

40 benchmarks for high-quality provision for more able learners and challenge for all

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The National Association for Able Children in Education (NACE) is an independent charity working with schools, education leaders and practitioners to improve provision for more able learners.

We believe that through a focus on meeting the needs of more able learners, and embedding an ethos and culture of high expectations for all, schools can ensure all young people have opportunities to flourish.

To mark NACE's 40th anniversary, we are sharing 40 benchmarks for all schools to work towards. These benchmarks are based on our eight core principles and draw on effective leadership and practice from across our network of member schools.

NACE core principles

Our work is guided by the following core principles, which unite our diverse network of member schools, professionals and partner organisations:

- The education of more able learners is a **whole-school endeavour** which should be embraced by school leaders at all levels.
- Addressing the needs of more able learners can **raise achievement for a much wider group** of learners in a school by increasing challenge for all.
- Providing for more able learners is about creating a **curriculum which gives opportunities for all children to flourish**.
- Considering the needs of more able disadvantaged learners is crucial to ensuring an **inclusive and fair curriculum**.
- Ability can be revealed across a range of **specific domains, or more generally**, and not only in traditional academic subjects.
- An **ethos and culture of high expectations and aspirations** is integral to any school providing for more able learners.
- Teachers are central to providing **challenging and enriching education**, and their **professional development** is paramount.
- Ability is a fluid concept: it can be developed through **challenge, opportunity and self-belief**.

celebrating
40
years
of NACE

Quick poll

How would you currently rate your school in providing cognitively challenging classrooms consistently across the whole school?

- ☐ Challenge is consistent and in place across all classes
- ☐ Pockets of excellence but more consistency is needed
- ☐ Examples of good practice but not consistent in all lessons
- ☐ There is no whole-school approach to cognitive challenge



Core principle #1

The education of more able learners is a whole-school endeavour which should be embraced by school leaders at all levels.



Benchmark 1: The school's vision reflects its focus on the more able and challenge for all.

Benchmark 2: All staff and governors understand why a focus on the more able and challenge is important and can articulate this.

Benchmark 3: All leaders ensure that a focus on the more able and challenge is a key aspect of their monitoring and evaluation systems and processes.

Benchmark 4: Plans for all levels of school improvement include a focus on the more able and challenge.

Benchmark 5: There is a nominated lead and governor for more able and challenge provision.

Core principle #2

Addressing the needs of more able learners can raise achievement for a much wider group of learners in a school by increasing challenge for all.



Benchmark 6: Through effective CPD, all staff understand the varied needs of the more able, including academic and emotional support.

Benchmark 7: All staff understand and can articulate what cognitive challenge is, and how it manifests in the classroom and across the whole school.

Benchmark 8: All teachers know who their more able learners are, and planning for challenge starts with these learners.

Benchmark 9: All staff understand how to provide effective challenge in the classroom for all learners through a 'teaching to the top' ethos and approach.

Benchmark 10: Teachers act on effective pedagogical guidance to ensure challenge for all, so that challenge permeates from the start to the end of every lesson.

Core principle #3

Providing for more able learners is about creating a curriculum which gives opportunities for all children to flourish.



Benchmark 11: Rationale and intent statements for the school's overarching curriculum and individual subject curricula articulate high expectations and challenge for all.

Benchmark 12: The curriculum has been designed to provide opportunities for rich knowledge, skills and cultural capital to be accrued, resulting in deep learning and arrival at ambitious end-points.

Benchmark 13: There is a whole-school, planned approach to ensuring more able learners have regular access to resources that challenge them, including demanding texts that develop rich vocabulary, including subject-specific vocabulary.

Benchmark 14: The school has a strategic approach to ensuring more able learners are offered rich and sophisticated problems before acceleration through new content. Exceptionally able learners have their curriculum adapted appropriately.

Benchmark 15: Curriculum enrichment and access to extracurricular activities provide a broad and rich range of opportunities for all learners to further develop their abilities and interests.

Core principle #4

Considering the needs of more able disadvantaged learners is crucial to ensuring an inclusive and fair curriculum.

NACE Essentials:
Breaking down
barriers



NACE Essentials:
More able and the
pupil premium

Benchmark 16: The curriculum provides the knowledge, skills and cultural capital for disadvantaged learners to succeed in life.

Benchmark 17: Teachers know who their more able disadvantaged learners are, understand their individual needs, and have developed effective strategies to address these.

Benchmark 18: The progress and attainment of more able learners who are disadvantaged are tracked closely and any underperformance is swiftly addressed.

Benchmark 19: Leaders ensure there are interventions for disadvantaged more able learners, delivered appropriately to take full account of their identified needs.

Benchmark 20: Commitment to high achievement for the most academically able disadvantaged learners is embedded into school life, including having access to a range of enrichment and extracurricular opportunities which they are supported to access.

Core principle #5

Ability can be revealed across a range of specific domains, or more generally, and not only in traditional academic subjects.



Benchmark 21: The school has developed a rich range of approaches to the identification of more able learners. These have been developed collaboratively, go beyond the use of outcomes data alone, and are in place across the curriculum.

Benchmark 22: All staff understand the school's systems to effectively identify the more able, exceptionally able, and those with multiple exceptionalities across the school.

Benchmark 23: The school values all abilities equally and this is reflected in case studies from across and beyond the curriculum.

Benchmark 24: The quality of education provided across the school encourages latent ability to come to light and be developed.

Benchmark 25: Systems are in place to support and encourage the identification of abilities beyond the school environment.

Core principle #6

An ethos and culture of high expectations and aspirations is integral to any school providing for more able learners.



Benchmark 26: The school's vision and core values reflect a culture of high expectations, no limits on learning, and challenge for all.

Benchmark 27: Aspirational targets are set and tracked for all learners. Any underperformance is swiftly addressed.

Benchmark 28: All staff and stakeholders are aspirational for all learners in terms of their academic achievement, cultural and social capital, and personal development.

Benchmark 29: The school provides a range of rich opportunities to increase learners' aspirations in terms of future learning and careers.

Benchmark 30: More able learners have opportunities to lead learning, experience leadership opportunities, and make a positive contribution to the school and the community.

Core principle #7

Teachers are central to providing challenging and enriching education, and their professional development is paramount.

NACE Essentials:
Getting started
with more able



NACE CPD:
in-person, online,
on-demand and
in-school

Benchmark 31: CPD systematically seeks to maximise knowledge and understanding of provision for more able learners and challenge for all, meaning teachers can articulate the main teaching approaches that allow more able learners to flourish.

Benchmark 32: More able- and challenge-focused CPD is based on analysis of need, is evidence-based, and leads to enhanced learner outcomes.

Benchmark 33: Provision for more able learners is part of the induction programme for new staff.

Benchmark 34: Teaching assistants, mentors and one-to-one tutors receive appropriate training and development to ensure they can support more able learners effectively.

Benchmark 35: A culture of openly celebrating and sharing best practice around more able and challenge provision permeates the school.

Core principle #8

Ability is a fluid concept: it can be developed through challenge, opportunity and self-belief.



Benchmark 36: Learners are explicitly taught about ‘desirable difficulty’ and encouraged to take risks with their learning. Those with perfectionistic tendencies are supported in this.

Benchmark 37: Learners embrace difficulty and can effectively evaluate the levels of challenge they experience.

Benchmark 38: Staff do not ‘steal the struggle’ from learners. They understand how to appropriately scaffold learning to ensure challenge for all.

Benchmark 39: Parents and carers are supported to understand the needs of more able learners and the importance of cognitive challenge and growth mindset approaches.

Benchmark 40: The school is outward-facing and proactive in developing a range of partnerships to create innovative opportunities for learning and progression.



Image: Shutterstock

NACE membership

What's included?

- ✓ NACE Curriculum Audit©
- ✓ Engagement in NACE R&D Hubs
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= over £1000 in exclusive member benefits

Plus...

- + Discounts on NACE events & in-school CPD
- + Discount on NACE Assessment Audit©
- + Partner discounts: up to 25% off retail price
- + Access to NACE Challenge Development Programme: exclusively for NACE member schools

Remember: NACE membership provides logins to our website for all staff. For support to set up logins for your colleagues, contact membership@nace.co.uk

nace.co.uk/membership

NACE Challenge Development Programme

Develop your school's provision for more able learners, in the context of challenge for all.

Whatever your starting point and needs, you will find the NACE Challenge Development Programme invaluable within your school improvement cycle.

“A framework for improvement, superb training and fantastic support [...] Working with NACE has not only improved the outcomes of our more able pupils but has improved teaching and learning for all pupils.”

John Lane, Headteacher, St Michael Catholic Primary School & Nursery, Surrey

40
years

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What could we improve?
- What topics would you like us to focus on
in future webinars, courses and resources?
- What additional support would be helpful?

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