



New Zealand Centre
for Gifted Education

Empowering Extraordinary Minds



Top Tips for Teachers: Finding Your Gifted Learners

Gifted learners are a priority group in the [Learning Support Action Plan](#). All schools are required to identify this group of students so that they can meet their needs. But finding those gifted learners can be tricky! We've put together some top tips to help you.

It's a brain thing

Giftedness is a neurological difference - gifted kids are just wired differently. We see gifted kids as:

Those with innate high abilities, along with particular personal qualities, that can be seen in one or more domains - intellectual, first and foremost, and also creative, cultural, social, spiritual or physical.

What all gifted kids share are advanced intellectual abilities - things like reasoning, abstraction, making connections and thinking with depth.

You can also see their high abilities across other domains too. For example, in the creative domain you might see gifted kids who shine in generating ideas, making unusual or unexpected connections between ideas and in their originality and flexibility of thinking. In the cultural domain, you may see gifted kids with advanced skills in culturally-specific areas like kapa haka, whaikorero or oratory. In the social domain, you may see gifted kids with acute social awareness, those who seem to have their finger on the pulse of the group, or those with natural leadership abilities.

Focus on potential not achievements

Not all gifted students have been in environments where their gifts have been identified and supported. That means that not all of them have translated their potential into achievements, particularly in what counts at school.

Look for characteristics

Here are some examples of characteristics that might help you spot intellectual giftedness in a student. If you are noticing some of these characteristics, pay attention to those and dig a little deeper.

Intellectual Characteristics

Is quick to pick up new ideas	<i>Seems to learn by magic, without real effort, is one step ahead of others, doesn't seem to need or enjoy when things are repeated.</i>
Enjoys intellectual challenge	<i>Loves learning new things that are at that 'just-right' level of hard - you will notice them really enjoying themselves in this zone!</i>
Thinks quickly	<i>Seems to be a step ahead, can see what's coming next, wants things to move on quickly, might get frustrated when you slow things down</i>
Recalls information easily	<i>Remembers things easily and quite unexpectedly. Might say things like 'but last month you said that...' May have an encyclopedic recall of knowledge in areas of passion.</i>
Has a large knowledge base	<i>Could be a source of endless trivia and can happily spout off endless 'fun facts'.</i>
Monopolises or dominates discussion	<i>Might talk a LOT and string together sentences and ideas without seeming to pause for breath. Might want or prefer to have all the 'floor space' in a group or class discussion.</i>
Uses verbal skills to manipulate situations	<i>Might have a clever 'answer for everything'. Might deliberately take figurative expressions literally or vice versa. May love to debate over everything to flex those verbal muscles, so can come across as argumentative.</i>
Appears to be showing off	<i>Might be really whole-heartedly passionate about particular topics and really wants to share knowledge with others. Might want to celebrate or just share their own high or interesting achievements but comes across as bragging.</i>

Look for who's hiding

Gifted learners will often be 'hiding in plain sight'. Here are a few common ways that our gifted learners may 'hide' and some ways you might recognise this:

- **Covert:** Just seems to quietly gets on with things, may be shy or introverted, or may even deliberately under-perform to fit in. This is really common for gifted girls and gifted kids from minority groups. .
- **Challenging:** May have actively disruptive behaviour that interferes with classroom life. You might see 'flashes of brilliance' in between the tricky behaviour.
- **Under- or Selective Achiever:** You notice a big difference between achievement on written tasks (which is low) and what you can tell about their learning from watching and talking with them. May also be anxious about 'failure' and procrastinate a lot with written work. But when really interested, can achieve very highly.
- **Twice-exceptional:** These are gifted learners who have another neurological, physical or sensory exceptionality (eg dyslexia, ADHD). This may mask giftedness and cause big differences between potential and actual performance. May also be anxious about 'failure' and procrastinate a lot with written work.

- **Visual/Spatial:** Seems to think in pictures rather than words. Seems to do better with complex rather than easy tasks. Really shines in hands-on tasks rather than written work - often gifted kids who are struggling with written expression are overlooked because they are not 'demonstrating' abilities in written work although they can demonstrate them in other ways.

Look together

As teachers you know your students well. It's also important to remember that other people know them well too - parents, past teachers, specialist teachers, kaumatua, peers, specialist tutors and other professionals such as psychologists and RTLBs. Work together with all concerned to identify gifted learners. When parents describe a completely different child at home to what you see at school, this is worth thinking through quite carefully.

And now?

Using the information you have collected from a wide range of sources, it's important to move from just finding your gifted learners to then actively providing for your gifted learners. At NZCGE we offer a range of specialist programmes for students, as well as supports for teacher professional learning - find out more [here](#).

Whāngai ka tupu ka puawai. That which is nurtured, blossoms then grows.