



# nace●essentials guide

Using data to  
improve provision  
for more able  
learners

Guide 8

Dr Ann McCarthy, NACE Associate

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# Foreword

*Hilary Lowe, Series Editor*

In this NACE Essentials guide – a unique companion document for all school staff, regardless of sector – NACE associate Dr Ann McCarthy gives a comprehensive, current and detailed overview of the data currently available to schools on the performance of individual students, designated groups and the school overall, with a particular focus on more able learners.

In a context where Ofsted and Estyn are taking a wider view of the quality of education in individual schools, the questions the author suggests schools ask about data and the responses which should inform planning, teaching and target setting are no less important. The guide provides a practical and manageable guide on how to apply data principles to support more able learners. Data for learning thus becomes an important adjunct to assessment for learning practices and involves staff at all levels in school.

It is the responsibility of governors and school leaders to know the position of the school in relation to the wider local and national context and on this basis to implement long-term strategy and short-term improvement plans. But, as the author maintains, **“the success in achieving rapid improvement or maintaining a highly successful school is dependent on whole-staff involvement. It is important that all members of the organisation have a meaningful share in data intelligence. By setting achievable but aspirational whole-school targets all those involved in teaching and learning know what they need to achieve during the school year.”**

Thus targeted improvement based on secure information ensures that no individual or group is left behind and all groups, particularly the more able, receive suitable opportunities and challenges.

The structure of the guide gives schools an architecture for analysing and acting on performance data:

- Comparative position of the school
- Overall performance and performance of more able
- Raised expectations and school improvement
- Focus on the learner

Each section and subsection comprise a set of activities and questions enabling schools to make detailed and meaningful analyses, to draw sound conclusions and to plan for improvements at all levels of the organisation.

In my view, this guide really should be essential reading for all school leaders and teachers.

## Activity 4: Accelerating learning through effective transition

**This activity is undertaken by those responsible for between-school and within-school transition, including headteachers and senior leadership teams.**

Agreed strategies to support transition points are put into practice, which are detailed, informative and help ensure progression in learning, based on prior attainment. Leaders use records of prior performance to support transition planning, target setting and learner tracking. Robust transition and transfer arrangements are in place to ensure the early identification of more able learners. Specific, measurable targets for improving the performance and achievement of more able learners, in and beyond core subjects, are put in place.

Baseline information about current learners based on prior performance should be gathered at the transition point, whether this is through a change of school or a change of key stage. It is important not to be overloaded by information but to hold accurate information to be sure of start points and learning.

**Once a learner has entered high-performance measures it is the challenge for the current school and subsequent schools to provide an education which leads to GCSE A\*-A or 7-9 outcomes and A\*-B or equivalent outcomes in post-16 qualifications. If a learner was at some point in a high-attaining group but has left that group, schools need to focus on strategies to remove barriers to help the learner progress more rapidly so that a return to high performance is possible. The hope is that more learners will move into the high-attaining**

**group because of good and better teaching which is aspirational. If a learner excels in one area, the aim is to make sure they achieve the same standards in all areas of the curriculum.**

On transition, knowledge of learners' prior attainment facilitates choice of teaching groups, curriculum offer, starting point and future targeted outcomes. It is important to offer a suite of courses which will lead to appropriate qualifications achieved at higher grades. This means prior achievement and future potential are recognised.

At the point of transition:

1. Import attainment information on all learners.
2. Identify high-attaining learners.
3. Identify additional learners who may have the potential for higher attainment than their most recent outcomes.
4. Use the information to establish a more able profile for the year group.
5. Plan the curriculum to include: organisation, subjects, grouping, progression and teachers.
6. Set targets for individual learners which will maximise progress within year and across key stage.
7. Set attainment targets which lead to the highest outcomes in all subjects and not just the learners' strongest subjects.

8. Communicate expectations to middle leaders and class teachers.
9. Communicate expectations to individual learners and their parents.

The tables on page 16 suggest the types of profiles which may be agreed for individual learners based on prior performance. The minimum expectation is that performance in all subjects should reach the lowest grade which maintains adequate progress. The aspirational target requires good or better progress. Where learners achieve the highest outcomes at the end of any key stage, they should have access to wider opportunities in the next key stage. Some learners may be identified as more able in a limited number of subjects; however, it is important to have a minimum expectation that higher levels can be attained across all their subjects.

Consider the following questions:

- Is there a complete performance profile for each learner?
- Are systems in place to identify all those who are more able, including those who may have potential?
- Is the information used effectively to profile the year group and plan curriculum?
- Is the information communicated effectively to raise expectations and set targets?
- Is transition information also used for movement between year groups, teaching groups or teachers?
- Do the curriculum, teaching and targets aim for minimum expectations or aspirational outcomes?



## Further reading

### Inspection frameworks:

- Estyn, Common inspection framework: <https://www.estyn.gov.wales/inspection/inspection-explained/common-inspection-framework>
- Ofsted, School inspection handbook: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/school-inspection-handbook-from-september-2015>

### School performance tables:

- England: <https://www.gov.uk/school-performance-tables>
- Wales: <http://mylocalschool.wales.gov.uk/>

### Guidance on school performance measurement:

- England: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/school-performance-tables-how-we-report-the-data/school-performance-tables-how-we-report-the-data>
- Wales: <https://beta.gov.wales/school-performance-measurement>

## Guide author

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With a career spanning teaching and leadership roles in primary and secondary, selective and comprehensive education, Dr Ann McCarthy has extensive experience of leadership coaching and school consultancy. In her current role as Improvement Director for a multi-academy trust, she works with school leaders to raise standards and aspirations, identify opportunities for innovation, development and training, and to promote collaboration. Dr McCarthy became a NACE Associate in 2017, with a focus on developing the charity's guidance on the use of data to support more able provision and school improvement.

## Series editor

### Hilary Lowe



Hilary Lowe has written, advised and presented widely on the education of more able learners. She led a major national professional development programme for gifted and talented coordinators and has designed national training and guidance materials. She is currently NACE's Education Adviser.

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