

Academic Extension Policy - Senior School

Introduction

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 add on, 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
- 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

Provision for students who excel 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.

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 believe that by the Sixth Form 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.

Extension for students in class

Both teachers and tutors should be encouraged to have higher expectations of the most able. 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 students outside of class

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

- 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

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 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 survey students annually, to ensure they feel they are being adequately challenged and stretched both inside and outside the classroom.

Mr M McIntosh
Head of Academic Extension

October 2023
Review Date February 2024