

Getting started with more able

A start-up guide
for early career
teachers seeking to
improve provision for
more able learners

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Introduction and context

Every teacher, no matter how experienced, will be concerned about meeting the needs of all their pupils to try to ensure they all make appropriate progress.

For the early career teacher, the desire to understand and provide for learners of differing abilities can seem challenging. In particular, identifying and meeting the needs of the most able pupils in everyday lessons can sometimes feel daunting. Don't worry. With thought, planning and acting upon the advice of others, you will achieve this and the results will be so worthwhile. This NACE Essentials guide will help you

understand what's expected of you and establish yourself as a confident teacher for learners with particular strengths and abilities, providing you with responses to such questions as:

- Why is it important to meet the needs of more able learners?
- How do I get started?
- Who are the more able learners in my class?
- What are the expectations?
- What are the learning needs of able pupils in my class?
- What progress should I expect?
- Who are the underachieving able learners?
- How do I communicate with parents and carers?
- Where do I get more information about provision for more able learners?



Note on terminology: various terminology is used to refer to the most able learners, including "more able, gifted and talented", or "MAGT". In this guide we will mostly use the term "more able".

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Links to the Teacher Standards and Early Career Framework

Sections in this guide are linked to the Teacher Standards and also the Early Career Framework (ECF) that is being piloted in some schools from September 2020, prior to a national rollout in September 2021. This will see teachers in their second year of teaching receiving an additional 5% non-contact time and a structured professional development plan.

The Teacher Standards are the measures against which a newly qualified teacher (NQT) is assessed. The standards usually refer to “all pupils” and it is important to remember that this includes more able pupils. The main Teacher Standards related to more able learners that you need to be aware of are:

TS1: Set high expectations which inspire, motivate and challenge pupils

- Set goals that stretch and challenge pupils of all backgrounds, abilities and dispositions.

TS2: Promote good progress and outcomes by pupils

- Be accountable for pupils’ attainment, progress and outcomes;
- Be aware of pupils’ capabilities and their prior knowledge, and plan teaching to build on these.

TS5: Adapt teaching to respond to the strengths and needs of all pupils

- Differentiate appropriately;
- Have a clear understanding of the needs of all pupils... including those of high ability.

TS6: Make accurate and productive assessment

- Give pupils regular feedback, both orally and through marking.

TS8: Fulfil wider professional responsibilities

- Draw on advice and specialist support.

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The ECF has a similar format to the initial teacher training (ITT) standards and provides useful guidance, but should not be seen as an additional assessment tool. The ECF underpins what all early career teachers should be entitled to learn about and learn how to do, based on expert guidance and the best available research evidence. NQTs may consider using the ECF statements in terms of how they relate to working with more able pupils, particularly with reference to the following points:

- Set high expectations: teacher expectations can affect pupil outcomes; setting goals that challenge and stretch learners is essential.
- Increase the likelihood of material being retained by balancing exposition, repetition, practice and retrieval of critical knowledge and skills.
- In all subject areas, pupils learn new ideas by linking those ideas to existing knowledge, organising this knowledge into increasingly complex mental models.
- Explicitly teaching pupils metacognitive strategies linked to subject knowledge, including how to plan, monitor and evaluate, supports independence and academic success.
- High-quality feedback can be written or verbal; it is likely to be accurate and clear, encourage further effort, and provide specific guidance on how to improve.

You will have already discovered that every class has pupils who need high levels of challenge on a daily basis. Without that stimulus in lessons, more able learners are denied the opportunity to succeed and achieve in the same way as others. As a result, pupils can become demotivated and occasionally disruptive, failing to make the progress of which they are capable. In a secure learning environment where the teacher has high expectations and creates regular opportunities for stretch and challenge, more able pupils will contribute to making learning exciting for themselves, the rest of the class and the teacher. This often helps to raise everyone's expectations and contributes to an atmosphere where all learners are seeking to improve and challenge is the norm.



How can you help your more able learners to be self-motivated?



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What should I expect of able learners? What progress should they make?

More able pupils are often high-attaining. One signpost is that their performance in standardised or national testing is usually well above age-related expectations and at the highest grading levels.

You have an important role in setting attainment targets for pupils. To do this for more able pupils in your class, your first step will be to identify what the expectations need to be. Check that your expectations match those of your school and national age-related expectations for the more able cohort. The pupils are likely to be working above age-related expectations, so find out what they need to achieve by the end of the year to at least maintain that. Be clear on how you will be assessing them and ensure they are well prepared for any assessments. This should not be narrow teaching to the test, but ensuring that they are able to show their deeper learning in a range of ways, including standardised testing. Ensure they are exposed to examples of work at greater depth so they know what that are aiming for.

TS1: Set goals that stretch and challenge pupils of all backgrounds, abilities and dispositions.

What to do next:

- ✓ Ensure that you have information about previous attainment and rates of progress; use this to help you in forming interim targets and end of year targets.
- ✓ Find out if the school policy is to share these targets with pupils, so that they are clear about their long-term goals.
- ✓ Think about how you will keep attainment and progress targets “live” in lessons. Consider how these will be embedded in your short-term planning and marking.
- ✓ Discuss with more experienced colleagues whether some pieces of work are at greater depth. You should have criteria to help judge this, but a knowledgeable colleague can help you with this.



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Additional support and next steps

Established in 1983, NACE is an independent education charity dedicated to providing high-quality support for school leaders and teachers, to improve provision and outcomes for more able learners. All staff within NACE member schools have access to our member benefits – including online resources, webinars, CPD, peer support and networking, and more. For more information visit www.nace.co.uk/membership

What to do next:

- ✓ Set aside some time to orientate yourself and gain key information about your setting.
- ✓ Find out who leads on more able provision in your school and arrange a time to meet with them.
- ✓ Read the school's more able policy before the meeting if you can.
- ✓ Use information from the school policy and this guide to help structure the questions you want to ask.
- ✓ Use this understanding to help structure a personal action plan for your new role.

Consider including the following in your personal action plan for more able provision:

- **Identified groups:** find out which pupils are already identified as more able, why they've been identified, and the nature of any current provisions for them in school.
- **Planning for your first class:** view any existing schemes of work/generic planning. Using this guide, identify what is already in place to help you shape learning experiences that will meet the needs of the more able learners.
- **Working with parents and carers:** ask for information about how the school involves parents and carers. Be proactive.
- **Identify areas for further support:** consider ways that you may be able to develop your skills. Perhaps ask about receiving coaching and mentoring from a Head of Department/Year Leader or observing and sharing planning with another experienced team member.

And finally... At this point in your career you'll be looking forward to consolidating learning as you progress and take full responsibility for guiding the learning of your pupils. This guide will continue to support you during your early career as you work towards successfully meeting the needs of more able learners.

This is exciting, energising and rewarding: embrace it.



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With over 30 years' experience of working in primary educational settings, Dr Keith Watson is an educational consultant who draws on his experiences as a former MAT CEO, Teaching School Leader and published researcher. Keith led the work on Portswood Primary School being the first school in the country to attain the NACE Challenge Award three times. He has extensive experience of professional development, having delivered training to hundreds of teachers through consultancy with the Portswood Teaching School Alliance and previously as a local authority MAGT advisor. Over the past 15 years he has written regularly for NACE and presented at numerous conferences with a particular focus on effective teaching strategies for more able learners. He holds a Doctorate in Educational Leadership from Southampton University and regularly publishes articles on a range of educational issues.



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