



New Zealand Centre
for Gifted Education
Empowering Extraordinary Minds

What to look for in a quality school-based gifted education programme



New Zealand schools are required by the Government's National Administration Guidelines to identify their gifted and talented students and to develop classroom and school-wide programmes to meet their needs.

A number of schools in New Zealand provide high-quality specialist support to their gifted students. But all gifted education programmes are not equal, and it's worth parents checking in on these areas.

Identification

Some schools may identify their gifted kids primarily by ability testing or by their current academic performance. We know though that many gifted kids will not show up well in these tests and that those who do test highly are not necessarily gifted but just high achievers and/ or hard workers. Ask the school whether it also includes kids who are not currently performing but where potential is recognised.

Acceleration

Some schools focus mainly on accelerating gifted students - moving them up a whole year, or having students work with another year group for some subjects. These are just a couple of ways that schools can accelerate the learning of gifted learners - there are many other ways as well that you can explore with your school. But when acceleration is just 'going faster', without any other changes, it might only be a small part of the overall

educational picture for gifted kids. Our gifted learners like to go deeper, to think differently and to ask those really big questions, and those needs may not be well met by just 'going faster'. Ask what other options are available alongside acceleration.

Accelerate class

Some schools group gifted students together in an accelerate class for all their work. This can be a good way of seeking to bring together like minds and ensure that learning meets the needs of gifted kids in every class every day. But gifted kids often show very asynchronous development - for example a child who is 5 years above her peers in maths but who struggles to read. Does the gifted class assume that gifted kids are at a high level across all subjects?

Another issue is social. Does your child want to be part of the gifted class all the time, or do they prefer not to have that label every day. A more flexible approach to grouping gifted kids may be a better way to meet their needs.

One-off extension activities

Some schools support gifted kids by offering a range of extension activities for groups of kids - taking creative writers to the Readers & Writers Festival; working with budding scientists on a Science Fair entry. These can be wonderful, memorable and influential experiences for our gifted kids.

What you will definitely want to hear about with your school is how they differentiate learning for gifted students on a daily basis. Does the school ensure that all its teachers understand and have the ability to differentiate learning in a way that is appropriate for gifted learners?

A really common misunderstanding is that gifted kids just need more work and at a higher level - "Extra for Experts". The reality is that gifted kids don't need more - they need different work that recognises their need to go deeper and wider, to ask big conceptual questions, to research independently, to follow their passions. How does the school support its teachers to achieve that?

Like minds

Gifted kids need like minds at school. Why? Every child needs to have a 'crew' around them - kids who think like them, get them, and can make friends with. Does your school bring their gifted kids

together in a way that builds these connections, or does it focus more on extending individual children?

Social and emotional skills

Gifted kids need support with social and emotional skills. Coaching our gifted kids to understand their intense selves and to respond to their own worries and niggles then helps our gifted kids to relate better to others and to make and keep friends. Does your school's programme help kids with these skills, or focus only on their academic achievement?

Staff capability building

Gifted kids need to be seen and understood. What looks like acting out, low effort, dreaminess, oppositional behaviour and anxiety may just be a gifted kid struggling to be understood. What efforts has the school made to ensure that all its teachers understand that gifted children think and learn very differently from neurotypical children?

To learn more about gifted kids and the MindPlus programmes we offer for students and for schools, check out our website at nzcge.nz or get in touch at hello@nzcge.co.nz or 0800 769 243.

