

Acceleration Pathways for Gifted/High Ability Students in the Diocese of Broken Bay

Guidelines for Pre-School - 12



Purpose

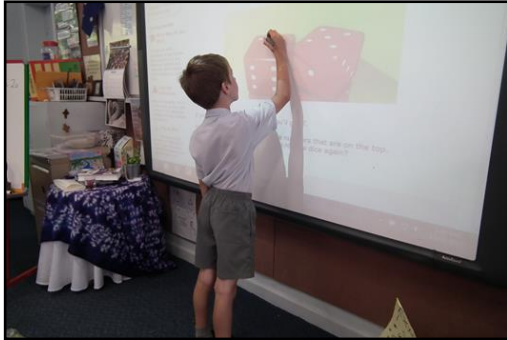
Acceleration is any educational intervention that allows students to move through curriculum at a faster pace or at a younger age than expected. This document aims to provide advice, procedural fairness and clarity when making decisions about class/grade placement, subject selection, enrolment and other accelerative options for gifted/high ability students in the Diocese of Broken Bay.

Acceleration is not primarily considered to be an intervention whose main goal is to speed up a student's educational program, it is a considered educational response to the demonstrated needs of a gifted student. In practice, there are many types of acceleration that are used by schools and teachers to satisfy the individual needs of a particular student or group of students.



Types of Acceleration

The process of acceleration is accomplished through the use of a wide range of practices. Over recent years, with the current more flexible approach to schooling, the number of available options has increased.



*The key question for educators
is not whether to
accelerate a gifted learner,
but rather how.*

Increased pace of progress within an age-appropriate classroom.

Within a differentiated classroom, students are given material at their point of learning need providing accelerated progression for gifted learners.

Multi-grade classroom/composite classes

A gifted student is placed in a multi-age classroom where he or she works through the curricular materials at a level beyond which is usual for his/her age.

Curriculum compacting

Through the use of pre-testing, a gifted student demonstrates mastery of material or a reduced need for instruction or drill in some or all parts of the curriculum. The curriculum presented to the student is tailored to the student's needs and time saved is used to move more rapidly through the curriculum.

Grade telescoping

The gifted student spends less time than normal in a course of study. For example, three years of study may be completed in two.

Subject or partial acceleration

Where a student has demonstrated advanced proficiency in a subject, he/she is placed for a part of the day with students at more advanced grade levels for that subject without being assigned to a higher grade.

Early entrance to school

A talented child who shows readiness for school enters kindergarten or Grade 1 one or two years earlier than the usual age of entry.

Grade skipping

A gifted student is promoted to bypass one or more grade levels. This may be done during the academic year or at the beginning of an academic year.

Concurrent enrolment

A gifted student attends classes at more than one level during the same year. For example, a Grade 6 student may spend part of the day attending classes in Grade 7 and receive credit for this.



Advance placement

A gifted student takes courses with advanced or accelerated content (usually at the secondary level) that prepares him or her for taking an examination that can confer university credit for satisfactory performances.

Mentorship

A gifted student is exposed to a mentor who provides advanced training and experiences in a content area that cannot be provided within the regular educational setting.

Credit by Examination

The gifted student receives credit (at secondary school or university level) upon successful completion of an examination.

Early admission to College or University

A gifted student enters College or University as a full-time student without completing high school.

Distance learning

The student is offered advanced courses by correspondence.

Online courses

A gifted student is enrolled in an online, accelerated course at their level.

Early admission to College or University

A gifted student enters College or University as a full-time student without completing high school.

Guiding Principles

The following principles inform these guidelines:

- Acceleration should be a rigorous, informed decision-making process with procedural fairness that ensures transparency of process, equal access to information and clear, open communication.
- All decisions around acceleration should be made collaboratively between the Principal and parents.
- Research literature on acceleration reveals that accelerated progression of gifted students benefits the majority both academically and socially. Conversely, failure to advance a highly gifted child may result in poor study habits, apathy, lack of motivation and maladjustment.
- Best practice research supports acceleration as the most effective curriculum intervention for gifted children. Eg. Hattie's meta-analysis of research on acceleration shows an effect size of 0.88 indicating that this has a high influence on positive learning outcomes.
- Giftedness alone does not necessarily determine enrolment, placement or additional educational provisions. Data should always inform educational decision making.
- Above level testing is highly effective in helping to identify students who would benefit from acceleration.



Guiding Principles (continued)...

- Social or emotional difficulties experienced by some gifted students may have been caused by inappropriately matched curriculum and in such cases the problem may be alleviated by accelerated progression.
- Acceleration needs to be recorded, tracked, monitored and reviewed.
- It is not necessary for every gifted student to be psychometrically tested. However, if students are being considered for full grade acceleration there should be a comprehensive psychological evaluation of the child's intellectual functioning, academic skill levels and social-emotional adjustment by a trained psychologist.
- All cases of accelerated progression should be arranged on a trial basis of at least six weeks. It is important that in such a circumstance that the child should not feel that he or she has "failed" if the acceleration is reversed.
- Care should be exercised not to build up excessive expectations from subject and/or grade advancement. Any other behaviours, personality traits, work habits and organisational challenges will still be present and these need to be scaffolded and supported as necessary.
- Some highly gifted children are so advanced in their intellectual or academic development that one year of accelerated progression is not always enough to appropriately challenge them. For such children further provisions, including possible further grade acceleration, may be advisable at some later period in the child's schooling.
- Grade advancement should occur at natural transition points, such as the beginning of the school year. Mid-year advancement may be desirable where the child's prior teacher and receiving teacher may more easily confer about how best to help the child make a smooth transition.



- Use of the inquiry cycle tracks and reviews acceleration options.



Matching the Student to Accelerative Options

Careful consideration must be given to the type of accelerative option that is best suited to a student's needs.

| Option | Cognitive functioning | Personal characteristics | Learning preferences | Interests |
|--|--|--|--|--|
| Increased pace of progress within age-appropriate classroom | Needs more to learn in a year than what is offered in a typical one-year curriculum. | Is independent and persistent | Likes working alone and with others. | Likes academic work. |
| Curriculum compacting Grade telescoping | Is achieving at a substantially higher level than most classmates. Pre-assessment demonstrates mastery at or above established criterion level on topic or subject specific measure of outcomes (usually 85%+) | Demonstrates motivation to learn, confidence, persistence and independence. Self-directed, makes connections and processes information easily. Is intense and focused when learning. | Exhibits willingness to work alone or in small groups. Has preference for challenge and skipping what is already known. Dislikes drill and repetition. | Has high interest in compacted area and wide-ranging academic interests. Shows a lack of patience and boredom with routine academic tasks. |
| Subject/partial acceleration | Is processing and achieving 2+ grade levels beyond others in a specific subject area. Possesses strong achievement need. Shows learning strengths in planning. | Is self-directed, persistent, independent, and motivated to learn. Makes connections and associations with prior learning. Is a fast processor and retains information easily. | Demonstrates preferences for challenge and fast pacing of instruction. Copes being in competitive situations. | Strong interest in specific academic area. |
| See Appendix 2: Partial/Subject Acceleration Planner | | | | |

| Option | Cognitive functioning | Personal characteristics | Learning preferences | Interests |
|---|---|--|--|--|
| Early entrance | Identified as highly gifted on an individual ability test and is achieving well above age peers. Shows readiness for reading or is already reading and good mathematical reasoning. | Is independent and motivated. Is socially mature, emotionally stable, perceptive and confident. Has longer attention span than most age peers. | Enjoys visual and fine motor activities. Likes being challenged. | Likes reading and/or mathematics activities and has exhausted what pre-school can offer. |
| Grade skipping | Identified as highly gifted on an individual ability test. The child should demonstrate achievement levels above the average of the class he or she desires to enter. Is frustrated with slow pace of regular classroom instruction at current grade level. | Is self-directed, persistent, independent, and motivated to learn. Enjoys school and learning. Socially and emotionally the child should be free of any serious adjustment problems. | Prefers fast-paced, challenging learning experiences. Enjoys working with students of like ability. The child's feelings about grade skipping are to be highly considered. | Likes academic work. Has wide-ranging interests. |
| <p>The IOWA Acceleration Scale (2003) is a valuable tool for guiding parent and teacher discussion in regard to the possibility of full grade acceleration of a gifted student. It requires collecting data about the student, provides accelerative options and an ongoing planning process for the future education of the student. The IOWA Acceleration Scale (See Appendix 1) is available through the CSO. See</p> | | | | |

Adapted from Rogers (2002) "Reforming Gifted Education: matching the program to the child"

Some examples of the types of qualitative and quantitative data that can be collected to provide supporting evidence for acceleration include:

- Psychometric test,
- Standardised tests
- Achievement tests
- Parent nomination forms with check list and commentary
- Teacher nomination with check list and commentary
- Work samples

Dispelling the Myths about Acceleration

“Acceleration is one of the most curious phenomena in the field of education. I can think of no other issue in which there is such a gulf between what research has revealed and what practitioners believe. The research on acceleration is so uniformly positive, the benefits of appropriate acceleration so unequivocal, that it is difficult to see how an educator could oppose it.”
Borland, J.H. (1989) *Planning and implementing programs for the gifted* p.185

- **Acceleration will lead to loss of friends and other social and emotional difficulties in school**

This is a very common argument when it is suggested that students work with others outside their age group. Many successful acceleration stories have nowhere near the impact on public perception than a few highly publicised cases of accelerated students who developed serious psychological problems. In these cases, factors other than the acceleration are primarily to blame, according to Benbow (1991). Research strongly supports the use of acceleration when used carefully, and many authors (e.g Silverman, 1993; Van Tassel-Baska, 1991) in the gifted field suggest that not only does acceleration not harm appropriately selected academically gifted students, but the lack of such a provision is detrimental to the social and emotional development of gifted youth. It has also been suggested that acceleration of underachieving gifted students in primary school can be much more effective than waiting until high school.

- **Acceleration will lead to the student becoming conceited**

Research, in fact, shows the opposite. In the classroom with age-appropriate peers of lesser ability a gifted child is constantly made conscious of the fact that he/she is brighter than his/her classmates and this could lead to inflated self-esteem. In fact many gifted students who are not being provided with the right degree of challenge often become underachievers which is associated with low self-esteem. When matched with optimal challenge, gifted students respond most often with a sense of relief and intellectual excitement and in Australia, accelerated students are more at risk from the syndrome of “cutting down the tall poppy” than of becoming conceited.

- **An accelerated student will be too immature to cope**

One of the contra-indications for acceleration is serious concerns relating to social and emotional well-being. A difference in chronological age will mean some developmental differences between individuals. However it has been found that with most gifted children, emotional and physical maturity appears to be advanced and to fall somewhere between the chronological and the mental age. It needs to be remembered that some behaviours which could be interpreted as immature may come about as a result of inappropriate placement and that these behaviours are likely to disappear when this problem is addressed. However, as part of the procedure, all accelerants need to be monitored carefully, possibly with access to a counsellor. This is more likely to be important when students are spending all their time with older students.

It is important that teachers do not confuse the absence of close peer relationships with social immaturity.

- **Acceleration will lead to 'gaps' in a child's education**

This has been recognized as a legitimate concern, and means that educators need to ensure that acceleration programmes are carefully planned, administered and evaluated. Gaps in learning can be detected by thorough testing before and throughout an acceleration programme. This testing needs to be an inbuilt part of the programme, particularly during initial stages. Due to the gifted child's speed of learning, any gaps detected can generally be handled by brief, targeted teaching.

- **Accelerating students is an organisational headache**

It can be. The ease of implementation of acceleration programs is to some degree dependent on the size and instructional structures within a school. In general, Early Entry, Grade Skipping of individuals or acceleration of a group of students large enough to be considered a class, can be handled relatively easily in most schools. Acceleration options, such as Curriculum Compacting or Grade Telescoping, which involve individual progression within the same student group will be dependent largely on the expertise and efforts of individual teachers as organisational issues within the classroom will be important.

Concurrent Enrolment and Subject Acceleration will require commitment and co-operation of all involved and probable resolution of timetable clashes. Organisational issues necessary to put in place Advance Placement, Mentorship and Credit by Examination will only be successfully managed by ensuring that time is provided to a specific individual (most likely a Gifted Co-ordinator). Schools need to be mindful of organisational issues involved in the different options for acceleration, but to always be guided in their decisions by the identified needs of students.

The receiving teacher must have positive attitudes towards the grade/subject advancement and must be willing to help the child adjust to the new situation.

- **Acceleration puts too much pressure on the student and they will have no time to “just be a kid”**

Acceleration is not the right option for all gifted students. Careful observance of the indicators formulated by experts and the following of well-tested guidelines is essential. In addition, monitoring and evaluation must be an inbuilt part of every acceleration process. If the accelerative option matches the child’s needs, then the child will be happy, challenged and learning. This may be in direct contrast to former observed behaviour. Very occasionally the child will put too much pressure on themselves, particularly when still adapting to the change and responding to the increased challenge, but careful monitoring and possible counselling of both parents and child should help the child gain balance. Acceleration should not mean that gifted students have no, or little, time to pursue out-of-school interests.

- **Allowing a student to accelerate in one area of strength (e.g. Maths) leads to learning becoming too specialised**

In other fields of endeavour a child is not discouraged from specialising. If a child shows potential to be a talented football player, or ballerina, then he or she is likely to receive expert coaching and encouragement. A responsible parent will, however, also ensure that the child does not fall behind in other important

aspects of their learning. In a similar way, any child who shows unusual ability in Mathematics or in Creative Arts or in learning Languages deserves support at an expert level commensurate with his or her needs, while at the same time maintaining an adequate level of achievement in other subjects. Gifts and talents deserve to be developed and celebrated. What is more, the recognition and encouragement of a child's talents whilst at school is likely to have a profound influence on how the student views and utilises these talents in adulthood.

- **Acceleration is not relevant in our school as we don't have any gifted students**

Statistically this is not likely to be true. Intelligence tests, designed to produce results that fall under a bell curve, indicate that 16% of children have an IQ of 115+, and that 2% or two in every one hundred students have an IQ of 130+. Research indicates that gifted, and potentially talented, students can be found in all socio-economic groups and across all ethnic backgrounds. Sometimes high ability is masked by environmental factors relating to an impoverished home background, or an inability to communicate effectively in English. Some potentially talented students are not easily recognised because they also have some form of learning difficulty. Some students may mask their ability for social reasons, others may react to boredom with a host of negative behaviours. Teachers need to be aware that gifted/high ability students are all individuals, are unlikely to exhibit all characteristics and will exhibit a wide range of behaviours. Underachieving gifted students are unfortunately too common. A careful check of any list of indicators of giftedness will assist you to recognise possible characteristics of giftedness in your students.

***Careful preparation of all stakeholders
will greatly increase
the chance of a successful transition.***

**WHOLE GRADE ACCELERATION:
IOWA SCALE**

DRAFT

APPENDIX 2: SUBJECT ACCELERATION:

INDIVIDUAL ACCELERATION PLAN

Name:
School:
Date:

Class:
Teacher:

| Data: | | | |
|-----------------------|----------------------|--------------------|-------------------------------|
| Differentiation | Learning environment | School environment | Beyond the school environment |
| Cognitive functioning | | | |
| Learning Strengths | | | |
| Learning Preferences | | | |
| Interests | | | |
| Social - Emotional | | | |

References

Feldhusen and Proctor (1986)