

Academic Extension Policy - Senior School

Introduction

This policy represents the Bedford Modern Senior School provision for our most able students. In other schools this might be referred to as Gifted & Talented, or Able, Gifted and Talented.

It is general educational practice in the United Kingdom for schools to make provision for their most able. This is a dimension of provision that is inspected: more able students are expected to progress at a rate appropriate to their ability, irrespective of class, school or national averages. As well as this, the spirit of the Equality Act of 2010 demands all are treated fairly and with due consideration: as such, our most able students should not be forgotten or overlooked based on their enhanced ability or just left to their own devices. This chimes with our commitment to Fundamental British Values as a school, in catering to the needs and demands of all students as individuals in a democratic and respectful way.

Due to the provision made for students in co-curricular arenas at Bedford Modern School (the 'talented' side of the old Gifted & Talented coin), management of such high-performing students in sports, music, drama and the arts will be devolved to these departments of which the Performance Programme forms part of the provision available.

Aims and rationale

The thrust of academic extension as a general, school-wide principle fits with Bedford Modern School's selective intake and is the spirit of our policy. Our average student sits within the top 10% of the national cohort, and thus we aim to intellectually and academically extend all of our students.

However, within this provision there is still a place and desire to identify our most academically-able students and extend and challenge them to the utmost of their academic capabilities. We specifically provide extension for our most able sportspeople, dramatists, artists and musicians, and we should similarly do so for our most able academic students.

Academic extension for all of our students

Bedford Modern School's students, being able and in many cases exceedingly so, should benefit not just from interesting and engaging 'core' content in lessons, but also by going 'off-piste' to develop and extend thinking by looking at new, unusual, or related topics to those studied in lessons. This should be considered a central part of our philosophy: it should not be seen as an optional extra, considering the highly able students we teach in comparison to national averages. Heads of Subject are required to build in explicit provision for the most able students into schemes of work.

Outside of the classroom, students can be extended in many ways, including (but not limited to):

- Visits from external speakers as arranged by departments
- Attending our academic workshop series, which is open to all in the school community, and sees staff from across the school presenting one off, snapshot

workshops introducing new topics and themes beyond those taught in the classroom

- Visits to external sites / speakers
- The running of subject-based clubs and societies
- Collaborative work between departments to fuel thinking about the connections between subjects
- Recommendations of reading lists or articles for wider reading
- Access to the variety of activities presented within the Super Curricular booklet (Y7-9)
- The production of department magazines, where students can write about existing or new interests to enhance their learning
- Academic Extension days, held each year for year groups to be challenged on topics they do not study in class
- Undertaking the HPQ (Y10 and 11) and EPQ (Y12) qualifications which we offer as a school

The Academic Performance Programme (for our most able students)

Aims, provision and constraints

We have a specific focus on our most able students through our Academic Performance Programme (APP), otherwise known as the Linnell Society. The programme's aim is to identify and then stretch our most able students. This is achieved through a mix of activities, including on-site sessions. Wherever possible, we try to offer academic activities that are open to any student who would like to attend sessions, irrespective of whether they are a member of the APP or not, such as Linnell Society meetings which are academic meetings open to all students with the expectation that APP students should attend.

Identification of APP students

Particularly able academic students at Bedford Modern School will be identified for the APP in a number of ways. It should be emphasised that these students are being highlighted as being particularly gifted in the Bedford Modern School context, even if almost all students at the school are highly able compared to national norms. If someone is not identified for the APP, that does not mean they are not able or intelligent compared to the national average. We aim to identify approximately 10-15% of a given year group, and aim to do so in the most objective ways possible. The ways of identification are:

1. Entrance and baseline testing
2. Departmental recommendations by teachers once the year is underway¹
3. School examination results at the end of the year

A central register of APP students will be available on our school information system to all academic staff, highlighting those demanding particular attention within the school. Parents are notified each academic year before a student is entered onto the APP, and we respect the right of a parent or student to withdraw the child from the APP at any time.

¹ Departmental recommendations will be key for highlighting exceptional students in given subjects. It is worth drawing attention to the fact that MidYIS baseline testing provides a generic overview of ability and provides an overall score, but that within this students can have varying scores in the four categories of verbal, mathematical, non-verbal and skills testing in the paper. So for example, one imaginary boy in Y7 who has an overall MidYIS score of 130 may not make it onto the APP register overall. However, his mathematical score on MidYIS might be 141, which would put him as one of the top mathematicians in the year. Teachers / HoSs might consider viewing each year group according to aptitude relevant to their subject to detect highly capable students in teachers' subjects for monitoring.

Provision for students who excel in a subject/s but are not members of the APP

The APP identifies students who excel across a range of aptitudes, tests and subjects. However, there is therefore the possibility that a student might be the most able student in a given subject/s in a year group, but not be on the APP. These students should be considered 'gifted' in a subject/s.

As part of the departmental recommendation process undertaken in November, we encourage teachers and Heads of Subjects to identify 'exceptional' students in their subjects, and what can be done to extend these gifted students specifically in the subject in question whether this individual is a member of the APP or not.

Provision for those on the APP

We run the formal APP programme in Years 7 – 9. Within these years, teachers are encouraged to extend and push these students in class through a variety of ways. Central provision away from lessons includes a mix of extension sessions, and the advertisement of appropriate extension opportunities like essay competitions.

We do not formally run the APP in the Sixth Form (although we maintain a register) as we believe that by this age students should be taking responsibility for their own academic development. However, within these year groups we offer Oxbridge, vet, dentistry and medical university preparation as well as significant subject-based opportunities revolving around clubs, trips, essay competitions and the like. Many teachers utilise students' ALIS scores from GCSE to identify the most able students in their subject at the beginning of the academic year in addition to the APP register we publish for the Sixth Form.

Extension for APP students in class

Both teachers and tutors should be encouraged to have higher expectations of the most able; a string of Bs can and should be challenged if the teacher or tutor involved believes that an able student should be achieving more. In general, extension provision should be considered a central part of a Bedford Modern School diet: it should not, as the Sutton Trust put it, be considered a 'bolt on.'

Within the classroom, extension can be achieved through:

- Setting in certain subjects, allowing the most able to go further and faster
- Differentiation, where activities are tailored to test gifted students through different activities to the main body of the group. This should be an essential part of lesson planning, in the same way as provision for those with SEND is
- Gifted students being given different stimuli or resources to other students
- Ability seating, where gifted students are banded together in group work and given a more difficult task than other students
- Ability pairing, where students of lesser ability are paired with those of the highest ability to encourage gifted students to lead this pair work
- Gifted students being encouraged to synthesise, evaluate and recreate their learning if finishing an activity early
- Direct questioning of gifted students asking higher-order questions or double questioning to really ingrain learning (using, for example, Bloom's Taxonomy)

Extension of APP students outside of class

Outside of the classroom, extension for gifted students can be achieved through:

- School-wide extension society meetings, such as the Linnell Society, which are targeted and pitched at the most able even if open to all
- Ability grouping on general school trips, where gifted students are banded together and might be taken to different rooms or activities than others on the trip to extend them beyond simply visiting the exhibition / gallery etc.
- Invitations to those recognised as excelling in a particular subject to Sixth Form lectures within departments
- Master classes, where the most able are invited to attend a specific workshop
- Departmental-based extension societies, particularly for university preparation sessions for interviews
- Designated lead roles for gifted students in general society meetings and the like
- External competitions such as Olympiads, essay writing prizes, design challenges etc.
- Acting as peer mentors for younger students
- School publication of selected essays / articles by students celebrating exceptional work

Please note that the above are suggestions and are not prescribed either to staff or students. Opportunities will vary depending upon the student, their interests and those of the subject.

Monitoring those on the APP

The Head of Academic Extension and the Head of Project Qualifications will monitor those on the APP to ensure satisfactory progress is being made (or that there is no relative underperformance) through:

- Informal discussions with teachers, tutors and other relevant individuals like parents or guardians
- School registers to ensure APP students are attending school as expected
- The reports system to ensure that able students are achieving well
- End-of-year examinations to ensure that able students are achieving well

We will also annually survey those on the APP, to ensure they feel they are being adequately challenged and stretched both inside and outside the classroom.

Whilst we will do all we can to support and encourage those on the APP, if someone is consistently underachieving or disengaging with the APP programme, we reserve the right to remove individuals from the APP at the end of an academic year. This is to remove potential burden from the said child, but also to allow someone else to avail of and benefit from APP membership if an individual is not embracing the chances offered.

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Head of Academic Extension

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