

## **Merchiston's 'Able' and 'Very Able' Pupil Policy**

The Merchiston Castle School Mission Statement shows our commitment to leading students towards 'personal excellence'. Our Additional Support for Learning provision has long recognized the needs of boys with specific learning difficulties; however, we are aware that Able pupils also have their own requirements and we are keen that academic Departments and individual teachers adapt their curricula in order to provide these pupils with the additional academic stimulus that they need. Although our performance in public examinations is very strong, we recognize that the Able pupil very often needs to be presented with more demanding challenges than national syllabuses alone can provide.

### **Identification**

We begin the process of identifying boys with learning strengths and weaknesses before they join the school. Parents and feeder-schools are asked to inform us of particular academic aptitude; our pre-screening procedures, Entrance and Scholarship Examinations supply us with concrete evidence of the ability of a potential pupil. We do, however, accept that examinations are only one part of the helping us to build an accurate picture as, depending on the pupil's age, these may only test for a certain range of academic abilities.

Once a pupil has joined the School we formally follow up our findings by means of our system of internal Report cards (on which boys receive a comment and grades for both effort and achievement from their subject teachers) and biannual internal examinations. Each pupil at Merchiston is assigned a personal academic tutor whose role is to oversee academic progress. The InCAS, ALIS and MidYIS systems benchmark pupils against the national cohort and provide further indications of appropriate academic targets for Able pupils.

We value the opinion of parents about their children, but do caution that this cannot be our sole method of identification. All parents consider their children to be special and often believe them to be displaying exceptional academic ability; however, our experience enables us to judge to what extent this ability is similar to that displayed by many other of our pupils.

### **Provision**

The work of individual Departments is key to our provision for Able students. Our policy of setting pupils by ability (up to the start of the Sixth Form) ensures some degree of differentiation. Additionally, internal examinations at every level contain differentiated material to provide opportunities for Able pupils to be challenged.

Individual departmental classroom strategies may also include negotiated individual targets for an Able pupil, group work (allowing pupils with similar strengths to challenge each other), and 'higher order' or open-ended tasks. Our concern here is always that the Able child should not 'tread water' by repeating material he already understands fully or become bored by moving through the curriculum at too slow a pace.

One part of any Able-pupil provision is a range of Extension activities. Currently our extra-mural initiatives include entry for the Mathematics and Physics Challenges and Olympiads, Mathematics Clubs, English Speaking Board exams, foreign language exchange trips, Arkwright Scholarships (Design and Technology), entry of pupil artwork in external exhibitions: our audits of Departmental provision give fuller details of what we offer. In the Sixth Form we enter pupils for the STEP / AEA (Advanced Extension Awards) exams and, although we are aware that Oxbridge is only one aspect of academic success, we are proud of our pupils' performance in this area.

In short, although Merchiston's Able-pupil policy is still evolving, we are moving towards a situation in which we challenge our Able pupils to the very outermost limits of their potential; indeed, to the point of failure.

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