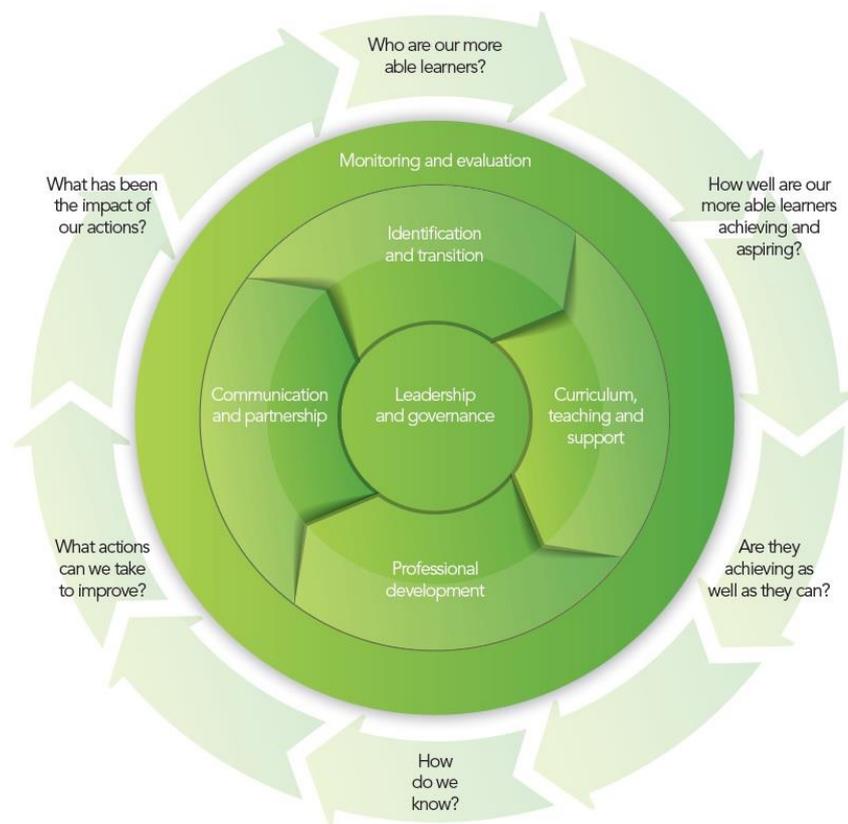


NACE Challenge Development Programme

Sustaining whole-school excellence



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The national context: why focus on challenge?

International comparisons, Ofsted, Estyn and Independent Schools Inspectorate (ISI) reports repeatedly show that the education systems in England and Wales are letting down a high proportion of more able learners.¹ Although some schools have some excellent practice in this area, too many fail to challenge their more able learners.

“National data show that too many of the most able students are still being let down and are failing to reach their full potential. Most able students’ achievement appears to suffer even more when they are from disadvantaged backgrounds or when they attend a school where the proportion of previously high-attaining students is small.”

– The most able students: An update on progress since June 2013, Ofsted, 2015

“43% of state secondary school teachers say they would rarely or never advise their bright pupils to apply to Oxbridge (Oxford or Cambridge).”

– Teachers’ Oxbridge perceptions polling, Sutton Trust, 2016

“How well the brightest children are doing will usually be among the very first questions an inspector asks the school leadership team at the start of the visit. This is because inspectors know that if provision for this group is good, it is likely that other groups of pupils are also being well served. Conversely, if the most able pupils are not being stretched, that will alert inspectors to the possibility that things may be going wrong elsewhere.”

– HMCI's commentary: most able pupils, 2016

“The quality of schools’ provision for more able and talented pupils depends upon effective leaders placing an appropriate emphasis on improving standards and provision for these pupils. Where this is the case, schools have developed highly successful whole-school approaches. School staff participate effectively in professional learning experiences to support more able and talented pupils. They also engage well with external organisations such as NACE to develop aspects of their practice.” – Estyn, Supporting more able and talented pupils, 2018

The NACE Challenge Development Programme challenges the national picture in England and Wales. Championing the needs of more able learners, it has transformed hundreds of schools across all settings and age groups, raising expectations and attainment with a “lifting” effect on the whole school community.

What is the NACE Challenge Development Programme?

The NACE Challenge Development Programme is designed to support school leaders who are uncompromising in their ambition to ensure more able learners achieve their potential, in the context of challenge for all. The programme is founded on the NACE Challenge Framework, a well-established tool for whole-school review and improvement, with accompanying resources, consultancy, CPD and opportunities for school-to-school working.

The NACE Challenge Framework has been used by thousands of schools for whole-school improvement, and to date more than 400 have gone on to achieve the NACE Challenge Award –

¹ See Appendix: extracts from Ofsted, Estyn and ISI reports

providing external validation of high-quality provision, and ongoing support for continued improvement.

Working with the Challenge Development Programme focuses school leaders and teachers on assessing whether teaching and learning is providing sufficient stretch and invites searching questions about school culture, expectations and how teachers can develop the skills and knowledge to enable learners to excel.

- Who are the more able learners in your school and how well are they achieving?
- Are they sufficiently challenged? How do you know?
- How consistent is the quality of challenge across your school?
- Do all teachers know what challenge looks like and how to plan for it?
- Do learners know what challenge feels like and how to respond to it?
- How can you improve the level of challenge and work together to raise the bar so all learners have high ambitions and achieve excellence?
- How can you create a school culture where it is “cool to be clever”?

Many schools choose to work with the NACE Challenge Development Programme because they seek answers to these questions. They are often aware that challenge is provided inconsistently across the school and that this is the perception among learners, particularly the more able. Very often, schools also want to raise aspirations for the whole school community.

The Challenge Framework provides a clear description of what can be done – not as a quick fix, but as part of a review and action-planning process to bring about long-term, sustainable improvement. It is accompanied by supporting resources and practical tools available via the NACE website, as well as opportunities for bespoke consultancy and CPD to help schools identify and implement next steps. Bespoke development programmes are also available for groups of schools working together to improve more able provision.

Element 1: Leadership and governance

There is a commitment to more able learners from senior leadership, all leaders, governors and teachers, supported by a policy, targets and action plan, leading to an ethos where high achievement is valued and success is celebrated.

Criteria	Evidence of process/actions	Evidence of impact
1.1 School leaders have successfully created an inclusive ethos, where high achievement for all is expected, valued and celebrated.	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> Expectations are evident in prospectus, other publications, displays, tutorial programme, assemblies, staff meetings, communication with parents... Professional learning, CPD, quality assurance practices, staff meetings, meetings... promote high expectations from staff. Marking, feedback, published and consistent standards for written work... promote high expectations from learners. Describe nature and purpose of performances, displays, competitions, trips and visits... Describe strategy, systems and activities such as awards and award ceremonies, praise postcards, assemblies, merits, policy... 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> Staff and learners can articulate the ways in which high expectations are evident. Classroom practice and work in books provides evidence of high expectations. Learners successfully participate in both internal and external challenge.
1.2 School leaders and governors can clearly articulate the strategy and approach to provision for more able learners and the rationale behind these.	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> Self-evaluation and school improvement strategies a central feature of the work of school leaders and governors as seen in minutes from governors/SLT/other meetings, SEF and school development plan. External reports evidence strength of practice. Policy statements and policy/planning for curricula teaching, learning and assessment... CPD plans, meetings, staff handbook, policy and practice... lead to clear communication and consistent practice. Curriculum plans, extracurricular activity, learner grouping, lesson planning... reflect the needs of individual learners. 	

NACE Challenge Framework: guidance for schools

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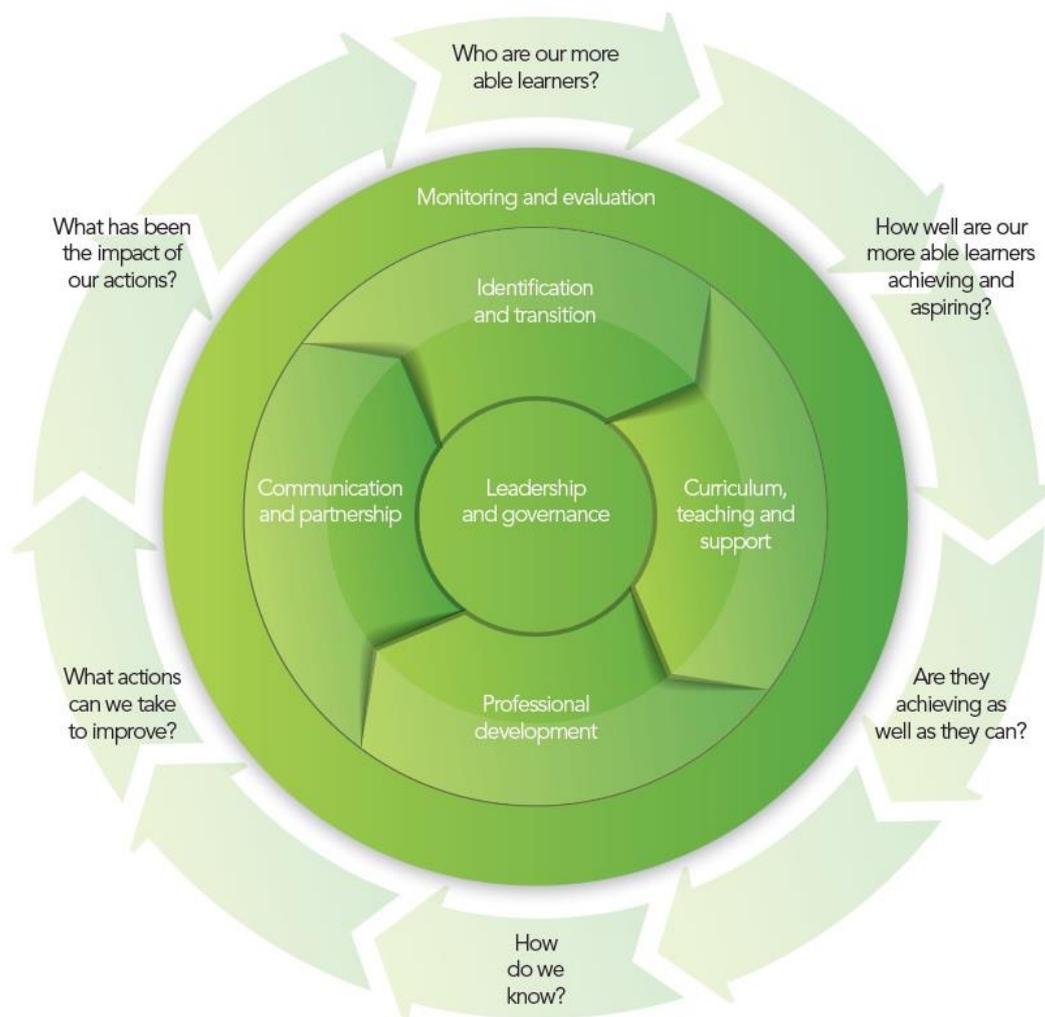
Appendix A: NACE Challenge Framework progress tracker

Use the chart below to identify your school's current status and next steps. When satisfied that all points within your category are secure, revisit the table and move on to the next stage.

Element	Next steps
Entry level in the early stages of establishing good practice and provision for more able learners	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Establish a whole-school focus, engaging leaders at all levels Introduce a more able policy Appoint a leader/coordinator to champion more able provision Audit aspects of provision using the Challenge Framework and implement an action plan Develop identification practices Focus on the more able or those at risk of being disadvantaged Identify an action plan for staff professional development Reflect teaching, learning and assessment processes to extend learning and challenge the more able
Developing, consolidating knowledge and practice in provision for more able learners	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Review and develop an established more able policy Review provision and practice using the Challenge Framework and set targets to extend and enhance this practice Review provision to meet the needs of the most able provision Reflect understanding of identification of more and exceptionally able learners Plan and set targets for the more able, including those who are disadvantaged Engage all staff, parents and learners in identification, learning and progress of the more able Develop a whole-school review process
High quality provision	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Self-evaluate against the six elements of the Challenge Framework Identify and share good practice Review provision to meet the needs of exceptionally able learners Create an action plan for further improvement and sustained excellence Extend practice, setting, assessment practices and working to help more able learners attain the highest standards and achieve as well as they should Reflect the contribution to extend learning and depth knowledge, understanding and skills Enable more and exceptionally able learners to make sustained and substantial progress in all aspects of their learning and allow them to excel Make applications through school experience and opportunities
Preparing to gain accreditation through the Challenge Award	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> External inspection determines an overall good or outstanding judgment Self-evaluation against the six elements of the Challenge Framework suggests the school meets all criteria Leaders and governors decide to gain Challenge Award accreditation Share information about Challenge Award with staff and learners Collate selected evidence of actions and impact Complete Challenge Framework evidence portfolio Set targets for outstanding provision and outcomes Apply for NACE Challenge Award assessment

Using the programme to support whole-school improvement

The Challenge Development Programme is designed to support whole-school review, action-planning and improvement, bringing coherence to a range of initiatives and school improvement plans, and integrating with overarching school priorities and goals. It is organised around six core elements, covering the key school improvement drivers which work together to achieve outstanding provision:



The central focus is on raising achievement through improving teaching and learning in the context of a rich curriculum, seeking to improve provision at classroom, department and whole-school levels. Working with the Challenge Framework and accompanying resources, schools can embed good practice so that it pervades every aspect of the school culture and community. While the core focus is on provision for more able learners, the programme leads to raised expectations and achievement for all – “the rising tide lifts all ships.”

No matter what the starting point, age group or type of school, the Challenge Development Programme has consistently proven its efficacy in enabling schools to raise expectations, improve provision and develop the skills of teachers so they understand and can plan to ensure all learners are adequately challenged and supported.

Alignment with current education priorities

Social equality and diminishing the difference

The Challenge Development Programme can be used to specifically target disadvantaged able learners, asking schools to identify barriers and raise expectations for this group. More able learners from disadvantaged backgrounds do not typically achieve as well as others with similar starting points; the school needs to show how this is being overcome so learners are supported in having high aspirations and making good progress. Many schools have successfully used the programme to bring about a cultural change in expectations. Most powerfully, schools need to show how they support learners and their parents to aim high and to achieve their goals. Schools working with the programme will often undertake bespoke CPD to help teachers understand the complex needs of underachieving able learners.

Strong school partnerships

Now more than ever, schools are working together to help each other improve. The Challenge Development Programme empowers leaders at all levels to take responsibility for driving improvement and working together to achieve success. It provides a robust common framework, language and goals to support collaborative working and the sharing of expertise across schools. Teaching alliances, academy trusts, federations, clusters, professional learning groups and informal partnerships can work collaboratively on the programme, maximising resources through joint CPD and peer review. There are also opportunities for all schools using the programme to share good practice within the NACE community through meetups, webinars, school-led research initiatives and contributions to the NACE website.

Mastery, greater depth and increased expectations

The revised national curriculum and accountability systems in England have resulted in a seismic adjustment of teachers' expectations of what learners could and should achieve, mirrored in the aspirations of the National Mission and new curriculum and assessment proposals in Wales. Working with the Challenge Development Programme will ensure that schools continue to ask probing questions about the more able in these developing contexts – including what greater depth can look like and how deep learning is being encouraged. The programme requires schools to consider progress in learning in all curriculum areas. Schools will need to think carefully about what progress looks like for more able learners, and what constitutes sufficient progress. Are more able learners getting incisive feedback and not just praise? Are they taking increasing responsibility for managing their learning? Are those who grasp concepts rapidly being challenged through rich and sophisticated content before being accelerated to new content?

Creating a learning culture

Feedback from schools consistently shows that the Challenge Development Programme can have a transformational effect in terms of raised aspirations and a reenergised approach to CPD which gets teachers talking about effective practice to challenge learners. The Challenge Framework is designed to foster a positive spirit of enquiry and acceptance – recognising that just like pupils, teachers and school leaders are always learning how to improve and need to be willing to take risks and leave their comfort zones to do so. Typically, schools working with the programme describe increasing openness to sharing practice, looking at evidence-based approaches for self-improvement, and placing a high value on what learners say about their learning. Teachers will hone their questioning

and assessment for learning skills to a high degree, and become more creative in their planning. More able learners are encouraged to see that challenge can mean making mistakes and taking risks, and that this is a necessary part of the learning process.

Supporting school autonomy and innovation

The educational landscape has never been more varied, and many schools have considerable freedom in how they deliver their curriculum. The success and longevity of the NACE Challenge Framework is partly due to the generic nature of the criteria, reflecting longstanding principles of leadership and learning which are applicable to all schools in all settings. There is no single or prescribed way to meet the criteria. One of the most powerful aspects of the framework is that it provides scope for schools to create new approaches and strategies in order to enhance their provision; it can be deeply satisfying for schools to see the impact of those home-grown approaches in action.

Meeting learners' emotional, social and intellectual needs

Too many young people lack confidence in themselves and have low aspirations – including learners who are more able or potentially more able. Some very able learners may put pressure on themselves, expecting perfection. Others, through lack of challenge, are rarely taken out of their comfort zones and cannot cope with failure when they eventually meet it. Uninspiring teaching may result in disaffection. Some more able learners will hide their ability as they do not wish to stand out, and the school culture does not encourage them to do so. Many latent talents and skills remain untapped through lack of opportunity to experience new challenges. If learners are anxious, unfulfilled or fare badly at school, they are unlikely to be successful in life. The NACE Challenge Development Programme requires schools to deeply consider the needs and views of learners; to commit to ensuring the very best provision in all aspects of education; to encourage learners to be leaders and self-confident; and to show learners that effort will lead to success and that they should always aspire to be the best they can be.

Securing a good, outstanding or excellent school rating

Many schools have used the Challenge Development Programme as the key tool for school improvement, self-evaluation and planning to sustain or improve their inspection rating. Even in schools currently judged good or better by Ofsted, provision for more able learners is still typically identified as a weak area. Ofsted and ISI descriptors of outstanding provision for the more able match well with the Challenge Framework criteria and vision. Working with the framework provides schools with an evidence base ready to back up their judgements when Ofsted/Estyn/ISI visit. Current inspection priorities include evidence for an ethos of high expectations underpinned by high-quality CPD, a rich curriculum experience, and ensuring that all more able learners are progressing well – and it is likely that these areas will continue to be a focus of inspections.

Feedback from schools

Schools working with the Challenge Development Programme frequently highlight its potential to have a transformational effect, raising aspirations and reenergising the focus on teaching, learning and professional development. Additional benefits highlighted by schools include:

- The programme is not an “add-on” to current school plans but enhances the focus on existing school improvement priorities to raise achievement through improving teaching and learning.
- It is not tied to a particular pedagogy or curriculum, meaning it can be used by all types of school and across all key stages and subjects. It can also be used across multi-academy trusts and other groups of schools, providing a shared framework.
- The programme can challenge complacency through searching evaluation with a strong emphasis on learner outcomes and what learners have to say about their learning experience. Hearing learners say they do not feel sufficiently challenged provides a powerful stimulus for change.
- The NACE Challenge Framework provides a comprehensive inventory of the processes and actions required for high-quality provision. NACE provide additional resources to support schools working with the framework, including specific examples and ideas of how to meet the criteria.
- Working with the Challenge Development Programme explicitly announces your school’s recognition of the need to ensure more able learners’ needs are met and that all learners feel motivated and comfortable in a setting where it is “cool to be clever.”
- It provides a starting point to recognise and celebrate what your school already does well, as well as an action plan for improvement.
- Through targeted CPD, the programme hones teachers’ ability to meet specific needs of more able learners, including exceptionally able and underachieving able learners.
- It’s a whole-school undertaking involving the whole school community – learners, teachers, parents, partners, governors and school leaders – and promoting collaboration and good communication, with benefits for all.
- Attaining the NACE Challenge Award is not easy, but the journey to get there brings about lasting and sustainable improvements, supporting progress towards outstanding teaching and learning across the school.
- The Challenge Award provides valuable external recognition of high-quality provision, with support from NACE to ensure the school continues to improve and maintains the award.

Testimonials from schools working with the NACE Challenge Development Programme

“The NACE Challenge Framework has been one of the most valuable tools we have used to analyse, reflect upon and improve provision in school. The framework is so rigorous that the impact is not just to explore all aspects of provision for the more able pupils, but to analyse and raise standards across the whole school, whilst providing the impetus for change.”

– Angela Stanton, Headteacher, Alfreton Nursery School

“The NACE Challenge Development Programme is a valuable tool for evaluating school culture and informing school improvement. The Challenge Framework is broad enough to capture whole-school provision, while at the same time specific enough to focus schools on what works well for more able learners and how to develop provision for this group within a context of challenge for all.”

– Renata Joseph, Deputy Headteacher, Canons High School

“At Portswood Primary it has never been about chasing another award. The point of working towards the Challenge Award has always been about the process and evaluating what we do. It provides a focus to think deeply about our teaching and learning in one area, but it always has transference to our teaching for all our pupils, not just the more able. NACE has been a part of Portswood for 12 years and we don’t ever see that changing.”

– Dr Keith Watson, Principal for Teaching and Learning, Portswood Primary Academy Trust

“The process of following the NACE Challenge Framework has allowed us to focus on our practices and procedures to ensure that we are providing the best opportunities and experiences for our learners. It has also been an opportunity for us to review our systems by conducting an audit and compiling an action plan which fed into our school development plan. This has ensured that MAT learners are at the forefront of our school improvement agenda and an opportunity for all stakeholders to participate in the process.”

– Rhiannon Roberts, Deputy Headteacher, Ysgol Treganna

Find out more

To find out more about the NACE Challenge Development Programme, and to discuss how the programme could support your school, contact the NACE team on 01235 425000 or by emailing challenge@nace.co.uk.

To place an order for the NACE Challenge Framework, bespoke consultancy and/or CPD, visit www.nace.co.uk/challenge-order-form.

Appendix: extracts from Ofsted, Estyn and ISI reports

Extracts from 2018 Ofsted short inspection reports:

“Activities in the Early Years Foundation Stage are not always challenging enough, especially in developing children’s literacy skills, so their progress is good rather than outstanding.”

“Further embed the challenge provided to the most able pupils.”

“Ensure that the most able pupils attain the highest standard in mathematics and greater depth in writing by the end of Key Stage 2.”

“Continue to ensure that most able pupils make rapid progress and attain higher grades, especially in mathematics.”

Source: reports.ofsted.gov.uk

Extracts from Estyn’s review of MAT provision, March 2018

“The quality of schools’ provision for more able and talented pupils depends upon effective leaders placing an appropriate emphasis on improving standards and provision for these pupils. Where this is the case, schools have developed highly successful whole-school approaches. For example [...] school staff participate effectively in professional learning experiences to support more able and talented pupils. They also engage well with external organisations such as NACE Cymru to develop aspects of their practice.

[...] Where there are shortcomings in provision for more able and talented pupils, leaders do not ensure that strategic planning pays good enough attention to supporting staff to meet the needs of these pupils. As a result, practices for challenging and nurturing their progress vary too much between classes in primary schools and by class and department in secondary schools. Too few schools monitor and evaluate how well their provision meets the needs of more able and talented pupils rigorously enough.’

Source: *Supporting more able and talented pupils - How best to challenge and nurture more able and talented pupils: Key stages 2 to 4, Estyn, March 2018*

Extracts from 2018 ISI reports:

“Ensure that lessons are planned to reflect the needs of all abilities to ensure more active engagement and to encourage and develop their independence of thought.”

“Encourage the capacity of pupils to develop resilience and self-confidence and decision-making skills by enabling them to take more responsibility for their learning and to take intellectual risks.”

*“Continuing to pursue current initiatives to stretch and challenge the most able pupils.”
[School judged excellent in all areas.]*

Source: www.isi.net