EVALUATION OF EXCELLENCE IN CITIES PRIMARY EXTENSION

A Report of the Gifted and Talented Strand Study

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1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background

Excellence in Cities (EiC) is a major policy aimed at improving schools in urban areas. Phase 1 was launched in 1999 in 25 LEAs. Within each LEA, EiC is delivered through a Partnership comprising the LEA and all the secondary schools. EiC was extended to further LEAs in 2000 and 2001. At the same time as the launch of the second phase, EiC was extended to about half the primary schools in Phase 1 Partnerships. This Primary Extension included the three main EiC Strands: Learning Mentors (LM), primary Learning Support Units (LSU), and provision for gifted and talented pupils. All primary schools involved in the EiC Primary Extension received funding for the LM Strand but only a sample was resourced for the Gifted and Talented Strand and for LSU provision. The aim of the Gifted and Talented Strand was to provide schools with additional resources to identify the most able pupils (defined as the top five to ten per cent of pupils within each school) and to support the teaching and learning of these pupils.

The research reported here focused in detail on the implementation and operation of the Gifted and Talented Strand in eight primary schools.

1.2 Evaluating the Primary Extension

In 2000, the Department for Education and Skills (DfES) commissioned a consortium comprising the National Foundation for Educational Research (NFER), London School of Economics (LSE) and Institute for Fiscal Studies (IFS) to evaluate EiC. The national evaluation of the EiC Primary Extension aims to evaluate the overall processes and impact of the policy and of the individual Strands. The evaluation is a longitudinal study based on the analysis of data collected from four main sources:

- interviews with EiC Partnership Coordinators
- case studies of EiC provision in schools, involving a detailed focus on work associated with the three EiC Strands (Learning Mentors, Gifted and Talented, and Learning Support Units)
- large-scale surveys of headteachers, teachers and pupils
- relevant secondary data sources, notably the Pupil Level Annual Schools Census (PLASC).

The aims of the Gifted and Talented case studies were:

♦ to identify and evaluate the impact of the Strand from the perspective of the schools involved.

♦ to explore the processes used in schools to implement and develop the Gifted and Talented Strand.

♦ to identify and explore the challenges faced by schools implementing the Strand and to explore issues such as sustainability.

1.3   Research Design

Visits were made to eight schools in April and May 2003, two schools were selected from each of four Partnerships. The schools were selected to represent a range of characteristics in terms of attainment, size of school roll and level of entitlement to free school meals. Appendix 1 shows the relevant characteristics of these schools.

A series of in-depth, semi-structured, face-to-face interviews was conducted with key staff in each school, including the headteacher, Responsible Teacher[1] for gifted and talented pupils and, where available, class teachers. Issues explored included:

♦ role and background of the Responsible Teacher

♦ training and support

♦ school background

♦ identification of the gifted and talented cohort

♦ provision for gifted and talented pupils

♦ monitoring and evaluation

♦ collaboration within the Partnership

♦ perceived outcomes of the Gifted and Talented Strand

♦ overall perceptions of the Strand.

In addition, one or two group interviews of about half an hour were carried out in each school with Year 5 and Year 6 pupils identified as part of the gifted and talented cohort: some of the groups were mixed year groups while others were separate. Issues explored with the pupils included:

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[1]   DfES guidance suggested that each school should appoint a Responsible Teacher to coordinate the Strand within the school.

- attitudes towards school, school work and activity
- Strand-related activity internal and external to the school
- how the Strand had been introduced to the pupils
- perceptions of the outcomes of the gifted and talented programme
- the attitudes of their peers following identification as gifted and talented.

1.4   Overview of findings

There was evidence from all case study schools that there had been a positive response from schools involved in the Gifted and Talented Strand. Involvement in the initiative was perceived by participants to have affected outcomes in terms of raising standards of attainment in the schools involved (and not just among the target group – the most able) and enhancing pedagogy, aspirations and expectations amongst, variously, pupils, parents and staff. The fact that whole school effects were mentioned, in addition to effects on the target group (which in most of the schools represented a very small number of pupils – sometimes as few as three pupils in each of Years 5 and 6) may be attributable to the fact that curriculum planning and assessment policies in primary schools tend to be more unified than in secondary schools. Additionally, in primary schools staff are more aware of what goes on in others' classrooms, generally know most of the pupil roll and are more accustomed to teaching mixed-ability groups (although streaming and setting were in evidence in some cases). Most of the Responsible Teachers in the schools visited were either members of the Senior Management Team or were experienced teachers presently working with Year 6 pupils but having previously taught throughout the school. This meant that they were able to see how provision for pupils identified as gifted and talented both influenced, and was influenced by, the whole curriculum. Furthermore, it was reported that schools not in the Gifted and Talented Strand had nevertheless been influenced by development in schools involved in the Primary Extension and had enhanced their provision. There was some evidence, thus, that the Gifted and Talented Strand may have been more inclusive, and had potential for greater impact, than when initially implemented in secondary schools.

2. SETTING THE CONTEXT

2.1 Identification of pupils and inclusion in the register

All schools visited were cognisant of the EiC definition – by percentage of pupil cohort – for inclusion of pupils in the gifted and talented register. Equally, all used a wide repertoire of means of identification, selecting from: end-of-key stage one assessment, voluntary assessment tests, other screening tests, teacher assessment and observation, analysis of pupils' work, pupil self-identification of interest, peer nomination, parental input (such as information on their children's out-of-school interests). Teachers were reluctant to think of registers as static or fixed, on account of pupils who 'arrived late' or who needed a challenge. Giving the right opportunities for pupils to demonstrate their potential was considered important.

There was evidence that a fairly pragmatic attitude was taken towards the gifted and talented register. It was usually at the convenience of the school rather than something which influenced the organisation of the school. In one school, for example, teachers were not asked to identify pupils till mid-year so that they had had time to get to know them and compile an informative account of their respective strengths. In another case, the register was considered useful for targeting certain pupils who might otherwise be neglected but '*the registered ones are only one aspect of what we want to do*'. This targeted group of pupils was one of many; focusing on this group had helped teachers think more generally about effective pupil grouping and the use of teaching time: '*It is about teachers thinking about targeted groups*'. One Responsible Teacher described how, initially, staff at the school had laughed at the idea of there being gifted and talented pupils on roll – they had assumed that this was incompatible with being a low-achieving school in a very challenging area. However, after the Responsible Teacher had presented an INSET session, colleagues began to realise that the gifted and talented pupils might be among the underachieving, attention-seeking and disruptive pupils.

All schools were driven by the desire to raise standards of achievement for all. The main objective for the gifted and talented cohort was to increase the proportion of pupils achieving level 5 or 6 at key stage 2. Most of the case study schools referred to hard data showing that this was occurring. However, attention was drawn by interviewees to the relativity of the EiC definition of gifted and talented. While the contextual definition – five to ten per cent of the school roll – encouraged differentiation in the classroom, it created problems when a child moved out of the

school – as the evaluation of the secondary Strand indicated (see Pocklington *et al*, 2002). A member of staff in one of the case study schools spoke of how a mother and daughter were disappointed, on moving to another school in a more advantaged authority, to find that the girl was only 'average', whereas she had been in the top five to ten per cent at her previous school.

Responsible teachers and headteachers were keenly aware that there was a staff development challenge in encouraging staff to distinguish between 'more capable' and 'gifted and talented'. Another headteacher stressed the importance of INSET from the, in her words, *'excellent'* LEA staff who provided support for the school, commenting that they helped her staff move from identification as *'the most capable in my class'* to children who were *'above and beyond'* normal expectations, had a very real flair for and interest in one or more areas, and would continue to make progress (*'they have no plateau'*). A Responsible Teacher in another school made the same point about going further than *'the better pupils'*. The focus on gifted and talented helped teachers to see what they needed to do to challenge pupils rather than give them *'ten more sums'* or *'more of the same'*.

2.2   Training and support for schools

Most of the schools had received some training, particularly those where the Responsible Teacher had had the opportunity to participate in the national training. Perceptions of the national training were mixed: some considered it useful, while others did not, reporting that it was *'not well taught'*, *'not very interesting'*, *'irrelevant'*, regretting the lack of practical ideas and application and commenting that it seemed to ignore not only any assessment of the local context but also the very different situations in which participating schools found themselves. A headteacher in a school where two members of staff had been through the national training doubted that it represented value-for-money and also made a point about its sustainable value for schools. While it was useful for the individual, it made them attractive on the job market in an area of high teacher mobility so it was difficult to retain in the school the expertise gained by the individual.

Local training also varied from the non-existent to what was regarded as excellent support. To some extent this may have been attributable to the previous history of provision for the more able or gifted and talented in the authority: in some cases, for example, there were established activities for more able pupils which predated

Excellence in Cities. The pupils identified as gifted and talented within the EiC Strand were thus embraced by this activity (which was not always necessarily confined to them).

Some local (Partnership or LEA) Coordinators were highly respected by staff in the schools visited: they were reported to be an excellent source of ideas and guidance. Local meetings were worth attending and focused, very practically, on meeting needs and providing challenge. There were indications that Coordinators had learned from experience and developed more effective ways of working since the Strand was first introduced. One headteacher said that, initially, it felt like a *'them and us'* situation whereby the Coordinator told his Responsible Teacher that she ought to tell him (the headteacher) what he was to do and made assumptions that any additional activity must have positive outcome, but that it was now a more developmental, collaborative process.

Other Coordinators were reported to be '*of doubtful worth*' and had not addressed issues of input and outcome. One headteacher commented that local gifted and talented meetings were of poor quality, unfocused and did not have an agenda. He noted that, from these meetings, it was apparent that the primary schools participating in the Gifted and Talented Strand were using the resources in very different ways. While his school regarded implementation as a whole school issue, others thought of it in terms of one-off opportunities and resources. As pointed out before, the case study sample on which this report is based was small (eight schools), but this suggests this issue needs to be investigated on a broader scale.

There was evidence that training (either external or from the Responsible Teacher within the school) was deemed most successful where it focused on effective differentiation. Where this happened, general teaching skills were being enhanced so that all pupils ultimately benefited – not just those identified as gifted and talented. Whereas there was, in some cases, a feeling of 'elitism' in the implementation of the Strand in secondary schools (see e.g. Edmonds *et al*, 2003; Kendall 2003), this was not apparent in the primary schools visited; this was in no small way as a result of the approach to provision. Training and professional development for the Strand in primary schools was regarded as a way of '*pulling up all teachers*' and '*focusing on the positives of differentiation,*' and involved '*the sharing of excellence*'. As regards the mode of training, cases where the local gifted and talented coordinator came into school to take model/demonstration lessons were particularly appreciated, these

sessions could be '*absorbed into the curriculum*' as teachers can utilise what they had observed in their own teaching.

As the EiC primary schools visited were all in areas of social disadvantage, teacher mobility was higher than the national average. This issue was referred to in the case study schools: the positive aspect on recruitment and retention is pointed out below but, nevertheless, the need for on-going training in the light of Responsible Teachers moving on elsewhere was noted. Furthermore, there was an additional challenge for the Responsible Teachers in the schools as regards the on-going training of colleagues: newly appointed staff might not necessarily have previously worked in a school which identified the needs of this cohort of pupils.

Succession planning was referred to in several schools. In one school it was approached by sending a prospective Responsible Teacher to the national training so that she could take over the role when the present post-holder retired, elsewhere it was approached via requiring all teachers to assume similar responsibility for gifted and talented pupils as they would with pupils with special educational needs. In this way, it was argued, ownership would be shared, rather than assumed to rest with the Responsible Teacher. One headteacher thought that having a designated Responsible Teacher could give the message that provision for gifted and talented pupils was 'bolt-on', unless the post-holder worked closely with colleagues.

Some secondary school gifted and talented coordinators liaise with their new primary school colleagues but they did not always seem to play any significant part in their training. While this may have been a factor of time available, the potential for greater collaboration could be explored in the future. In one case study authority, there was a meeting of Coordinators cross-phase but it was reported that '*as yet there are no systems* [for collaboration]' – though it was thought that these would develop in time. Equally, the input from Beacon schools (as they were then known) – where applicable – was variable and both positive and negative relations were reported.

2.3　The influence of the headteacher in establishing the Gifted and Talented Strand in whole school planning

The headteachers in the schools visited were all committed to the Gifted and Talented Strand. Given that the schools involved in the Gifted and Talented Strand were a subset of those in the Primary Extension, which was in itself a sample of schools in the Partnerships, this is, perhaps, unsurprising: participating schools had, generally,

made a positive opt-in to the activity and/or had been specially selected. Thus, findings must been regarded with caution in that they might not apply to a broader range of schools.

A few headteachers had taken direct responsibility for the Strand by being the Responsible Teachers; while most had selected a member of staff to fulfil this role. Generally, headteachers felt that they themselves would not have the time to undertake the role effectively: for example, a newly appointed headteacher knew that there were other priorities in the school which only the headteacher could address and trusted a colleague to coordinate the Gifted and Talented Strand. There was evidence that they had assessed the development of the Strand in their school and had allocated responsibility in the light of contextual factors such as the Responsible Teacher's potential for influencing colleagues and other curriculum needs in the school. In one school where the headteacher was also the Responsible Teacher, a key stage leader commented that the fact that the headteacher had not delegated responsibility was a negative factor as '*nothing is passed down*'.

Figure 1: Example of a Responsible Teacher's role

In one school, responsibility had initially been allocated to a class teacher but, because she was full-time with her class and also, as is common in primary schools, had additional curriculum coordination/leadership responsibility, she had very limited opportunities to influence colleagues. The school had a full-time, non class-based special educational needs coordinator. The headteacher was then able to establish a management post which incorporated this special education responsibility with oversight for assessment and inclusion. The post-holder had a school-wide view on progress and achievement and was, thus, in a strong position to take on responsibility for gifted and talented pupils. The post-holder had, hitherto, been a very successful supply teacher at the school and had a proven track record of working effectively in the classroom. The headteacher referred to the post as '*one management job with a lot of practical tracking input*' and one which, they hoped, would give '*forward thrust to achievement*'.

Thus, in this case, provision for gifted and talented pupils was embedded within whole school procedures for monitoring and assessment. As an innovation, it was not 'bolt-on'. The headteacher commented that the new post was significant insofar as, previously, only the headteacher had this overview.

Responsible Teachers who had experienced different headteachers, with different levels of commitment, spoke of the fact that it was much easier to make provision effectively where the headteacher was committed and facilitated provision becoming a whole-school issue.

3.   OUTCOMES AND IMPACT

3.1   Curriculum development generated by participation in the Strand

Involvement in the Strand gave the opportunity for practitioners to meet with others, attend training and accompany pupils to activities run by subject specialists and staff in higher education, for example, thus exposing them to a wide repertoire of pedagogic approaches. However, much of the change in classroom teaching reported in the case study schools seemed to come from the way in which the Strand was managed – in particular, the way in which it was embedded within whole school curriculum planning. Again, this feature appeared strongly in the case study primary schools in a way which it did not in secondary schools when EiC was implemented (see Edmonds *et al*, 2003 and Kendall 2003). It was noticeable that the more senior teachers interviewed were all conversant with the principles of gifted and talented provision within their school and, in some cases, were as *au fait* as the Responsible Teacher with practical teaching issues. The Responsible Teacher was, thus, in some cases, not *'a lone voice'*. As stated before, the schools visited can not be assumed to be representative of all schools nor even of all schools in the Primary Extension. Implementation of the Gifted and Talented Strand may present more challenges in different contexts.

There were examples where the Responsible Teacher was working with colleagues to incorporate provision for gifted and talented pupils into their general planning. Again, it is important to note that the particular Responsible Teachers interviewed often had whole school responsibility/authority apart from the gifted and talented coordination, e.g. as deputy head.

Figure 2: Examine of Responsible Teacher coordination

One post-holder, who was a recent appointee and therefore had had no training, was trying to incorporate all the specialist out-of-school work which the gifted and talented pupils were doing (they had a regular cluster session) into the school planning. She monitored lesson plans, talked to pupils about their perceptions of the curriculum and, on the half-day a week allocated for the coordination work, looked at pupils' work. The post-holder was keen to accompany the gifted and talented group and sit in on their special sessions so that she could subsequently feed back ideas to colleagues at the school.

At this school, one-off events were determined from scrutiny of the curriculum and identified pupil needs. For example, there might be a session related to a core curriculum subject, or another which addressed pupils' social needs.

This Responsible Teacher commented that she had excellent support for her work from the headteacher and the governors.

Another Responsible Teacher said that her original allocation of one afternoon per month had been augmented to one half day per week. She had started off '*with lots of meetings and school visits*' and then focused on extending the curriculum in the school. A third Responsible Teacher reflected on the way that the role had enhanced her own professional development as it had involved more monitoring, planning, and classroom observation which was '*interesting for me – I get to see the big picture*'.

Monitoring and evaluation

There was evidence, from what Responsible Teachers said in the case study schools, that the monitoring of the progress of gifted and talented pupils was informing pedagogic planning. Sometimes this was on a weekly basis. At one school, 'highly able' pupils had had individual education plans to address their 'special needs' prior to the implementation of the Gifted and Talented Strand, so the idea of regular review and target-setting was not innovative for these pupils. Monitoring was also sufficiently effective to pick up individual anomalies: a Responsible Teacher commented that she identified a gifted and talented pupil who was regressing. However, this interviewee did comment that she did not think that she was doing anything particularly unique in the school: '*If I weren't here [as Responsible Teacher], it wouldn't mean that these pupils were not catered for. The school would do this anyway.*' She made the point that there was an implicit assumption in Excellence in Cities that gifted and talented pupils were not reaching their potential. She felt that, in her particular school, this cohort had always been well provided for: the Strand merely reinforced established good practice. Another school in the same authority commented that they had always grouped by ability and had held booster classes for the most able prior to EiC ,while a third school commented that the value to them of the Strand resources was being able to extend what they had previously done .

Where provision for gifted and talented pupils was part of the school's Improvement Action Plan, there was a knock-on effect for all pupils.

Figure 3: Example of gifted and talented planning

In one school, the headteacher (who was also the Responsible Teacher) was, for strategic reasons, reluctant to quantify the time spent on provision for pupils who were gifted and talented, believing that it was part of routine school planning, as was provision for pupils with special educational needs. In her school, all provision was embraced within the planning of the five curriculum teams, who looked across both key stage 1 and key stage 2 and tracked pupils thought to be gifted and talented right from nursery. The senior managers monitored all planning, and gifted and talented provision was part of that process. It was also in the pupils' Work Review schedule,

which involved sampling and comparing pupils' work. The headteacher welcomed the specific EiC thrust on gifted and talented as it had helped teachers' classroom management; however, she pointed out that differentiation for the most highly able was an expectation of teachers at the school, rather than an additional activity.

Grouping and setting

In one school, the potential of the Gifted and Talented Strand for whole school development was so clear as to prompt the headteacher to plan for a Responsible Teacher for both key stage 1 and key stage 2. Furthermore, on account of greater differentiation at key stage 2 and the consequent extension of the range of achievement, the headteacher was regrouping pupils in Years 5 and 6. Previously, there had been three groups in each year; these took account of pupils with particular special educational needs, for which the school was specially resourced although it took an inclusive approach to these pupils. The headteacher was now considering having five groups spanning Years 5 and 6. Another school was considering alternative grouping as it was reported that year 5 pupils were outperforming year 6 pupils.

One Responsible Teacher interviewed reflected on the way that the implementation of the Strand had developed in her school. She reported that she was now doing far less specific project work with a discrete group of pupils and was instead working with whole year groups. As a gifted and talented pupil 'expert', she was delivering the Strand within year group work.

Figure 4: Example of grouping strategy

The establishment of a separate gifted and talented group may have implications for the learning of other pupils.

One school started setting in four graduated ability groups. The top set, which contained those on the gifted register together with some of the most able pupils, '*flew*'; the least able group (pupils with learning difficulties) said that they were very happy and moved on fast, but the group just above them did not meet their targets and were reported to have become very dependent on the teacher. It was considered that this was because they lacked peers as role models. While the gifted and talented group remained, the two lower groups were merged so that there was a range of ability.

Subject specific issues

Headteachers and Responsible Teachers in the case study schools commented on the way in which involvement in the Gifted and Talented Strand had enhanced pedagogy

in the school as a whole, although they invariably recognised that there was still a great deal of developmental work to do here.

Some schools recognised that their provision complemented that of the local authority but this depended very much on the role taken by, and capacity of, the Partnership or LEA Coordinator. For example, one school focused on English and maths in the knowledge that their LEA did excellent work in the field of the arts. In some cases, general curriculum development work and additional activities (for example, a poetry-writing project) led to specific follow-up programmes, such as creative writing workshops, for gifted pupils. All pupils were able to benefit from the initial activity, but those who would benefit further were selected for the follow-up. The specialist teaching for selected pupils that was facilitated by involvement in the EiC Strand was perceived to have a positive outcome for the whole school. One teacher interviewed commented that the Strand had made all staff more aware of the benefits of specialist teaching, and they appreciated the opportunities for staff development for all via opportunities to share expertise (for example, across the curriculum with ICT and literacy) and ideas. Indeed, one Responsible Teacher identified the motivation generated in children by working with professionals as a major bonus of specialist arts projects.

There were indications that interviewees thought that their schools more readily accommodated provision for gifted pupils than for talented ones. For example, one said that the impetus started with talented pupils but that had '*now faded*' and the thrust had turned to raising standards of achievement and increasing the proportion of pupils achieving level 5 at key stage 2. In another example, the interviewee thought that it was '*harder to cater for the talented as they are 'sidelined' subjects – music, art and PE*'. Elsewhere, teachers pointed out that the identification of talent often relied on extra-classroom evidence, sometimes gathered from the pupils themselves or their parents. For example, a pupil might attend music or sports clubs about which the school was unaware. There was certainly no indication, from the data on provision, that there was any neglect of opportunities for pupils to display talents: all schools had a rich array of arts-based projects, for example.

Reference was commonly made to the positive effects on pupils from deprived backgrounds of engagement in creative tasks; several schools put a high premium on engagement in arts-based activities, particularly those that were multi-disciplinary. This was because these activities were related to pupil confidence which was reported

to be related to socio-economic factors and low self-esteem: '*children are scared to try and so avoid tasks*'.

3.2   Challenges in school addressed by the Gifted and Talented Strand

The case study schools were characterised by socio-economic deprivation: six were in the highest 20 per cent of free school meals, two in the second highest band, and, in some cases had high proportions of pupils for whom English was an additional language (one primary school had 27 mother tongues and only two per cent of its pupils were from white English backgrounds). The challenges to learning and achievement identified by staff at the school were, unsurprisingly, associated with these factors. Staff commented that parents had low aspirations and expectations for their children or that because of their circumstances, were unable to provide stimulating linguistic, social and educational experiences at home. For example, some families rarely moved outside the vicinity of their home and work, even to go to the nearest city or the sea. Pupils, in turn, lacked confidence and self-esteem, and had low expectations of their own achievements. The opportunities afforded by the Gifted and Talented Strand activities were felt to have helped address these barriers by:

♦   raising pupils' level of achievement and, thereby, their expectations of their own potential

♦   giving them opportunities outside their own school to meet with other pupils and adults

♦   broadening their horizons and general knowledge (e.g. of current affairs, literature, politics)

♦   providing opportunities for the pupils to be creative and develop hitherto untapped potential

♦   enabling them to participate in local or community initiatives which brought them into contact with different aspects of the area (e.g. in one case pupils spoke at the council chamber)

♦   providing a more stimulating and engaging curriculum to help stem disaffection as pupils progressed to Year 6

♦   addressing stereotypes of '*you can't/won't make it*'

♦   enabling the development of linguistic skills (e.g. extending vocabulary by extending the contexts in which the pupils were working).

Cause and effect were, as always, hard to track but staff gave anecdotal evidence of individual pupils being *'turned round'* by involvement in the Gifted and Talented Strand, as the following examples illustrate:

♦ A deaf pupil used sign language and, previously, would have been reluctant to do anything except with trusted adults. Through identification as gifted and talented, this pupil joined groups of pupils from other schools and began working independently to a high standard.

♦ A boy was selected for his sporting talents and played in the local football team. His national curriculum assessment level was reported to have gone from level 3 to level 6 on account of his increased self-confidence and changed attitudes.

♦ Underachieving Year 5 boys were *'turned round'* by identification as gifted and talented.

♦ A boy was severely disruptive but a good mathematician. His maths was *'nurtured'* to the extent that he began to see himself as a learner and his behaviour difficulties ceased.

In an authority which gathered together the gifted and talented pupils from one cluster of participating primary schools for a morning a week, a headteacher commented that there was now a group where *'these kids fit'*; previously, gifted and talented pupils had tended to *'dumb down'* so that they would *'fit'* their classes at school. In another school, these special groups were deemed necessary lest *'the brightest pupils get a false sense of security at their own school'* and stop pushing themselves to work hard.

One headteacher noted that progress occurred once the pupils perceived the provision *'as part of everyday life'*. In the past, difficulties had arisen from the *'add-on things; kids see it as entertainment'*. It was essential that provision was assessed by reference to progress in the curriculum and pupils' personal development rather than *'how they enjoyed it'*.

Another set of barriers relating to human resources was identified. For example, the case study schools were concerned with recruitment and retention, and staff mobility. The fact that these schools were now engaged in the Primary Extension and were showing positive outcomes with regard to raising standards of achievement with the higher-achieving pupils helped both recruitment and retention. For example, there were additional management/coordination posts on offer (e.g. *'one teacher stayed on to take responsibility for gifted and talented'*), and the schools reported that their local reputations had been enhanced by their involvement.

The combination of EiC resources could be powerful. For example, the case was cited of a gifted and talented pupil whose mother had been murdered and whose father was in custody. She was able to be supported via the Learning Mentor Strand. In another case, Learning Mentors were used to take out gifted and talented pupils to off-site activities. It was doubtful that teacher time to do this could be afforded. (Schools also reported that teaching assistants were used in this way.)

3.3   Specific opportunities available to gifted and talented pupils

As provision related to the Gifted and Talented Strand in the primary schools visited was principally conceived of within the normal curriculum, there was less emphasis on off-site and 'special' provision. Furthermore, much of the provision referred to had been in place prior to implementation and was also available to all the pupils in a year group. Thus, when interviewees were asked to outline what was available to gifted and talented pupils, they identified a range of provision which was not specifically attributable to EiC. While in the secondary evaluation there was reference to additional GCSEs such as Latin or statistics and early entry to GCSE, in the current primary evaluation events were usually general projects, particularly those associated with the arts (although there were science projects with the local higher education institutions). For example, in one school there was a ten-week Shakespeare project for all Year 5 pupils; in another, a local book award (and the comment was: '*participants have to be good readers rather than necessarily gifted*'). More unusually, there was a 'science musical' (a musical based on science topics), '*pub quiz style maths quizzes*' and, in one Partnership, gifted and talented pupils worked towards producing a newspaper, for one morning a fortnight, at the City Learning Centre. In another Partnership, there was a general gifted and talented cluster group: activities were sometimes based on the national curriculum (for example, doing maths topics early), sometimes on extension work (e.g. extended creative writing), and sometimes on new areas (such as philosophy or Latin).

A Responsible Teacher described how off-site activities at his school arose, as far as possible, from suggestions, from all teachers, as to ways in which pupils' experiences could be enhanced to support their work in school. Thus, visits to the theatre were encouraged as children would not normally have this opportunity. It was commented that they often lacked the experiences which helped them engage in creative writing.

3.4   Work with parents facilitated by the Gifted and Talented Strand

One of the case study schools was clear that some of its most important work was with parents, and that this work had been given a boost by the gifted and talented resourcing. They aimed to raise parents' understanding of education, especially where their child was able. Many of the parents in this community were not expecting their child to go to higher education. The school reported changes in parental attitude which motivated their children and raised pupils' expectations.

Some schools involved parents in identification, seeking from them information about their children's out-of-school learning and interests. Others, usually those which preferred not to use the term 'gifted and talented', kept a low key with parents of gifted and talented pupils, communicating with them for permission for their child to attend an off-site or after-hours activity. Parents would be told that their child was a capable mathematician and had the opportunity to join others from other schools to do more challenging work.

Generally, parents were reported to be delighted that their child was receiving *'something extra'*. It was regarded as *'a way in'* with some parents; if parents realised that the school wanted their child to do well, they would resolve to support the school. However, it was reported that some parents were reluctant to travel with their child to a Saturday event. It was pointed out that, even if the family had a car, they would have to *'kill'* a couple of hours if they took a child to a Saturday school. It did not appear, in the authorities in which the case study schools were situated, that any provision for parents (e.g. a parents' room with coffee/ICT facilities) was provided in these circumstances.

4.   RESOURCING

The additional funding afforded by the Gifted and Talented Strand was welcomed for opening doors and providing options as '*there is little flexibility in primary school funding*'. All headteachers were concerned that funding be maintained at its present level; otherwise, they judged that activities, particularly the discrete and off-site ones, would not be possible. These were regarded as critical to the efficacy of the Strand as pupils '*needed the buzz*' of working with a similar-ability peer group. Several interviewees remarked that they did not think that they would have been able to help pupils achieve the higher levels without this provision.

In one case study authority, resourcing was intended to have a catalyst effect insofar as the schools selected to receive funding were expected to identify a partner school which they would support in relation to gifted and talented provision but which would not receive additional funding.

Budgets were spent on enabling the additional activities and on materials such as books, CD roms, science equipment. As some of the Responsible Teachers had senior management posts anyway and the sample was so small, there was little evidence about funding additional responsibility points, although this had happened in some case study schools.

There were indications in the case study schools that, despite the fact that there was such a high degree of embedding gifted and talented provision in the curriculum and, indeed, using it to enhance the curriculum, none of this would be possible without the boost given by EiC. One head teacher, with three years' experience of the Strand, during which it had become increasingly integrated into the curriculum throughout the school, said, '*gifted and talented will go on here without the budget*' but that the additional resources had been necessary to get things going. This headteacher had, in fact, invited all other local schools to a gifted and talented event being held at the school '*because we thought that the community would benefit*' but no one came. She attributed this to the fact that other schools thought, '*if there's no money, we can't do it*'.

However, it would seem, from the evidence of these schools, that the use of the funding represented value-for-money. Most schools commented that it would not be value-for-money if the budget was entirely focused on the very small number of pupils on the register; the way that the budget was used influenced the educational experiences of a far wider group of pupils and was conceived in terms of whole-school development.

5.   THE PUPILS IDENTIFIED AS GIFTED AND TALENTED

As reported above, the cohort of gifted and talented pupils was identified by the full range of methods. These were the pupils who were on the register. As numbers were so small, schools found it hard to make firm statements about representativeness but, generally, the identified cohort reflected the school roll. In several schools, the school roll was extremely heterogeneous anyway and there were no *'majority groups'*.

Pupils were generally aware that they were on the register, but the approach was usually that they were told that they had particular strengths/gifts and were thought to be able to benefit from certain additional activities (presented as '*wonderful opportunities*'), either within or outside the school. In very many cases, particularly with regard to arts projects, a far wider group of pupils was involved in trips and visits (often whole classes) and the gifted and talented were merely given appropriate tasks to do within the general programme. In other cases, they were selected – for example, for a maths academy, or a cluster group once a week when they did more advanced literacy and mathematics projects. The schools reported that they tried to link all off-site work to the curriculum so it was likely to benefit all pupils in this respect. Interestingly, in one school, the headteacher made a point of telling the relevant pupils that they did, indeed, have special gifts or talents and would, thereby, be able to occupy a certain place in the community, but that they also had responsibilities and were expected to work hard to realise their potential.

No school reported any stigma attached to identification as gifted or talented nor any jealousy expressed by other pupils. Staff had not noticed any bullying or adverse reaction from the cohort's peers. Other pupils were reported by staff to be interested in what the gifted and talented group were doing and proud when they were specially selected from their school to join pupils from other schools. Staff considered that it was good for pupils' social skills to meet and work with pupils from other schools. The pupils themselves reported having made friends within the cluster group activities where this applied. Staff referred to the fact that other pupils were motivated by seeing the gifted and talented pupils doing more advanced work and looked on them as a resource.

Staff perceptions were borne out by pupils interviewed. Certainly, the pupils interviewed were all identified as gifted and talented but none reported any bullying or even 'mick-taking' as some secondary pupils interviewed for the evaluation of the secondary school Strand implementation reported. The response of all pupils seemed

to be a recognition of 'difference' rather than of elitism. Pupils themselves said that their peers asked them for help and they were happy to give it – for example, when they had covered a mathematics topic such as factors in the special cluster group prior to their class doing it they were then in a position to help their peers.

When asked about their experience of school, the pupils interviewed said that they liked it. The subjects that they particularly liked reflected the varied preferences of any group of Year 5 and 6 pupils, though within-school patterns (such as all of a particular group favouring ICT) were discernible. Unsurprisingly, the Year 5 pupils commented that the work was *'harder than last year'*, as did the Year 6 pupils, who also referred to a lot of *'revision for SATs'* – one group said that specialist provision was, in fact, a welcome break from this. They were all noticeably focused on performing well in end of key stage assessments: one Year 6 pupil said that he was aiming for level 6 in all subjects and had been promised a mobile phone if he achieved this. The pupils' appreciation of out-of-school activities were often framed by this: they said that the activities *'help with your exams'*. However, some did like the special provision because it was *'challenging'* or *'makes you think'* or *'you do things you don't normally do in class'*. When they stated a dislike, this was for reasons irrelevant to the specialist provision – for example, when it was hard or a particular subject or fellow pupil they were not keen on: *'sometimes we have to work with people we don't get on with'*.

Pupils were also asked about the things that they did in playtime and their answers reflected the school's approach to playtime more than any particular activities favoured by this cohort. For example, the pupils in schools with some recently acquired playground equipment said that they played with the sponge balls or the bean bags. Other pupils, in schools where Year 6 pupils were expected to take on additional responsibilities, spoke of *'being called in to help the teacher with the books'*. Elsewhere, there was a prefect system whereby older pupils had to look after younger ones in the playground.

Similarly, pupils went to a range of regular out-of-school activities: sports clubs, musical activities, youth organisations. Some mentioned Saturday schools, where these were available.

6.   TRANSITION

Arrangement for transition in relation to the gifted and talented programme were, generally, disappointing. No rigorous structures were reported in the eight case study schools. Rather, although pupil files were sent on to the secondary schools as a matter of course, there did not seem to be any direct liaison with the gifted and talented coordinators in the secondary schools. The primary schools visited spoke of their fear of pupils *'getting lost'* within large year cohorts and of their gifts and talents not being nurtured – or, at least, not until they had been identified again in the larger school. Primary school staff did not receive any feedback on the pupils who had been on the gifted and talented register, unless they followed up the progress of these pupils themselves. Some primary school staff reported that the secondary school gifted and talented coordinator *'does not know who our [gifted and talented] children are'*. As noted earlier, there was little linkage between phases as regards training and support, so there is, perhaps, quite a lot of developmental work that could be done here.

7.   CONCLUSIONS

The evaluation reported here was limited to eight case study primary schools which, although demonstrating the range of background characteristics of the Primary Extension schools, were not necessarily representative of all schools in the Primary Extension. This said, findings were positive and certainly indicated the fruitful way in which the policy could be interpreted in order to realise practice that ensured value-for-money and a critical change in whole-school structures that had the potential to raise standards of achievement in the long-term, if not immediately.

All the schools visited were approaching provision for gifted and talented pupils by way of enhancing the repertoire of teaching skills of all members of staff and ensuring that all teachers took responsibility for the learning and progress of the gifted and talented pupils in their class. Monitoring and evaluation were embedded within regular procedures. This had the effect that teachers developed awareness of the needs of gifted and talented pupils even if they did not have any in their particular class at the time or were teaching an age group not involved in the scheme. Thus the Strand was influencing classroom practice for a wider group of pupils than only those in the target group.

There was evidence that considerable progress had been made since the implementation of the Strand insofar as it was felt by interviewees that there were fewer 'bolt-on' features of the programme and more activity embedded in the regular curriculum. Where additional activities were provided, they were generally grounded in curriculum needs rather than engaged in merely because they were on offer. From the evidence of the case study schools, it appeared as though this progress had been made because of the schools' self-reflection and desire to use the budgets for the benefit of as many pupils as possible. It was not evident that the primary strand practice had been influenced by experience from the secondary strand (unless this was via the Partnership or LEA Coordinator) as links between phases seemed weak and, certainly, should be a focus of future development if opportunities for longer lead times (which are conducive to raising standards of achievement) are to be fully utilised.

It is speculated, from the evidence presented by interviewees, that progress was made in the eight schools on account of the fact that most were able to make use of experts coming to the school to scrutinise the context and make recommendations about provision for gifted and talented pupils using this knowledge. All schools considered

this model to be strong, perceiving the effect of the national training to be weak by comparison.

The additional resources which came to the schools on participation in the EiC strand were welcomed, first, for their catalytic effect. Arguably, as the importance of gifted and talented issues becomes more widely recognised by all schools (not only those involved in EiC) – there was evidence of this happening – it will be easier for schools to adopt gifted and talented practices so resources as catalysts may not be so important in the future. Second, resources were valued for providing a budget by which pupils' experiences could be enhanced – for trips and visits.

In conclusion, the Gifted and Talented Strand had been extremely well received by the case study schools, with relatively few challenges to its implementation being noted.

APPENDIX 1

Characteristics of the case study schools

School:	School type	Fulltime pupils (to nearest 10)	Percentage eligible for free school meals (2001)	Achievement Band (KS2 2001 performance)
1	Infant & Junior	290	Highest 20%	Middle band
2	Infant & Junior	210	Highest 20%	Lowest band
3	Infant & Junior	270	Highest 20%	Lowest band
4	Infant & Junior	300	Highest 20%	2nd lowest band
5	Infant & Junior	410	Highest 20%	2nd highest band
6	Infant & Junior	600	2nd highest 20%	2nd lowest band
7	Junior	290	Highest 20%	Lowest band
8	Infant & Junior	190	2nd highest 20%	Middle band

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