GIFTED LEARNERS POLICY

Purpose
The purpose of this policy is to provide direction and guidance for the education of gifted students so that their learning and holistic needs are met. It provides procedures for the identification and management of gifted students throughout the school.

Scope
Good Shepherd Lutheran School recognises that any approach to gifted students needs to involve the whole school community. There are roles and implications for school staff, students, families and potentially elements of the wider community.

Definitions
Giftedness - the ability to perform at a level significantly beyond what might be expected from one’s age peers, in any domain of human ability [Gagne 2008]. This may include a group of approximately 10% of the population.

Gifted students show evidence of high achievement capability in areas such as intellectual, creative, artistic or in specific academic areas and require services and activities tailored to their individual need.

Inquiry learning –
‘Inquiry learning involves students forming their own questions about a topic and having time to explore the answers. Students are both problem posers and problem solvers. It is a collaborative process in which both students and teachers work together negotiating aspects of the curriculum’ (Wilson & Wing Jan, 2003, p.10) in order to meet agreed Content Descriptors. Inquiry learning ‘... is based on the belief that students are powerful learners who must be actively engaged in the process of investigating, processing, organising, synthesising, refining and extending their knowledge within a topic.

The inquiry process involves:
• Planned, direct and vicarious experiences that provide opportunities for students to pose questions and gather information.
• Activities that help students organise the new information and skills in a way that assists them to form concepts and generalisations about their world.
• Opportunities for students to demonstrate what they have learnt (knowledge and skills).
• Opportunities to apply the knowledge and skills to new or different situations.’
(Wilson & Wing Jan, 2003, p.10)

Curriculum Differentiation
Differentiation means tailoring instruction to meet individual needs. Whether teachers differentiate content, process, products, or the learning environment, the use of ongoing assessment and flexible grouping makes this a successful approach to instruction.
At its most basic level, differentiation consists of the efforts of teachers to respond to variance among learners in the classroom. Whenever a teacher reaches out to an individual or small group to vary his or her teaching in order to create the best learning experience possible, that teacher is differentiating instruction.
Teachers can differentiate at least four classroom elements based on student readiness, interest, or learning profile:

Content – what the student needs to learn or how the student will get access to the information;

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Process – activities in which the student engages in order to make sense of or master the content;

Products – culminating projects that ask the student to rehearse, apply, and extend what he or she has learned in a unit; and

Learning environment – the way the classroom works and feels.


In today’s classroom less emphasis should be placed on the amount of material learnt, and more weight put on making connections, thinking through issues and solving problems. Differentiation allows students multiple options to make connections by taking in information, making sense of ideas and expressing what they have learned.

A differentiated classroom provides different avenues to acquiring content, to thinking through or making sense of ideas, and to solve problems by developing products so that each student can learn effectively. Effective differentiating in a mainstream classroom increases student engagement.

Connected Schools – Good Shepherd Lutheran School forms a part of the Connected Schools group. Connected Schools is a Christ-centred community of K-12 Lutheran schools. Our commitment to partner, dream and passionately engage across five sites of learning in support of students and families is based on evidence that schools are capable of much more working in partnership than they could ever imagine or achieve individually.

Connected schools are Good Shepherd Lutheran School Para Vista, Golden Grove Lutheran School, St Paul Lutheran School Blair Athol, Salisbury Lutheran Kindergarten and Endeavour College Mawson Lakes.

Acceleration – is a placement process in which a student is placed with an age cohort ahead of his or her chronological or school year in one subject, several subjects or across a whole learning year.

Critical and Creative Thinking – In the Australian Curriculum, students develop capability in critical and creative thinking as they learn to generate and evaluate knowledge, clarify concepts and ideas, seek possibilities, consider alternatives and solve problems. Critical and creative thinking is integral to activities that require students to think broadly and deeply using skills, behaviours and dispositions such as reason, logic, resourcefulness, imagination and innovation in all learning areas at school and in their lives beyond school.

By applying a sequence of thinking skills, students develop an increasingly sophisticated understanding of the processes they can employ whenever they encounter problems, unfamiliar information and new ideas. In addition, the progressive development of knowledge about thinking and the practice of using thinking strategies can increase students’ motivation for, and management of, their own learning. They become more confident and autonomous problem-solvers and thinkers.

Responding to the challenges of the twenty-first century – with its complex environmental, social and economic pressures – requires young people to be creative, innovative, enterprising and adaptable, with the motivation, confidence and skills to use critical and creative thinking purposefully.

Individual Learning Plan (ILP) – is part of the school’s response to meeting specific needs of identified students, setting unique, high priority, achievable goals for their learning.

Quality teaching – requires that the teacher is able to manage his or her own affective state and develop understanding of and relationships with students in order to evaluate students’ needs, interests and motivations and determine how to teach them effectively (Henderson and Jarvis, p.2).

At Good Shepherd, we believe the following learning principles underpin quality teaching:

Learning Principles

We are effective and successful learners when:

1. The learning environment is a safe and supportive place to build self, social, emotional and spiritual capacity;
2. Learning is attuned to be engaging, developmental, personalised and differentiated to meet individual need;

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3. Learners are enabled to be resourceful, innovative and persistent and to use initiative;
4. Learners are active and informed citizens, connecting strongly with communities and practice beyond the classroom;
5. Learning capacity to think deeply, critically and creatively is enhanced through active and purposeful inquiry, question posing and problem solving;
6. Learners master the essential skills in literacy and numeracy and are creative and productive users of information communication technologies;
7. Learners reflect and receive regular, timely and targeted feedback in order to understand, monitor and adjust learning goals for rigorous learning and to meet high standards; and
8. Quality assessment practices are an integral part of teaching and learning.

Policy Statement
As part of Good Shepherd Lutheran School Vision: Active and Connected, growing for LIFE and the Values of Love, Optimism and Creativity we celebrate the different gifts and talents that God has given to students within our school community. We are committed to helping students identify, develop and use their gifts in service to God and one another. We believe that learning is enhanced when learners are motivated and engaged and are challenged to reach their individual potential.

To this end, gifted students need a learning environment that fosters wellbeing and incorporates challenges that match their abilities. The learning environment should include teaching that promotes both intellectual and emotional learning.

The provision of gifted education is a matter of social justice (ACARA). Quality teachers need to know what quality educational experiences will look like for a range of different learners (Henderson & Jarvis, p.5).

Teachers who model and incorporate higher order thinking into their curriculum, who apply a range of strategies and regularly monitor students’ progress against high quality learning objectives in order to make ongoing adjustments, are more likely to be effective for all learners, including the gifted (Henderson & Jarvis, p. 9).

Procedures
1. Identification of gifted students

Without adequate support gifted students are at risk of underachieving, developing poor study habits or misbehaving. They may become socially isolated and develop poor self-esteem. By clear identification and assessment we can design a curriculum to meet their individual needs.

Identification of gifted students is an on-going process that should involve a range of subjective and objective measures.

These include:

- observation;
- checklists of character traits, skills and interests;
- samples of student’s work;
- whole school data eg NAPLAN, Lexiles, Westwood;
- interviews;
- anecdotal records of interviews, conversations;
- competition results

The identification involves:

- an initial request made by parent or staff member;
- discussion and collaboration with parents, class teacher & relevant staff.

Identification requires:

- development of learning provisions by the classroom teacher in collaboration with relevant staff;
- ongoing evaluation of these provisions facilitated by the classroom teacher and relevant staff.
It is important to be aware that some students are at risk of not being identified

Possible factors may include:

- cultural background;
- underachieving;
- learning difficulties;
- conduct disorder issues.

2. Educational Pathway Options

A range of options are available to meet the diverse needs of gifted students. Generally, the higher the level of giftedness, the greater will be the need to make special provisions. Pathway options should be made in consultation with teaching staff and parents.

2.1 Possible actions involving classroom teacher and Learning Support staff and the Director of Learning

2.1.1 Differentiated Curriculum

A differentiated curriculum can be achieved through the manipulation of content by:

- using broad concepts or issues;
- integrating and linking multiple disciplines into an area of study;
- developing class or personalised inquiry based units;
- allowing for negotiation of learning outcomes;
- compacting the curriculum. The curriculum could be streamlined to delete previously learnt material with less repetition of core concepts or skills. The most appropriate entry level for a gifted student may not be at the beginning;
- providing a personalised program such as an on-line learning module or independent research project. It should not be assumed that gifted students already have the skills needed to complete such programs independently, thus relevant support should also be provided;
- teaching critical and creative thinking;
- developing social skills such as group work and negotiation; and
- teaching research/study skills including goal setting and self-evaluation.

2.1.2 Facilitating other school based enrichment and extension opportunities including:

- ConnectedSchools Enrichment program for years 5 and 6 students;
- music programs such as instrumental music program, choir, musicals;
- sporting teams;
- clubs;
- competitions;
- workshops;
- leadership opportunities;
- mentoring which draws on expertise from the wider community, aiming to develop individuals and small groups who have specific interests;
- incursions; and
- camps

2.2 Possible actions within wider school structures

2.2.1 flexible grouping strategies such as ability grouping within stages, focus groups for particular learning areas and individual and small group learning programs;

2.2.2 early entry for students may be considered in consultation with the Principal. A psychological assessment clearly recommending early entry by a registered child
psychologist is generally required in these situations. Consultation with kindergarten or early learning site is also recommended;

2.2.3 Acceleration through a year level

Occasionally, students demonstrating high levels of performance across the curriculum may be moved to a year level higher than their peers in age. In this situation the following guidelines need to be adhered to:

- the academic needs of the student cannot be met in an alternative way and the student will be disadvantaged academically and/or emotionally by remaining in the age appropriate year level;
- a recent psychological assessment by a registered child psychologist is generally required. The evaluation should look at their intellectual functioning and academic skill levels;
- social-emotional adjustment are to be considered;
- consultation with the classroom teacher, other relevant staff, student and parents is required. The Principal will consider the wishes of the student and parents and take into consideration the space and resources available;
- across the curriculum, the student should demonstrate skill levels above the average of the class of intended entry, and
- the student should be in favour of the idea, and not feel pressured by school or parents.

Process for year level acceleration

- initial discussions between Principal, class teacher, other relevant staff, student and parents;
- gathering of relevant data - formal and informal such as school achievement tests, work samples, observations of student and their social and emotional skills;
- formal meeting between Principal, class teachers, relevant staff and parents recommending acceleration or alternatives. Counselling of the student and parents is important so that they understand the implications of acceleration; and
- if acceleration is recommended the following need to be determined and documented:
  - formal approval in writing from the school;
  - selection of receiving teacher and class
  - trial date and starting date – ideally advancement should occur at natural transition points;
  - transition process for student, eg class visits, counselling for students and parents, strategy for peer support in new class, strategy for the addressing of any gaps in knowledge or skills; and
  - formal review at the end of a trial period. If the experience is not positive there needs to be the option of returning to the original situation.

3. Supporting positive and emotional development

At Good Shepherd we value and celebrate unique individuals with their own God-given gifts and differences by fostering an atmosphere of encouragement and acceptance. While the majority of gifted students are well adjusted, some may have difficulties interacting socially with their peers and may require specific training to develop their group and social skills. Gifted students can feel different from their peers and there may also be a social or cultural bias against high ability. This can lead to masking and deliberate under-
achievement. Good Shepherd has structures in place through Social and Emotional Learning and Well-being to support students, teachers and families.

4. Parent and community involvement

Parents are their child’s most influential educators. They therefore have a unique knowledge and understanding of their gifted child. Parents should be actively involved and participate in catering for their needs. Parents and community members have expertise, interests and skills which can broaden the range of options available for gifted children.

Parents and community members (with appropriate volunteer training credentials) may:

- mentor a gifted student or small group of students;
- facilitate a workshop in their area of expertise;
- provide assistance in running workshop sessions; and
- co-ordinate and supervise additional out-of-school hours activities.

Parents can support their child by:

- accepting them for who they are;
- encouraging critical and creative thinking;
- offering extra curricula activities to provide gifted students with other creative and intellectually enjoyable avenues (the performing arts, music, sport, art classes, problem solving games, MENSA etc.); and
- accessing interest clubs allowing possibilities for children to interact with others outside of school with similar interests (Double Helix Science Club, workshops run by the Gifted and Talented Children’s Association).

Parents should be encouraged to know that the current educational climate is placing emphasis on personalising learning to meet the needs of diverse students, including those who are gifted. There is advice within the Australian Curriculum and direction within the Australian Professional Standards for Teachers (AITS, 2011) that make clear reference to providing for advanced learners.

The official website of the Gifted and Talented Children’s Association of SA can provide information and support for parents of gifted children, [http://gtcasa.asn.au/](http://gtcasa.asn.au/)

Implementation Responsibilities

Responsibilities of Principal

The Principal will:

1. ensure the provision of access to a range of educational options for gifted learners;
2. foster an understanding in staff of the importance of appropriate provisions for gifted learners;
3. support and involve parents in the development of relevant provisions for their child;
4. ensure that ongoing documentation and review occurs;
5. ensure relevant processes are adhered to; and
6. encourage collaborative links with external agencies.

Responsibilities of Director of Learning

The Director of Learning will:

1. actively investigate and evaluate current educational trends and developments in Gifted Education and their relevance to our school;
2. co-ordinate identification process;
3. support staff by;
   - assisting with the development or review of a differentiated curriculum or in-class program for gifted students;
   - assisting with the development of ILPs as required;
· locating resources including professional development opportunities;
· sharing with teachers identified gifted students in their classes and providing an overview of the particular needs of these students; and
· providing professional learning opportunities in Gifted Education.

4. support students in developing their interests and skills by:
   · providing extra support for a student’s differentiated curriculum or extension work;
   · referring them towards opportunities inside or outside the school; and
   · advocating for them within the school.

5. update gifted and talented information and resources for the school;
6. provide opportunities for enrichment through the Connected School Enrichment program;
7. provide opportunities for enrichment through the program planned through the Cosmic Cluster group of schools;
8. establish a positive communication link with parents, updating them on aspects of the Gifted Learning program and achievements of individual students;
9. updating the school community on aspects of the Gifted Learning program;
10. refer specific students or situations to Principal/Deputy Principal if necessary;
11. assist in the periodic evaluation of gifted learning provisions for the school involving input from staff, parents and students; and
12. contribute to transitioning the student from one teacher to another and to other schools if the student leaves.

Responsibilities of teachers

Teachers will:

1. provide a supportive and challenging learning environment which responds to the intellectual, physical, social and emotional needs of gifted learners;
2. be learner centred rather than teacher or content-centred;
3. promote acceptance rather than judgment;
4. provide for a variety of group options, rather than one grouping as a general organisation;
5. enhance their professional knowledge and skills with respect to the identification of gifted learners and subsequent implementation of appropriate provisions;
6. provide an appropriate and challenging learning program which incorporates a variety of teaching strategies relevant to the specific learning styles of gifted individuals;
7. develop a differentiated curriculum for a gifted student where required, with the support of the Director of Learning Collaborate as needed with students and parents in the development of an ILP and ongoing reflection of the plan;
8. teach appropriate thinking skills as outlined in the “General Capabilities – Critical and Creative Thinking Continuum.”;
9. monitor and evaluate their programs and practices to ensure that the specific needs of these students are met;
10. encourage and support gifted learners to achieve their personal best and to become independent learners capable of sharing responsibility for their learning programs;
11. use purposeful assessment practices, both formal and informal, for, of and as learning;
12. maintain individual student profiles including formal test results, interviews, provisions and progress; and
13. communicate progress and provisions with parents in a variety of ways e.g. parent meetings, general report comments, work samples.

References


Melbourne Declaration of Educational Goals for young Australians (MCEETYA, 2008)


Related Policies

Good Shepherd Lutheran School Learning Support Policy
Good Shepherd Lutheran School Vision & Values
Good Shepherd Lutheran School Enrolment policy

Forms

None

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