

Top Tips for Supporting More Able and Talented Learners July 2020

'We can, and will, support all our young people to make the most of their potential.'
Education in Wales, Our National Mission – Ministerial Foreword.



Many of our more able and talented learners may to a lesser or greater degree show traits of what has become known as Perfectionist Syndrome, traits which are likely to be exacerbated by the current pandemic situation and its consequences on the normal routines of schooling.

Perfectionist syndrome is recognised as a tendency to have excessively high personal standards, to be overly self-critical, and to expect often unrealistically high expectations of those around us. Feeling like this can lead to anxiety, frustration, a lack of certainty and a dominantly negative mood. It is not, of course, a set of feelings that is only likely to be felt by more able and talented learners at this time, but recent research (<http://psycnet.apa.org/record/2017-57603-001>) does suggest that a high-proportion of such learners do suffer from these feelings to such a degree that their wellbeing is often negatively affected. If this is the case, then the current situation with its uncertainty can only make matters worse.

During this time of distance learning, many more able and talented pupils may be worried about the loss of their known routines, they may be feeling uncertain about the immediate future and the expectations they had of examinations, and many may be feeling disconnected.

Top Tips for Leaders

1. Ensure that all staff have an up to date knowledge of who the MAT and SEREN pupils are in the school, especially as they may be responsible for new classes, including new Year 7 pupils. Remind staff of these pupils and their needs throughout this time of blended learning.
2. Consider summarising the non-negotiables of the school's MAT Policy/Rationale for staff as a quick checklist for reference- with so much that is 'new' required for September, a full policy may get lost in the mix!
3. Make good use of staff briefings or staff newsletters to keep a focus on the needs of MAT pupils and remind staff about the school's commitment to them.
4. Advise teachers on learning tasks, to avoid repetition of work, low challenge or overly-generalised feedback.
5. Check that MAT learners are having suitable work, not just extension tasks. Their main 'diet' of work should meet their needs.
6. Use the school's communication systems to share good ideas and approaches to planning, teaching and feedback- especially ideas that will ensure sufficient challenge and will be manageable for a blended learning system.
7. Consider creating a virtual group/classroom for enrichment for the MAT pupils, using your own school's guidelines to ensure it is suitable.
8. Keep the focus on the needs and progress of the MAT in your school's teaching and learning, curriculum and senior leaders' discussions.
9. MAT pupils who are experiencing aspects of Perfectionism syndrome are vulnerable, so ensure that they are tracked and monitored and perhaps have one teacher as a point of contact for their wellbeing and progression needs.
10. Value student voice- check in with MAT pupils and listen to their views on their work and progress in order to ensure their blended learning experience is fit for purpose.

Top Tips to Learners

1. What is your home physical learning environment like? How can you make it more suitable and comfortable to your needs? Remove any unnecessary distractions. Too much screen time can have a detrimental effect on wellbeing.
2. Set realistic and achievable targets, do not be too aspirational in this different way of working. Share them with your parents and carers.
3. Be aware of your need for perfectionism. This is your need to be perfect at everything. Read the link below.
<https://www.healthline.com/health/perfectionism#prevention>
4. Set times away from your work. Keep to these times. Exercise and diet will be crucial to good levels of wellbeing.
5. Engage with your peers. It is vital to interact socially with your peers and share your experiences of blended learning, remote learning and the new normal way of learning.
6. Focus on the constants and the things that you are in control of. Do not focus too much on the events surrounding your education that you can't control involving the pandemic, your examinations and your schools opening again. Look up circles of influence- the things that concern you that you can control.
<https://www.habitsforwellbeing.com/the-circle-of-concern-and-influence/>
7. Constantly check in with school. Your wellbeing matters to them so keep communicating with your teachers and use them to get feedback on your learning.
8. Are you coping? Who is your go to person when you are finding things are difficult? Do not hide your feelings.
9. Give yourself kudos when you do complete a task. Appreciate when you achieve one of your goals.
10. Don't be afraid to make mistakes.

Top Tips for Parents /Carers of MAT Learners

1. Be interested in and appreciate what your child is doing and learning.
2. Provide your child with a broad range of life experiences so they become confident in how to behave in a variety of social experiences.
3. Communicate and work with the school to plan how best to manage schoolwork load, rehearsals and practices if your child has a particular talent e.g. sports, music, acting, dancing
4. Communicate and work with the school to ensure your child's learning should be stimulating and progressive not repetitive.
5. Support your child to understand that we all learn from making mistakes.
6. Allow your child to follow their passion and avoid pushing them in one direction.
7. Encourage your child to improve their depth of processing new information and skills by engaging in programmes that support them with note taking, revision skills etc.
8. Encourage your child to 'switch off' and relax in a way that suits them.
9. Avoid comparing them with siblings or friends.
10. Openly talk about mental health and wellbeing within the family home.



Top Tip for Practitioners

The following tips are offered as ideas that might usefully inform your thinking as teachers about the support that MAT pupils might benefit from:

1. Remember that these pupils may be extremely anxious about their studies and lost hours of learning. Like all pupils, they will need plenty of reassurance as well as recognition of the work they have completed from home.
2. Ensure an appropriate blend of support and rigour. If the rigour reduces because the support increases then that's fine!
3. Your classes will look a little different now e.g. reduced number. Reinforce that you know who the MAT learners are through regular communication.
4. Use optimistic language e.g. "When you move on to sixth form..."
5. Feedback that is regular and personalised will be helpful for MAT learners, to keep them reassured and focussed.
6. Give opportunities for pupils to collaborate with others across classes through use of Hwb tools.
7. Unpick your planning to maximise the opportunities for MAT learners in a blended delivery model.
8. As we move to a blended approach and pupils return to school, MAT learners may benefit from the clarity of knowing what they should do, by when, how and how much.
9. MAT learners will benefit from work being set that reinforces what they know, but also connects it with new learning. They may feel demotivated if the tasks they are set only involve reinforcing and recalling.
10. The high quality provision for MAT learners (and all learners) will still be relevant when we return to a

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