

Making space for able learners

Cognitively challenging learning: supporting learners who encounter disadvantage

It is deeply concerning that our education system is failing many young people. The achievement gaps between learners who encounter various forms of disadvantage and their peers represent a loss of talent and a lack of opportunity for individuals to fulfil their potential.

There is a moral imperative to recognise and address these issues. NACE is committed to casting a light on the disadvantages that exist within schools, so that we can work together to remove educational inequities.

The third phase of our **making space for able learners** research project is focusing on how schools can best support more able learners who experience disadvantage in any of its many forms. This phase aims to identify and share the successes of trailblazing schools which have found ways to break down a range of barriers to achievement.

Thus far, our research has shown that the inequity in education which impacts on more able learners is not limited to those traditionally seen as disadvantaged. In many ways the “disadvantage” label has contributed to the slow pace of improvements in provision, linked to a relatively narrow focus and a lack of nuance in response. However, a more strategic understanding of disadvantage in the context of education makes us aware that there are many disadvantages, both visible and hidden, which affect learners from all backgrounds in myriad ways.

At present there are many solutions aiming to repair specific problems, such as poor attendance or lack of resources. We need a more strategic response which recognises the individual needs of each child and their personal differences. Instances of good practice currently occur in the moment, but greater equity and greater challenge can be achieved through a whole-school strategy to rethink curriculum to ensure that learning gaps are diminished and individual learning needs addressed.



Our research has identified key practices which create an equitable and challenging environment, including:

- A strategically planned curriculum which remediates learning gaps and provides powerful knowledge, metacognitive development and enriching experiences;
- Well-informed teachers whose collaboration provides quality and consistency of practice;
- Ambitious learning and engaging classroom practice which adapts to the changing needs of the learners;
- Excellent relationships between school and home learning which empower parents to support learning;
- A school environment where learners have a sense of belonging and the confidence to excel;
- Agency, giving learners a voice in their learning and opportunities to follow their interests and regulate their learning.



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