



Information for parents – Supporting gifted and talented learners

Dear parents

Gifted children and young people should be given the opportunity to develop their talents. This can be particularly challenging for both parents and teachers. Here we aim to inform you about what it means to be gifted and how to identify and support gifted and talented children and young people at home as well as at school.

Being gifted/highly gifted

In primary year 2, Anna has no difficulty doing mathematics exercises up to 1000. At the age of 10, Rafael knows dozens of poems by heart and writes long stories. Anna and Rafael are examples of children who are exceptional because of their talents and achievements in subjects such as mathematics, technology, music, art, social relationships or sport.

Learners are gifted if their abilities in one or more subject are much further advanced relative to peers in their age group. If their abilities are greatly advanced, it can mean that the child/young person is highly gifted. Depending on the definition of giftedness and intelligence, this means approximately 1% to 3% of learners. Transitions between levels of giftedness are fluid.

Many gifted and talented learners find they are able to develop and fulfil their potential successfully. Lessons in their mainstream class can meet their needs with the teacher creating learning opportunities appropriate to their ability, and gifted and talented children finding their own way or solutions. Gifted and talented children may have special educational needs, however, if they are not being challenged at school or if they are experiencing problems on a social or emotional level. In such cases, it is advisable for parents and the school to provide the learner with further help within the scope of «Supporting gifted and talented learners».

Identifying highly gifted children and young people

Highly gifted children often stand out either at home or at school through their achievements and behaviour. But it is not always easy to identify highly gifted learners as their achievements may not be consistently exceptional. Conversely, above-average performance may not necessarily be due to giftedness. It is particularly difficult to identify giftedness among children/young people whose first language is not German, and among those whose development is impaired and so cannot fulfil their potential.

Observation sheets and lists with typical characteristics of gifted and talented children/young people can help raise parents' and teachers' awareness of giftedness (Reference: «Begabungs- und Begabtenförderung», pg 16). These can provide points of reference but should in no way replace talks with teachers or a specialist assessment. Especially in cases where special developmental measures are being considered, it is advisable to request an assessment by the educational psychology services.

What can the school do?

The opportunities the school provides for highly gifted learners should be highly challenging; should develop knowledge of and abilities in those areas learners excel in; and should support their personal development emotionally and socially. In most cases, differentiated learning within mainstream school, with specialist support from classroom support staff, can meet the needs of highly gifted learners. For example, learning material can be compacted and acquired within a short time (Compacting), allowing the learner further time to expand their objectives and deepen their understanding of the content (Enrichment) – for example, through project work. Further measures, which require careful planning and learner support, are starting kindergarten early, moving up a class or attending lessons in certain subjects in higher classes.

Schools are responsible for deciding how far special needs teachers are involved in supporting gifted and talented learners. In addition to the support learners receive within mainstream schools, each local education authority can opt to provide further opportunities, eg courses, mentoring by external specialists. Your school management can provide you with further information on what they offer.

If a gifted and talented learner faces difficulties in mainstream school, parents and teachers work together to find a solution. If necessary, parent-teacher talks to evaluate the learner's current level can serve to decide on learning and developmental objectives as well as how to implement and monitor them.

What can parents do?

Your support and your involvement in your child's school and leisure time activities play an important part in enabling your child to develop and fulfil their potential. As a parent of a gifted and talented child you are probably used to certain challenges. You may have the following concerns: Do I need to bring my child up in a certain way? How can we best help and support our child? How do we go about tackling certain situations within the family? A specialist can best advise you on how to deal with these types of issues (see Advice/Reading). Your child's interests and what they enjoy doing have priority. Make sure that you do not place too much pressure on yourselves or on your child to get high grades for example. Help your child to recognise their strengths and weaknesses. Give them the support they need to deal with being highly gifted and talented.

Get in contact with your child's class teacher early on if you have any concerns about school or problems arise. You should always contact your child's class teacher first and then the school management.

Reports from external private specialists are taken into consideration when evaluating a child/young person's current level and for support plans. For important school decisions and developmental measures that incur additional costs, it is advisable you involve the educational psychology services. It is also important that you involve your child in any decisions so as to strengthen their own responsibility.

Advice and information

EHK – Elternverein für hochbegabte Kinder (Parents' association for gifted children):
www.ehk.ch

Stiftung für hochbegabte Kinder (Foundation for gifted children): www.hochbegabt.ch

For local and school links: Your child's class teacher, School management, educational psychology services (www.vsa.zh.ch → Gesundheit und Prävention → Schulpsychologische Dienste)

Volksschulamt Zürich (Education authority): www.vsa.zh.ch → Schulbetrieb und Unterricht → Begabungs- und Begabtenförderung

Reading

Brochure «Begabungs- und Begabtenförderung» aus Ordner 3, Umsetzung Volksschulgesetz, Angebote für Schülerinnen und Schüler mit besonderen pädagogischen Bedürfnissen (Opportunities for learners with special educational needs)

www.vsa.zh.ch → Schulbetrieb und Unterricht → Begabungs- und Begabtenförderung

Hochbegabte Kinder – ihre Eltern, ihre Lehrer. Ein Ratgeber Webb, J.T., Meckstroth, E.A., Tolan, S.S., Zimet, N.D., Preckel, F. / Bern, 2002. Verlag Hans Huber

Unser Kind ist hochbegabt. Ein Leitfaden für Eltern und Lehrer Mönks, F.J., Ypenburg, I. / München und Basel, 2000. Ernst Reinhardt Verlag

Mythos Begabung – Vom Potenzial zum Erfolg Stednitz, U. / Bern, 2008: Verlag Hans Huber