

**FOCUS:
Research into the
Catering for Gifted and Talented
Secondary School Students
in England**

**Report to the Ministry of Education
from Lyn Sneddon's Sabbatical Leave
Term 2, 2005**

Preamble

The education of learners identified as ‘gifted and talented’ has become source of interest and concern to various governments for several years, but data based policy making seems to be a phenomenon of the early 21 Century.

In New Zealand a working party was established in May 2001 to investigate the development of policy in this area, and in November 2001 their report was presented to the then minister, Rt. Hon. Trevor Mallard...

The upshot of this was the development of a policy that differed from those occurring in other countries in several ways, and whilst this report is not intended as a comparative study, it is still seen as important to highlight some of these differences rather than just report on the situation overseas. Riley (2004), identifies three major areas of departure in New Zealand:

- Giftedness and talent can mean different things to different communities and cultures
- Distinctive cultural consideration need to be taken into account in the planning and delivery of gifted education provisions
- That differentiated learning experiences should begin in inclusive classrooms.

This last point is significant in that this requirement remains true to the agenda for Special Education set out in the SE2000 policy to provide an inclusive education for all New Zealand students, and, as we shall see, this marks a distinct difference between New Zealand and England, in as much as the provision of education for gifted and talented students is firmly set within the provisions for special education within NAG1 (iii, c.) whereas in England a deliberate decision was made to not include gifted and talented within their special education provisions. The implications for schools in New Zealand, as a result of this, are quite different from those in England. Whereas the English schools enjoy the luxury of specific and targeted funding for the provision of Gifted and Talented learners, New Zealand schools are left to cut another slice out of the Special Education or Operational Grants to resource their programmes.

Notwithstanding this, the New Zealand Government did establish a funding pool of \$1.2 million to support 17 innovative programmes targeted at gifted and talented learners. This however, was not spread across all schools, but was a contestable funding pool based on applications that demonstrated some programmes already in place.

The resourcing, or lack of it, of gifted and talented learners is seen as problematic by many schools in New Zealand:

‘A lack of professional development, accesses to resources and support, funding, and time, as well as cultural misunderstandings, were seen as impediments to providing for gifted and talented students.’

(Education Gazette: 22 March 2004, p5)

Not only is there and absence of a clear funding stream for programme implementation for gifted and talented learners in New Zealand, there is also a lack of a coherent and unified definition of 'giftedness' and 'talent'.

A review of the research in New Zealand suggests that there are many possible definitions of 'Gifted and Talented' with Riley (2000) suggesting as many as 200, as well as a large number of descriptions., and that, at the time of writing (2004), of the 1273 schools that returned the survey, only 60% had formally identified gifted and talented students in the past year, and only 47% reported having a schools based definition of giftedness and talent.

Much of the new Zealand model, as it develops, rests on the work of Gagne (2003) who clearly differentiates between 'gifted' and 'talented', in as much as he assigns innateness to those attributes described as 'gifts', and describes 'talents' as the expressions of these gifts.

The plethora of possible definitions, coupled with the fact that New Zealand has accepted that giftedness and talent can mean different things to different communities and cultures, has meant that there is no official definition of what gifted and talented is, the current expectation being that each individual school, with its community, will establish a school based definition of gifted and talented (MOE, 2000; 2002). This has resulted in the development of an underlying set of principles which serve only as guidelines for schools to develop their programmes. It could be suggested that without a set of coherent and national guidelines that schools will be left floundering both in the areas of resourcing programmes and coming up with a workable definition that will provide consistency in the delivery of programmes. The perceived lack of leadership by the Government in this area of education can only be seen as detrimental to the development of positive outcomes, an issue clearly pointed to by research carried out by the National Academy for Gifted and Talented Youth at Warwick University in England:

'Where it is left to chance, evidence indicates that educational progress is not so much of intellectual merit but rather a question of affluence, with the most affluent receiving the best education and therefore achieving most highly'

(Campbell et al: The social origins of students identified as gifted and talented in England: a geo-demographic analysis. Occasional Paper No2. University of Warwick. 2005)

The ‘English Model’: Evolution, Structure and Practice

At approximately the same time (2001) as in New Zealand, England was also focussing on the needs of gifted and talented learners. At this juncture it would be correct to state that historically the English education system had catered poorly for gifted and talented learners (Campbell et al. 2005). In this research, ‘The social origins of students identified as gifted and talented in England: a geo-demographic analysis’, Campbell and his group clearly state:

‘Traditionally gifted education has been seen as divorced from the general education system, yet if a country’s education system seeks to provide appropriate education for all its children, then the education of the most able (gifted) should be seen as just one part of a larger whole. This in itself should provide a compelling case for a nationally coherent and integrated approach to the education of the gifted.’ (ibid. p5)

It is difficult to assess the political motivation for the development of a ‘nationally coherent and integrated approach to the education of the gifted’, but in England the Blair Labour Government was acutely aware of a drop off in school leavers moving into tertiary education, and launched a campaign to set a target of 40% of all leavers moving into further education. To do this, schools were asked to identify 10% of their student bodies as being ‘gifted and talented’, and to develop programmes to meet their needs. Out of this arose an official definition of gifted and talentedness which applies across the country where ‘giftedness’ is seen as applying to high academic achievement in curriculum areas such as Mathematics, English, and Science, whilst ‘talent’ was seen as being high achievement in such areas as Sport and the Performing Arts. Schools then had clear guidelines with which to be able to identify students that would require special attention because of their giftedness or talent.

Unfortunately in New Zealand we have no such clear targets, and although the English model shows discrepancies in application, and is still evolving, there seems to be a direction which is clearly directed by policy and intention. Much of this will become the focus for future debate and comparison.

The current study focuses on the way that the provisions for gifted and talented learners has evolved in England, and to use this as a comparison with the New Zealand situation, and to use the information gleaned for future development of structure and programmes at Whangarei Girls’ High School.

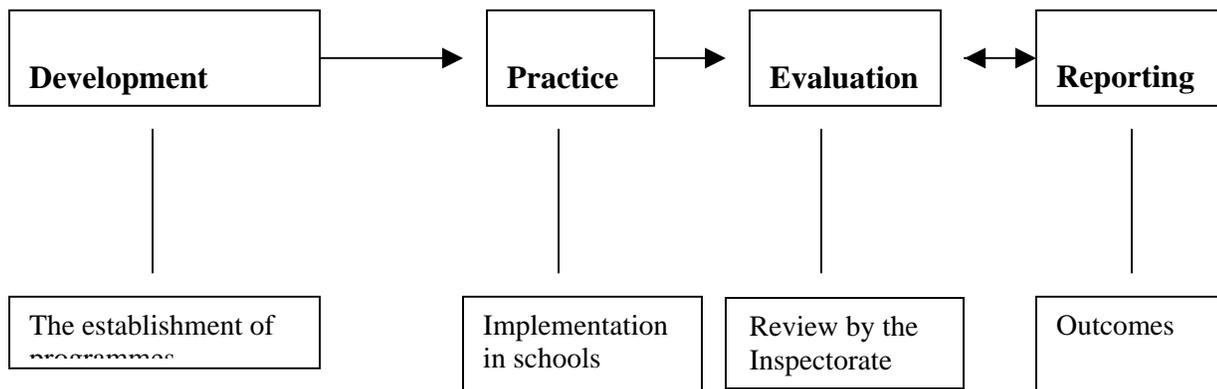
The sabbatical leave was awarded on the basis of a research proposal that addressed the following:

- What models of organisation and teaching are being used to meet the needs of ‘gifted and talented’ students overseas that can be extrapolated to the New Zealand setting?

- Which of these models meet the criteria for inclusion, which is the underpinning philosophy of the provision of special educational needs in New Zealand education?
- Which models of classroom practice are appropriate enough and flexible enough to meet the demands of the New Zealand setting?
- Which models of classroom practice best meet the needs of adolescents, in such a way that they match the aims and philosophy of Whangarei Girls' High school, and are flexible enough to be adapted to the needs of the school?
- Are there any disparities between the espoused theory that comes through in the training in England and the theory in practice in schools, and what can we learn from this in terms of meeting the needs of our learners?

The reporting of the study will track the process of development, implementation, and evaluation of gifted and talented programmes in England:

Fig.1



Development/Structure

The political debate in England over the education of gifted pupils has been going on for some time. As early as 1978 the Department for Education and Science reported that the response to the educational needs of gifted pupils was characterised by 'a long trend of low expectations at the classroom and school level' (DES 1978), and until recently by the absence of a strategic policy at the national level (Eyre 1997), and as recently as 2003, the government's Office for Standards in Education (OFSTED) reported:

'Consistently high quality across the subjects for gifted and talented pupils remains the exception. Many schools need to make sure that schemes of work set out what is meant to be a high level of challenge and to provide guidance on ways of enriching and extending work for high attainers. While activities outside the normal lesson are often stimulating.....they do not link well with mainstream work' (OFSTED 2003, para 126)

A study undertaken by Joan Freeman (1995) and commissioned by OFSTED analysed research and practice on the identification and education of highly able pupils, whilst at the same time the House of Commons Education and Employment Committee was taking evidence to inform its enquiry into provision for gifted students. The report was published in 1999, and recorded that there was much evidence that the provisions for gifted students was not satisfactory in a large number of English schools. The committee also recorded its variance from the commonly held view that highly able students can get by on their own.

This committee's views were in line with those of the Department for Education and Employment (DfEE) whose view it was that there was a need for a more active national strategy for the education of the very able. Within the context of a much broader approach to raising educational standards, efforts were made to encourage schools, especially in the inner city areas (generally low socio-economic groups) to identify their very able students and to make special provision for them through targeted initiatives. The result of this was a set of four grant-funded programmes: master classes, summer schools, independent/maintained school partnerships and a strand of a much larger Excellence in Cities initiative, which have formed part of the national strategy. The main emphasis of these programmes has been pupils of secondary age.

Within this strategy it is possible to identify three levels:

- A localised strand
- The development of a national toolkit of resources to support teachers of gifted and talented learners
- The development of a National Academy for Gifted and Talented Youth to lead the strategy

The National Academy for Gifted and Talented Youth (NAGTY)

As this strategy has unfolded additional provisions have been made, one of which was the establishment of an Academy for Gifted and Talented Youth based at Warwick University, in 2002, funded by the Department for Education and Skills.

The Academy grew out of a recognition by the Government that national leadership in the area of Gifted and Talented was absent. This provided the mechanism for leading, delivering, and supporting delivery of the national policy into the national system, and forms the cornerstone of a coherent and integrated approach to the education of gifted and talented learners. The main function of the academy was to identify and support the needs of 'the top 5%' of secondary students: a definition derived from the parliamentary select committee, and the academy now has 28000 members of the student academy (2004).

The distinctive feature of the Academy (NAGTY) is the integration of three dimensions of its work – services for students, services for teachers, and research, into a unified

academy. The work of the academy is supported by the government through and expanded Gifted and Talented Unit at the Department for Education and Skills (DfES), and NAGTY receives funding as part of its contract with this unit. In this regard NAGTY is one of the key drivers of the national agenda for the delivery of provision for gifted and talented students.

The focus of the work of the Academy is with secondary school students up to the age of 19 years with its main aim being the improvement of the educational provision for gifted and talented young people, its primary role being to drive forward improvements in student provision by developing a nationally coordinated approach, and providing leadership and support. To achieve this NAGTY works in close partnership with other gifted and talented agencies, the DfES, schools, students, parents, other educational professionals, universities and businesses.

The Academy abstained from using a single standardised test to identify giftedness and talent, opting instead for an applicant led choice whereby students are accepted into the academy on a variety of criteria including

- Test performance
- The use of portfolios
- Demonstrated high performance in the arts, music and sports (the areas implied by the term talented)

This approach by the Academy was based on a particular theoretical position on giftedness, which drew on the work of theorists such as Gardner (1983, 1999), Renzulli (1998) and Sternberg (1985) in which various forms of ‘multiple intelligences’ were discussed.

The support that NAGTY provides is through a range of activities and services. In addition to numerous online services, including Academic Study Groups, moderated member forums including a debate forum, e-learning provisions, and a comprehensive Careers and Guidance service, the Academy also runs outreach events delivered by subject experts across the country, as well as summer school programmes. These latter programmes do carry a cost for the students of around 1700 sterling, but of this 1000 sterling was met by the Department for Education and Skills. The schools are also expected to sponsor their students (around 300 sterling per student) and parents to provide the remainder, but the Academy can provide funding to cover this for those on low incomes. This helped ensure that pupils attending the summer schools can from a wide range of socio-economic backgrounds. Only those parents with children at Independent schools were expected to pay 600 sterling towards the costs.

The virtual communities are connected online in a safe moderated forum environment, and these are free to the users as a result of NAGTY’s funding stream.

The research arm of NAGTY extensively researches and reports nationally on aspects of the application of the policy and strategy, including a current longitudinal study on the geo-demographic profile of the social origins identified as gifted and talented students. (Campbell et al, 2005). In the writer’s discussions with Jim Campbell and his team at Warwick University, it became evident that there are several political issues that are emerging from the research so far

- that ideology has played a part also, in that making special provision for gifted and talented is commonly constructed as elitist in academic discourse, whereas the role of education as an instrument of social engineering is seen to be to promote the 'lower classes' and ethnic minorities through educational success
- that parental anxiety about provisions in mainstream schools has led to a demand from the professional classes for private schooling
- that selective schools (there are 161 Grammar schools left in England which have selective entry by entrance examination) provide the main structural mechanisms for differentiated education based on able students

- both students from independent schools and Grammar Schools are underrepresented in the preliminary NAGTY research findings

(Some of these issues may relate significantly to the New Zealand situation where there has emerged a great deal of community, and professional anxiety about the National Certificate of Educational Achievement).

- in gender terms there seems to be no absolute bias for boys or girls, and that socio-economic factors seem to be more significant than those related to ethnicity per se.

The research arm of NAGTY serves to inform and point the way to future developments in the national strategy, and enrich the work being carried out with students and teachers, as well as developing strategic relationships with other universities. This has been achieved involving York and Durham Universities and the London School of Economics, as well as establishing a national base for Gifted and Talented education linked to John Hopkins University in the USA, and Oxford Brookes University's Research Centre for Able Students.

These partnerships are critical in meeting the agenda for the national strategy, and are continuing to evolve, and can provide a seamless system between the secondary and tertiary sectors

The development of the relationship between the Academy and the teaching profession is interesting. Previous research (DES 1978, HMI 1992, OFSTED 2003) had indicated that generally teachers' attitudes towards the Gifted and Talented showed a lack of enthusiasm, either on the grounds that they lacked the confidence about how to challenge such students through their teaching (HMI 1992 para 3), or that meeting their educational needs had lower priority than managing the learning and behaviour of other pupils in busy and challenging classrooms (Eyre 1997, p.vi). Because teachers seemed to be under engaged, the professional arm of the academy was developed to bring support staff, teachers and head teachers together to collaborate on best practice in the teaching and learning of gifted and talented students. The outcome of this has been the development of quality standards for teachers.

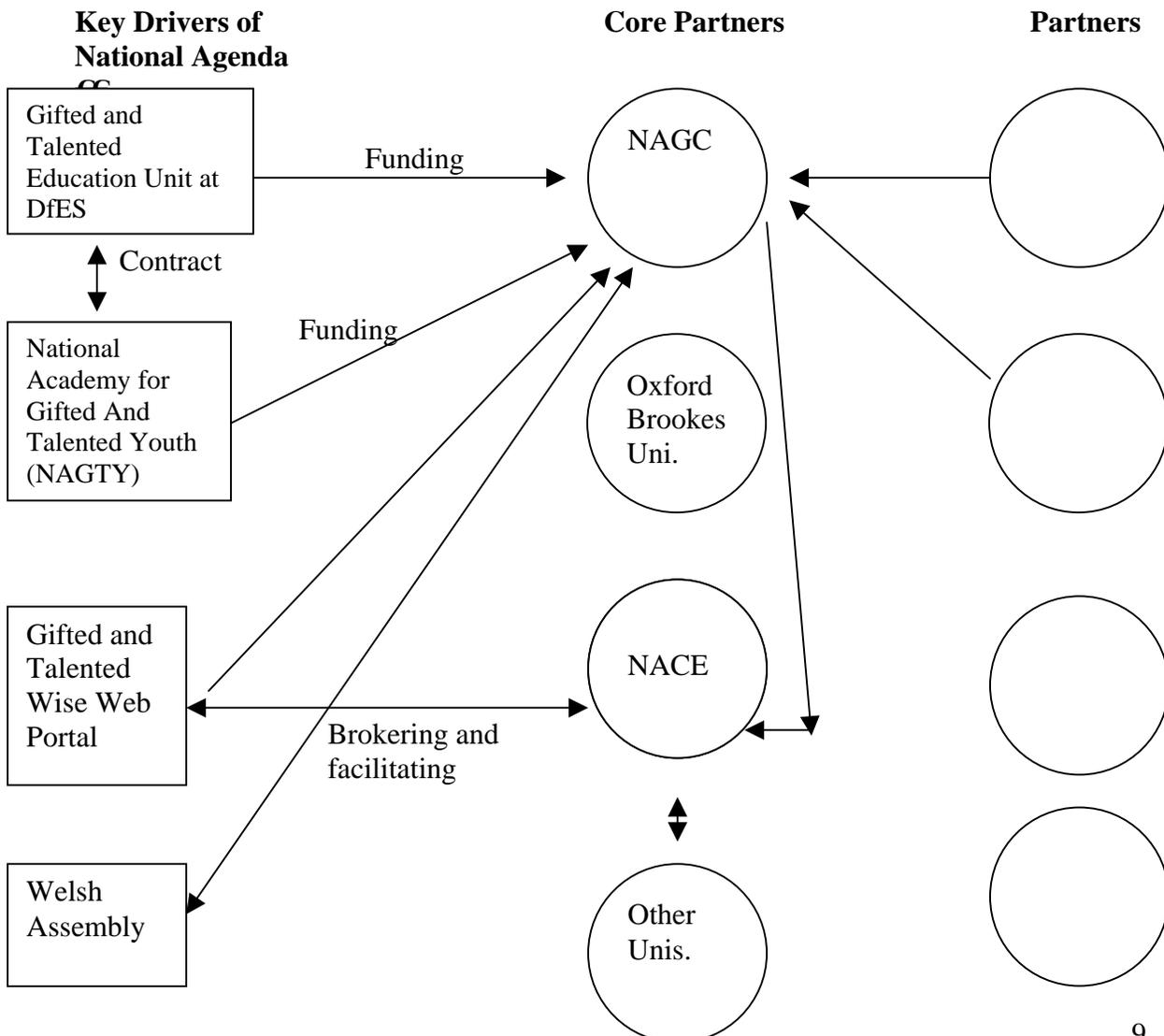
The Academy also has a role in linking into the wider community, and does this by team members giving public presentations, witnessed by the example of 2200 parents turning up at Newcastle Civic Centre for a presentation on the Academy's work. The depth and

breadth of the Academy’s work is a testimony to its leadership role in the provision for Gifted and Talented learners in England, and to the commitment of the Government to Gifted and Talented education.

Fig 2.

Gifted and Talented – Future Relationships in National Provision:

Coherency and Integration



The National Association for Gifted Children

The National Association for Gifted Children (NAGC) is based in Milton Keynes, and is regarded as a core partner in the provision for gifted and talented learners. NAGC receives the bulk of its funding from two sources: the Gifted and Talented Education Unit at DfES, and the National Academy. A proportion of the funding comes from private sources and donations.

NAGC has royal patronage (HRH The Duchess of Gloucester GCVO), and is a registered charity. Its director Dr. Stephen Tommis, leads a small team of paid functionaries who are responsible to a Council of Management who are elected annually at the AGM.

NAGC has 24 branches in England, and one in Northern Ireland and as late as 1999 was the 'only player' in the Gifted and Talented arena at a National level, and with the introduction of the national strategic plan, started to focus more closely on its core business which was service to parents and children.

A significant element in the NAGC work is the parent helpline which receives upwards of 3000 calls a year. These vary considerably from simple requests for information to pleas from desperate parents seeking understanding and help with their child(ren). Many of the calls relate to life in the school, and concern negative aspects of schools as experienced by children whose parents feel that they were in some ways highly able or gifted. Positive stories are rare, but Stephen Tommis and his team felt that much could be learned from cases where parents were pleased. They felt that lessons learned from such examples could feed into good practice principles as recommended by NAGC and the DfES (who agreed to support research in this area).

This project was conceived as a one year proposal, and was one of the earlier research projects carried out by the National Association (2001-2002) and funded by the DfES. Cases were drawn from a number of sources: Association membership, the Excellence in Cities coordinators, and schools. The sample was small and quite diverse – nine cases comprising six girls and three boys ranging in age from four to fifteen, with a good mix of socio-economic status. Despite the sample size, some tentative conclusions could be drawn

- positive home-school relationships can enhance children's learning
- teachers and headteachers who are approachable, flexible, willing to listen, and discuss possible courses of action openly are valued by parents

Out of findings such as these has arisen a section of NAGC that involves itself in Parent-School Partnerships. This work is carried out by trained volunteers who work through issues between parents and schools. This programme (formerly known as The

Independent Parent Support Scheme) was established four years ago, again through DfES funding, although NAGC also charges schools a consultation fee.

The Mission Statement for this scheme concerns itself with the belief that children thrive and achieve their potential when all partners, teachers, schools, parents and health practitioners work together and plan appropriate interventions. Its purpose is to inform and support the parents involved with gifted and talented children on all aspects of need, and to encourage open dialogue on agreed provision. This is done by offering a variety of services including helping schools and local authorities develop policy and practice in working with parents, providing staff training on gifted and talented issues, and advising on the production of parent-friendly and accessible information.

Essentially NAGC has three major specialities:

- Parent Helpline providing advocacy and free advice on the best way forward for parents. Communication is likely to take place by phone and/or e-mail at first, but face-to-face meetings can also be arranged
- Training for teachers in the education and management of students with gifted and talented needs
- The NAGC Youth Agency which is funded directly by the DfES which runs an online service for students including a discussion board, and online virtual art gallery. This unit also serves as a resource area for teachers.

Communication with interested parties is through a bi-monthly newsletter that presents information on the latest research, government policy, and upcoming events of interest to members. Such an event is the annual Family Day, which in 2004 attracted 436 parents. These days include fun activities, information, and workshops for parents and students, as well as seminars.

The relationship between NAGC and the Government through the DfES is very close, and NAGC was a 'major player' in the development of the National Strategy, and as more agencies enter the market space, NAGC sees that it needs to maintain its strategic position as a core partner in the strategy, and develop niches that are complementary rather than competing.

The National Association for Able Children in Education

NACE is based in Oxford and forms the third arm of the development strategy for Gifted and Talented provision, and the main concern of this organisation is the development of programmes for teacher training and their implementation. They are responsible for the providing professional development directly to teachers through seminars, the dissemination of information, and workshops.

Summary

The setting up of the National Academy for Gifted and Talented Youth, and the integration of the National Association for Gifted Children and The National Association for Able Children in Education into the national strategy has provided a firm basis on which the needs of students identified as 'Gifted and Talented' can be addressed. The work is firmly embedded in research as well as political ideology and rhetoric, and is long term in nature. The Government has a commitment to goals for the next five years that see

- Gifted and talented students progress in line with their ability rather than their age
- Schools inform parents about tailored provision in an annual school profile
- Curricula include a gifted and talented dimension, and at a 14-19 there is more stretch and differentiation at the top end, so no matter what your talent you will be engaged
- And the effect of poverty on achievement is reduced, because support for high ability students from poorer backgrounds enables them to thrive at school and progress to our leading universities

(David Miliband MP: Conference Speech 18 May 2004)

The Practice/The Schools

The schools visited showed a wide range of development in the provisions they had in place for Gifted and Talented Students, although generally the structure for managing these provisions was very much the same.

As far as general structure goes the Local Education Authority (LEA) has a large part to play, as representatives of these bodies take responsibility for chairing the meetings of schools, as well as being responsible for the distribution of money. These representatives are generally referred to as Teaching and Learning Coordinators. Schools are expected to complete a Gifted and Talented Self-Evaluation to the LEA, and this must include the school's examination results in GSCE, as well as information about any effective practice that exists in the school.

Schools are generally arranged into clusters, and meetings are attended by the Gifted and Talented Coordinator from each school within the cluster. These coordinators are classroom teachers who have 'put their hands up' as being especially interested in the education of Gifted and Talented learners.

Funding comes into the cluster for use in establishing in/out of school programmes. For example, in one cluster visited there were 12 schools who had to manage a fund of .5 million sterling for meeting the needs of their gifted and talented students. In this cluster there were two LEA coordinators who each met with six schools. The funding is generally used to support weekend programmes, masterclasses, summer schools, and for teacher relief during training. Some schools also reported that they received an

Excellence in Cities Grant, but for many this was a rare achievement. Gifted and Talented and Excellence in Cities funding is made directly to the school. The coordinators in each school receive a management allowance of time and money for their role, and receive their training at a national training programme through Oxford Brookes University, which is one of the core partners in the national strategy.

In general school programmes are expected to emphasise differentiation, enrichment, acceleration, and extension, and summer schools have been established in most areas with the potential to progress to University. All schools are expected to set targets for students with teacher assessment tasks replacing specific extension tests, and world class tests have been introduced in Mathematics and problem solving. Those schools which have developed specialist areas are expected to share their expertise with other schools in the cluster.

Out of school programmes are arranged as cluster events and rely heavily on interested staff members from the schools to lead these programmes. These are planned for at the regular cluster meetings.

School A

School A is an inner city Catholic school with a roll of 650 students in the North west Midlands, who remain at this school until age 16 when they move on to a senior college after sitting GSCE 'O' level subjects (equivalent to New Zealand NCEA Level 1), or transition into the work force. In 2004-2005 this school received almost 21000 pounds sterling as its Gifted and Talented Grant.

The coordinator at this school saw her role as improving teaching and learning within the school, with particular reference to Gifted and Talented, but the fact that, as yet (2005) she had no job description. Her main role is to liaise with departments within the school to identify the mandatory 10% of any cohort as 'gifted and talented' in their individual subjects, and then to provide learning support, and enrichment activities. The criteria for selection into this cohort is initially the Standard Assessment Tests (SATs) carried out at year 6 (English Secondary Education begins in Year 7), which are the equivalent to New Zealand Progressive Achievement Tests (PATs), and this is followed by regular in school testing.

Many of these enrichment activities are organised through the cluster with schools combining facilities and resources to provide out of school enhancement and enrichment programmes, such as a summer school for young and talented cricketers, or weekend workshops in academic subjects.

The liaison with the University is important, and they will supply experts to come into the classrooms, as well as providing professional development for staff, and in the last four years School A has focussed on English, Mathematics, Science and Technology, and this has increased the pass rate for them at GSCE level 1 quite considerably.

Students at School A know that they are on the Gifted and Talented register, but the school is quite aware that they suffer from some degree of banter from their peers, and are seen as an elitist group by some teachers, who have commented to the coordinator

how difficult it is to integrate them back into the mainstream classes after they have been withdrawn for extension work, raising some of the issues identified in earlier research as realities at the grass roots level.

School B

School B is a suburban school in a large Midlands City with 620 students. It receives its student intake (Year7) from 40 'feeder' schools, and uses the SATS tests in Science, English and Mathematics to identify students as gifted at a whole year level. 10% of students are identified as gifted and talented on the following ratios: 7% are identified as gifted (English model) in academic areas, and 3% are identified as talented in Sport, Music, the Performing and Visual Arts. This sets the benchmark for the school, although Departments and parents are also able to nominate students.

School A has a strong policy of involving students and parents in the process, and parents are kept informed through meetings, and personal interviews with the coordinator, who has the same process for working with the students. Their belief in the process of identification and programming being so open makes them highly critical of schools that do not inform the parents/and or the students, and their openness seems to be an exception rather than the rule in their area. The coordinator did make the comment, however, that the school still has a problem managing the issues around elitism both amongst the students and the staff.

The school cohort list is placed in each classroom, and as well as this Departments may very well generate their own Gifted and talented list which can be at variance with the overall school list: this is not seen as a problem because the main emphasis in the teaching programmes are enhancement and enrichment not acceleration.

The coordinator at School B receives one management unit for the position, and is involved as a member of the local cluster of 5 schools, which organise area activities for the gifted and talented students, as well as masterclasses at various schools and summer schools. School B employs four mentors who are non teachers, but who are paid and work in the school full time to monitor, work with, and counsel the students on the Gifted and Talented register.

The coordinator bemoans the fact that Professional Development in the area of Gifted and Talented is very limited in the school, although the majority of teachers have come to accept it as part of school life, and at each subject network meeting (Department meeting) issues around gifted and talented learners are always on the agenda

School C

School C is an inner city girls' school of 650 students, with a very wide ethnic mix (26 languages spoken in the school), comprising mainly of Muslims and Afro-Caribbean's. There were two coordinators at this school, neither of which had an allowance for Gifted and Talented, and who did not access the funding (22500 sterling) money that they had for the provision of these learners either from the Excellence in Cities fund or the Gifted

and Talented fund directly, as this was all controlled by the headteacher, to whom they had to make application for grant money.

They were at great pains to point out the difficulties they had engaging parents and students in any type of programme, especially with the Bengali girls who were frequently required at home for house chores. The organisation of providing for Gifted and Talented learners was through the department and the coordinators saw their role as attending the meetings at area level, reporting back, liaising with department heads, and trying to arrange extra-curricular programmes along with other cluster schools.

The presentation of this school was that it was very run down and lacking in resources, a reflection perhaps of the city area it served. Certainly the staff appeared tired and worn out, although it was near the end of the school year. Nevertheless it was noticeably different in both the way the provisions for Gifted and Talented students were made, and the general attitude of staff, from whom the feeling was that it was an extra that they did not really need given the perceived social problems within the school.

School D

School D is a non-selective (Comprehensive) school in an area that has grammar schools. Although not an inner city school, School D serves an area of low socio-economic status.

The school has a radical social inclusion policy, and a wide range of options for students ranging from the most able studying and accelerated curriculum, to students for whom the national curriculum has been disapplied.

School D has a large number of Special Educational Needs (SEN) pupils, with roughly 28% of the 900 on roll being on the SEN register. Approximately 18% of students are identified through standardised tests as being 'higher able', and are in the "A" bands. Gifted and Talented students come from across the academic spectrum and children with high non verbal reasoning are specifically targeted. For example, dyslexic students are given considerable extra support, and high ability children with Asperger's are provided with laptops and given help with social skills.

There is a great deal of home-school liaison, and at the parent-teacher meetings it is the parents who set the agenda, and many parents of highly able students have picked School D ahead of neighbouring selective grammar schools, as they feel the open consultative environment provides them with a genuine stake in their child's learning, and like the philosophy of the school which is 'if they have talent we will find it'.

School E

School E describes itself as a highly inclusive school, and does not keep a formal register for Gifted and Talented students. Informal lists are, however, kept and students are

identified through year 8 transfer data, standardised tests, classroom observation and talking with parents.

The school prides itself on valuing diversity, and, in the absence of a special school in the area, has a special concern for bright pupils with behavioural difficulties, as well as learning difficulties through dyslexia, ADHD, and Asperger's Syndrome. Teachers have been trained to recognise students with specific learning difficulties, and there is little withdrawal work, and all teaching is in mixed ability classes except for Mathematics and Science.

School D and School E are interesting examples of identification of highly able students with specific learning and behavioural difficulties having their needs met through the provisions of special needs funding and the gifted and talented pool. Often in school like this the Special Needs Coordinator is also the coordinator for gifted and talented, and a great deal of time goes into working in collaboration with parents, and having regular One-on-one meetings with students to monitor progress.

School F

School F is one of 161 grammar schools left in England, and was founded in 1877, when it was opened as a girls' under an endowment made to the town in 1624. The school is described as a 'fully selective foundation grammar school' (School Prospectus), and entry is by application, followed by an entrance examination consisting of verbal and non-verbal reasoning tests.

School F is a girls' grammar school that offers a broad curriculum in both academic and cultural areas. The students are highly motivated, and because there is always a waiting list to enter, are fully aware that keeping their place at the school relies on their achievement levels. A point verified by the fact that in a summary report (July 2003) reported 0% for pupil sessions (half days) missed through unauthorised absence!!

The Headmistress commented that probably about 80% of her students would meet the criteria for entry to the National Academy for Gifted and Talented Youth, and in 2005 they formally set up a Gifted and Talented register, whereby they have opted to identify 10% of students as gifted and talented in every lesson/class not on overall school roll or through departments. This means that all staff members are directly involved in both the identification of Gifted and Talented girls within their individual classes, but also for the provision of their needs within their individual classes.

The school undertakes thorough self-review, based on the new formula being used by OFSTED, but also has a very comprehensive school development plan, and employs outside consultants to work with staff. The OFSTED report for this school was glowing:

'This is a school of outstanding high quality. Leadership is highly effective in helping pupils to aspire to excellence as scholars and as persons. Pupils and students attain the highest standards....'

It is obvious that the ideological issues of social inequity and elitism found in so many other schools in England, and reported on extensively in the research and Ministerial reports, is not an issue at School F, and the level of competition to gain entry to the grammar schools continues to reflect some of the parental anxiety around mainstream non-selective education referred to above.

School G

School G is an independent school (private) set in the rural north. It is a full boarding and day, co-educational independent senior school, and it has a selective admissions policy. The majority of students enter in Year 9 and they sit the schools' own entrance test. 'Pupils with specific learning difficulties may be accepted provided the school is able to offer the level of specialist and general assistance required. There may be a charge for learning support.' (School Prospectus).

The selective nature of the school allows it to be able to offer small classes, and the school is magnificently equipped with very up to date facilities: 'small classes, dedicated specialist teaching staff, and state of the art technology alongside personal tutors enable each pupil's progress to be accurately assessed. The aim is not just to impart knowledge but to develop critical thinking and evaluation in all our students' (ibid).

School G describes its curriculum as 'enriched' covering the national curriculum and beyond. Academic standards are high, and the issue of specifically catering for Gifted and Talented students does not really come into play, although there is a coordinator and team for special education, who provide one-to-one support for those who require it, and advise staff on appropriate teaching and learning strategies.

Summary of Schools Visited

There is a wide and rich variety of educational choices in England, and although there is a national strategy for gifted and talented in place, there are variations in the implementation of the strategy. As commented above the social equity and elitism issues are not issues in the selective schools, but do come into play quite markedly in many of the state schools who still see themselves as promoting those from disadvantaged backgrounds rather than catering for the needs of all students regardless of ability. This is compounded by the socio-cultural factors that also come into play in many of the inner city schools, where high degrees of political correctness are to be found amongst the staff. This has led to fragmentation in implementation as schools try to accommodate widely differing cultural and religious needs.

The system for the provision for Gifted and Talented is still evolving, and although the funding will still be available to schools in 2006 it will no longer be 'ring fenced' but discretionary as new programmes such as 'Aim Higher' come into effect.

A further development has been the development of specialist schools, especially sports academies. In October 2002 government funding was made available to assist in the

delivery of DfES/ Department for Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS) to implement a National Sport Strategy. The brief was twofold

- DfES/DCMS were to produce a framework for the development of a multi-agency approach centred on sports colleges, whereby responding to the needs of young people with sporting talent, thus raising their aspirations and improving their performance and self-esteem
- Plan for PE and sports focus on establishing an infrastructure by creating specialist sports colleges/academies and school sport coordinator partnerships.

This is seen as an extension of the already existing provisions for specialist schools which began in 1994 with technology colleges, arts colleges and so on. Some of these specialist schools have made use of visiting professionals to stimulate higher standards among pupils, and encourage gifted and talented students to enter for national competitions. As well as this the DCMS also funds the National Creative Partnership scheme whose purpose it is to establish coherence in the links between education and the arts organisations such as theatres and galleries.

This raises some important questions around specialisation outside of the inclusive model fostered by the English Government, but what does come across loud and clear is that the government is prepared to make available specific funding in a wide range of areas to enhance the provisions for Gifted and Talented learners, and to disseminate these funds to a regional level where they can be used for locally defined needs. This compares very favourably against the ad hoc 'do your own thing' approach within a very broad framework, as is the New Zealand case under NAG 1, the critical difference being seen, not in the amount of money available, but the coherence and integration of a set of national strategies for gifted and Talented learners.

So, despite the fact that at a classroom level teachers are responding to the needs of Gifted and Talented learners in much the same way as New Zealand teachers, through curriculum compacting and adaptation, enrichment and enhancement programmes within the classroom, and acceleration, they do so with the knowledge that funding is available, and that there is a broad spectrum of backup available. The involvement of the Local Education Authorities working closely with the coordinators through the cluster, and the services offered by the Academy don't necessarily guarantee good classroom practice, but at least provide a strong foundation for the national strategy to have the best chance of being successful.

Evaluation

In - school evaluations are carried out by the Office for Standards in Education (OFSTED) which has replaced the Inspectorate, and serves the same purpose basically as the Education Review Office does in New Zealand. Part of OFSTED's mandate is to evaluate and review the provisions and practices for catering for Gifted and Talented learners in the schools.

Central to the evaluation by OFSTED is a school's self review which is a lengthy and time consuming process involving classroom observations, schemes of work, personal

interviews with Heads of Department, accountability reports, and reflective practice, all of which have to be documented prior to the OFSTED visit.

For the purpose of this review OFSTED have produced a self-evaluation form

‘To get the greatest benefit from inspection, headteachers and governing bodies will need to ensure that their school has undertaken an objective evaluation of its performance, identified priorities for improvement and set achievable targets. Ofsted’s SEF provides schools with the means of capturing the findings of their self evaluation.’

(A New Relationship with Schools: Improving Performance through Self Evaluation: Department for Education and Skills, 2004).

A significant part of this review is the provision for Gifted and Talented learners within the school, and the means whereby these provisions are met.

Several important issues have emerged from OFSTED’s monitoring of these provisions

- The importance of engaging parents and pupils: parents should be consulted and able to share in events. The same applies to pupils. Students need to understand the rationale behind the approach and its intended outcomes, so that their active engagement and endeavour are fully enlisted.
- Developing subject-specific approaches. It was found that many schools have yet to work out how they can improve mainstream subject practice for high ability students
- Schools need to make the best of additional provisions such as summer schools and masterclasses, which can offer stimulating and highly enjoyable experiences for both teachers and students
- Involving students directly in evaluating their own progress and contributing to future targets

OFSTED also found that most schools visited in the survey ‘Providing for Gifted and Talented pupils: An Evaluation of Excellence in Cities and other Grant-funded Programmes’ (HMI 334), ‘have not yet developed effective systems to monitor the additional improvements are intended to promote’, and recommended that senior managers needed to interpret data on attainment and behaviour to find out which groups of students are successful, and in which departments, so that increasing improvement can be planned for.

As part of this evaluation, OFSTED also assess the role of the LEAs (Local MOE offices) in the provision for Gifted and Talented, with the inspection team looking for

- Detailed attention in the LEAs audits and plans to address any weaknesses in G&T provision in the schools
- An LEA management team that is able to develop effective partnership with schools, and that has the capacity to exert a positive influence on developments in schools
- The identification by the LEAs of a good level of expertise in G&T issues to which schools can gain access

- The range of partnerships with other LEAs, voluntary organisations, private schools, etc. aimed at strengthening the current provisions
(See 'Inspection Toolkit Example' Appendix 3)

As part of its brief on Gifted and Talented educational provisions, OFSTED also evaluates the National Academy's programmes. In its report ('National Academy for Gifted and Talented Youth: Summer Schools 2003', HMI 2073, May 2004) evaluated 25 programmes centred on Canterbury Christ Church University College, and the universities of Durham, Exeter, Warwick and York. Ten of the programmes were provided at the University of Warwick, and each school lasted three weeks.

Each summer school was visited, and OFSTED evaluated one of the programmes in depth, and others more generally, focussing on the quality of staff, course planning and management, the teaching and the learning, and the suitability of the staffing, resources, accommodation, and pastoral care. The main findings of these visits are summarised

- The students felt that they were very successful, and most made substantial progress both in their understanding and learning, and their self-esteem
- The quality of learning was very good, much of this being in response to effective teaching which kept the students motivated
- The quality of teaching varied, but most was 'at least good and some was excellent'. In the best sessions, expert tutors used their subject knowledge well, and captured the interest of the students. Good use was also made of visiting specialist and visits to places of interest
- The pastoral care of students was good, and health and safety were given high priority
- The quality of assessment and reporting varied, and reports on students generally did not provide sufficient information to their schools on what they had learned, or what they might tackle next when they returned to school.

As a result of this OFSTED made the following recommendations

- The academy should investigate why students numbers were low and to take steps to ensure that all gifted pupils know about and have access to the summer school programme (only 500 in 2003), but 40% of the students came from LEAs with Excellence in Cities programmes, which reflects the high profile given to the education of gifted and talented in those areas
- The academy needs to ensure that the teachers are effective in their approach to teaching the age-groups and types of students attending
- Assessment and reporting needs to improve to provide later continuity

Later reports on the summer schools report improvements in these areas (10 March 2005), and in 2004 all 1050 places at summer schools were filled.

These evaluation visits by OFSTED to secondary schools, and to the work of the Academy continue to stress the commitment of the government to continuous improvement in the area of provision for gifted and talented. The situation is definitely a work in progress, but schools are certainly left in no confusion as to their role in these

provisions and the expectations placed upon them. There are many disparities still to be found between theory and practice in some English schools, but the National Strategy and self-reviews provide a good framework for these gaps to be plugged. Many of the disparities remain both political and philosophical in nature, particularly in relation to the specific identification of a group as 'gifted and talented' and the making of special provision for this group which, by many, is still constructed as elitist. Campbell et al (2005) provide a satisfactory conclusion to this matter:

'It is not being claimed that the social inclusion agenda in relation to gifted and talented students has been achieved, since we will not have direct evidence for that until the cohort completes its secondary schooling. What is being claimed is that insofar as comparisons can be drawn with proportions of social and ethnic groups performance in other data sources, it is a reasonable hypothesis that the policy on identifying gifted and talented students seems to be more inclusive.....(schools) need to provide the guidance support and action needed to sustain these students through the school system and into university...It will be a major test of the efficacy of the English model' (ibid. p15).

Discussion

This report reflects research into one country's solution to the provision of educational programmes for Gifted and Talented students. This solution is based on an explicitly ideological position by the government, which has shown a strong commitment to raising the awareness of the needs of the gifted and talented students at all levels of the social strata. This has been achieved through the setting of targets, and the creation of a fully funded infrastructure that appears to be both coherent and integrated.

England has opted for a national definition of 'gifted and talented' which raises its own questions. This model is quite opposite to the position in New Zealand, which relies on individual school/community based definitions, which can be seen as problematic as there is no clear 'road map' to follow. Many schools surveyed by Riley (2004) made comments that centred on "the provision of professional development, with the aim of creating a shared philosophy and vision, the procurement of support from the school administration and Board of Trustees, the continued education of staff via research related professional reading, and targeted school-based funding for gifted initiatives" (ibid. p20). This is a significant point of difference between the provisions in England and those in New Zealand, where, as noted above, funding is not targeted to launch gifted and talented education, but is included in the Special Education provisions under NAG 1, and so lack of resources, time and funding are seen as barriers (ibid. p20).

There are, however, some significant similarities between the two systems. For example, many of the in-class programmes are based on well tried techniques such as differentiation, acceleration, enrichment, and enhancement, although in the secondary system it is generally recognised that many staff have some difficulties with multi-level teaching in the inclusive classroom.

Again, there is a significant point of difference in the two systems, in as much as most New Zealand secondary schools seem to be working in an isolated, uncoordinated way, in many respects each 'inventing its own wheel' within a broad set of guiding principles, with little leadership from the government through the establishment of a national strategy, targeted funding, and a pooling of resources. As is seen in the research, the setting up of the National Academy for Gifted and Talented Youth has been a critical factor in establishing a leadership base from which all else can build, including the Local Educational Authorities' direct involvement with schools through the cluster system. There are those, who may prefer the autonomy of the 'do it yourself approach' arguing that it meets the needs of, and applies to, one community and not another, but one has to ask questions regarding consistency in monitoring and evaluation, and whether the focus for the outcomes is local, national, or international.

From the research carried out on this sabbatical several recommendations can be made that are relevant to secondary schools in the New Zealand setting.

- Develop a school ethos where academic and creative achievement is expected and celebrated
- Be open with parents/caregivers and pupils about what the school is trying to do, and actively enlist their support and involvement (Riley notes that the reported involvement in the overall organisation and coordination, identification and provisions for gifted and talented students in New Zealand schools is minimal, whilst in England the National Association of Gifted Children stresses that this was found to be a key component through its research)
- Adopt a management structure which involves all departments and ensures sufficient authority for the coordinator and team to work effectively to influence classroom practice
- Use careful analysis of data on pupil performance, and their approaches to learning in subjects as a basis for effective identification
- Work on developing a variety of assessment strategies within subjects so that teachers become more adept at recognising latent ability
- Work in conjunction with local schools and community organisers to pool resources and expertise, using specialists within the group
- Have a programme of systematic monitoring as a basis for evaluating the effectiveness of the provisions made, with a view to continued self improvement
- Create effective partnerships with tertiary institutions to expand the level of potential resources and expertise
- To create secure online forums and e-learning opportunities to increase the range of student-student interaction

Conclusion

It is appreciated that many of the issues raised are of a philosophical nature, and need to be debated further. This debate should be informed by ongoing research rather than just ideology. It is generally recognised that the debate is as yet still in its infancy, and as Riley (2004) comments ‘there is a paucity of reported national and international research which evaluates the effectiveness of provisions for gifted and talented students in relation to social, cultural, emotional, creative, and intellectual outcomes (ibid p21).

It is hoped that the introduction of the ‘English model’ in this paper will add to the debate, and inform further research and debate. There is no ‘perfect’ approach, and as already discussed there are many similarities: it is the differences however that makes a difference, and much of these rest, on what are perceived to be differing political and social agendas.

As one of Riley’s research subjects comments:

“It’s a long journey and we ain’t there yet!”

Lyn Sneddon
May 2006

Bibliography

Campbell, R.J., Eyre, D., Muijs, R.D., Neelands, J.G.A., and Robinson, W. (2005) The Social Origins of Students Identified as Gifted and Talented in England: a Geo-Demographic Analysis. Occasional Paper 2. National Academy for Gifted and Talented Youth, University of Warwick, Coventry

Department of Education and Science (1978) Primary Education in England: an HMI Survey London

Department for Education and Skills (2002) Excellence in Cities, Schools Extending Excellence Annual Report 2000-01 Nottingham

Education Gazette 22 March 2004 Wellington

Eyre, D (1997) Able Children in Ordinary Schools London: David Fulton

Freeman, J. (1995) Review of Current Thinking on the Development of Talent in Freeman, J (ed) Actualising Talent London: Stationary Office

House of Commons (1999) Education and Employment Committee, 3rd Report Highly Able Children London: HMSO

HMI (1992) The Education of Very Able Children in Maintained Schools: a Review by HM Inspectorate London: HMSO

Ministry of Education (2000) Gifted and Talented Students: Meeting their Needs in New Zealand Schools Wellington: Learning Media

Ministry of Education (2002) Initiatives in Gifted and Talented Education Ministry of Education: Wellington

Office for Standards in Education (2001) Providing for Gifted and Talented Pupils: An Evaluation of Excellence in Cities and Other Grant-Funded Programmes HMI Report 334 London

Office for Standards in Education (2004) National Academy for Gifted and Talented Youth: Summer Schools 2003 HMI Report 2073 London

Office for Standards in Education (2004) A New Relationship with Schools: Improving Performance through Self-Evaluation Department for Education and Skills London

Riley, T., Bevan-Brown, J., Bicknell, B., Carroll-Lind, J., and Kearney, A. (2004) The Extent, Nature and Effectiveness of Planned Approaches in New Zealand Schools for Providing for Gifted and Talented Students: Report to the Ministry of Education Massey University, Palmerston North

Sneddon, L.J. (2005) Personal Interviews

