gold, Silver and Bronze success criteria model where all children are given the opportunity of a deeper challenge.

There are two factors to bear in mind:

- teachers are aware of what constitutes the essential ingredients of ability (as opposed to knowledge) in different subject areas, with the development of skills, concepts and attitudes being emphasised rather than content. Well-designed extension tasks promote higher-order skills such as speculation, inference, prediction, hypothesis and synthesis, as well as nurturing independence and self-knowledge.
- not all types of extension can be planned for. Our effective teachers notice opportunities to extend pupils in the course of lessons, e.g., when they ask a particularly interesting question or demonstrate a depth of understanding over and above their peers.

Extension by resource

Every class has resources that are 'more challenging' than others. These can include:

- books with more complex text and/or diagrams
- a tool or piece of equipment that requires more dexterity or technical expertise
- an artefact that is more obtuse in its function or design
- a medium that is more difficult to work with (e.g., in art, textiles or food technology)
- more exacting technology.

Extension by work rate or pace

Highly Able students often think and work faster than their peers, and teachers take account of this. Those who are capable of working fast are encouraged to do so, without fear of having to complete more work than everyone else – especially 'more of the same'.

Extension by task or input

Our success criteria model enables teachers to set extension tasks for the most able, or provide a range of options for extension work from which they can choose. A common starting point that allows for a wide variety of individual responses is more inclusive and can result in able pupils being suitably engaged and challenged. Teachers are aware, however, of the needs of those More Able pupils who require structure and guidance.

Extension by individual negotiation

In some lessons, pupils might negotiate the nature of the work they are to do, or the ways in which they might present its outcomes. In technology and other process-based subjects, pupils have to demonstrate competencies rather than knowledge; and by their nature, these require pupils to develop individual work. This approach is especially suitable for our pupils who have good organisational skills as well as good ideas and can confidently manage their schedules.

Extension by support

It is not assumed that extension tasks always imply less need for guidance, structure or personal support. Many pupils, including some who are highly able, have problems with organising themselves and/or their tasks and for them, some scaffolding of their learning can help. This type of support need not displace challenge, or the need for pupils to take risks. Guidance on short-term learning targets and longer-term goals and explanation/negotiation of assessment criteria can also be helpful. In addition, timely interventions and challenges from an adult will prevent the tendency of some able pupils to coast along or to get bogged down in meticulous detail.

Extension by dialogue

Teachers use more difficult vocabulary and more complex language to extend More Able pupils.

Challenge can be extended by:

- asking probing questions
- effective discussion between teacher and pupil
- well-constructed opportunities for collaborative discussion between pupils
- interventions by the teacher to take the concept further, explore the idea more
- broadly or interpret the task in a different way.

Built-in extension

Activities can be designed with 'built-in extension' by employing some generic features, such as:

- plan/do/review
- using a range of information sources
- recording in an unusual way
- role play
- problem solving
- decision-making, e.g., who does what in the group, what to include in a presentation and what to leave out
- open-ended tasks that do not have one right answer
- setting the questions to given answers
- time restraints
- developing meta-cognitive knowledge
- opportunities to develop higher-order thinking skills (HOTS)
- using technical language
- working with experts
- considering moral/philosophical issues.

By task

- We may use an able pupil to quickly recap on the previous lesson's learning for the other pupils.
- Many starter activities require pupils to find a number of examples. An able pupil can be set a higher target, e.g. expected pupils find five synonyms for the word 'pleased' while greater depth pupils find 9
- During feedback during the lesson, we may enlist an able pupil to record ideas on the board while you lead the discussion.
- Teachers often ask able pupils to model their writing or thinking, by explaining their answer/solution to a task to a neighbour.
- The best way to prove understanding of a topic is to teach it. We get able pupils to teach the less able a key learning point.
- A technique used is to ask Highly Able pupils to provide the plenary. Alert them at the start of the lesson to be ready to present their findings to the class at the end of the lesson.
- We ask able pupils to come up with questions to ask during the plenary to test other pupils' understanding of the lesson.
- We use higher-level questioning and direct questions at particular pupils rather than waiting for the hands up approach. Be ready to probe beyond the first answer in order to make them really think: 'Why do you think that?' 'How did you come to that conclusion?'

By resource

- We provide dictionaries and ask able pupils to look up and explain definitions of key words or technical vocabulary used throughout the lesson.
- We produce laminated pupil-speak grade or level descriptors at the start of the year for generic assignments and reuse them for target setting and review.
- Often, we provide unedited or full-length versions of abridged texts you are using with the rest of the class for your most able.
- Our school librarian produces a reading list of texts and electronic resources to encourage wider reading or research around a class topic.
- We may set an independent task, such as a further investigation in maths or science, or a different class reader from a selected list and invite pupils to decide how they would like to demonstrate their learning to us or the rest of the class after an agreed length of time.

By outcome

- We may use the 'Must do', 'Could do', 'Should do' ascribed to classroom tasks or homework to direct the type and length of activities pupils might complete.
- We provide opportunities for pupils to respond in ways other than writing: display work, role play, short video films etc.
- Remember that 'less is more' in some cases. Prescribe the number of words to be used to make Highly Able pupils think hard about what they write, and make every word count.
- We use a snapshot of a pupil's work and during the lesson, project it onto your board to use for modelling purposes. Using the board, we highlight or annotate key features of successful examples and provide opportunities for self- and peer assessment.

By support

- While other pupils are working on a simple starter, we use the time to explain to able pupils how they can excel in the lesson, which lower-level tasks they can bypass and which tasks they should tackle to stretch them.
- Teachers may ascribe the roles of chairperson or lead learner to able pupils who will then take on the mantle of responsibility and help maintain momentum and focus during tasks.
- Teachers plan their groups carefully. Sometimes able pupils will learn most productively together, sharing and extending their more developed thinking; sometimes it is helpful for them to advise a less-able pupil and have to work harder to successfully articulate their ideas.
- Rather than repeating or summarising instructions ourselves in front of the whole class, we may get an able pupil to do so.

The KWL strategy

Know

Want to know

Learned

What does KWL bring to a lesson?

- Multiple solutions opportunities
- A focus on listening skills
- Differentiation by outcome
- A focus on independent thinking and learning
- The opportunity for high-quality structured research
- A potential focus on aspects of literacy, such as key concepts and vocabulary [?]
- Opportunities for creative thinking and the generation of higher-order open questions
- Metacognitive techniques for self-reflection.
- These examples show how KWL activities transfer across subjects:
- Students in physics could be asked how the universe came into existence and what they know about its origins.

Having completed the 'K' and 'W' parts of the table, the children could be exposed to a section of video or text and then asked to complete the 'L' column.

- In English, students may be asked to think about the key similarities and differences between the styles of two poets. Having completed the 'K' and 'W' columns and having listened to and discussed examples of work from the two poets, students can then complete the 'L' column using the appropriate literary terms.
- In a geography lesson, students could be quizzed on the possible reasons as to why earthquakes and volcanoes occur. Having filled in the 'K' and 'W' columns and having researched the topic using books and the internet, the 'L' column can be completed.

Lessons for pace

Pace has always been an important component of a successful lesson, particularly with able or gifted groups of high-achieving students who are more than able to cope with 60 minutes of rigorous challenge, who thrive on the demands of a lesson that asks them to move quickly through exposition and review to get to new learning points and spend time developing and extending new learning.

How we create pace within lessons:


- While pupils are working on the starter activity, we may prepare for the next activity (by writing on the board, distributing the next resources).
- Give our instructions for the main activity or key learning points verbally and visually.
- Have a clock in our rooms that all can see.
- Make the circumstances of learning clear and enforce them: silent work, two minutes to ask your partner any questions then quiet work, and so on.
- Give clear time instructions for every task. 'You have five minutes to complete task 1 after which we will...' Give pupils a countdown: 'You've got four minutes, three minutes, two minutes...'
- Include a competitive element to our lessons if it's appropriate.
- We may use fast-paced music, such as Star Wars. For the last 30 seconds use TV's Countdown music.
- We set tasks that rely on pupils needing to have their contribution ready to share. They might not mind failing to complete a task if they think someone else in the class will take responsibility for answering. If they know they have to share their personal work with a partner or demonstrate to the class they will, perhaps, feel a greater pressure to complete it.
- We may ask an able or willing pupil early in the lesson to collect their findings to present to the class at the end of the lesson.
- If you are taking feedback during the lesson enlist a pupil to record ideas on the board while you lead the discussion.
- Keep end of lesson plenaries short and focused: 'You have two minutes to write down two facts you have learned this lesson', or, 'turn to your neighbour and tell them two reasons for...'

How we improve questioning of 'More Able' pupils in the classroom

- Extending pupils' answers
- Use non-verbal interventions: eye contact, a nod or raised eyebrows to encourage extended responses, to challenge or to express agreement or surprise. Ask questions such as the following:
 - Can you say a little more about that?
 - Why do you think that?
 - Does that always apply?
 - What are the exceptions?
 - Can you explain how/why ?
 - Why did you decide to start like that/do it that way/include that...?
 - How did you reach that answer/decision ?
 - How can you be sure?
 - What if...?
 - Could you put that another way?
 - Who thinks something different?
 - Can you justify, give reasons why/evidence for..?
 - Can you give an example of...?
 - Who can offer a different point of view?
 - What might be a more powerful/interesting word to use here?
 - Who can argue against...?
 - What do you think happens next?
 - How does this connect to...
 - Who would like to add to or ask a question about what has just been said?

The Question Matrix and the Linking Our Learning models are embedded across our school.

The Question Matrix...



The diagram shows a grid with a vertical arrow on the left pointing downwards and a horizontal arrow at the top pointing to the right. A large diagonal arrow points from the top-left to the bottom-right, labeled 'DEEPER THINKING' three times. The grid contains question words in the first column and auxiliary verbs in the first row.

	Is? Does?	Has? Did? Was?	Can?	Should?	Would? Could?	Will?	Might?
What?							
Where?							
When?							
Which?							
Who?							
Why?							
How?							

Let's link our learning...

Why are
you
learning
this?

How does
this relate to
other lessons
this week?

How does
this relate
to last
year?

What are
you
learning?



How does
this relate
to other
subjects?