



During this time of blended 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. It is essential that high quality teaching and learning is prioritised for all learners including more able learners.

The Sutton Trust highlight that Wales is the only nation in the UK with a nationwide programme for the highly able learners. The Seren Network is comprised of 11 regional hubs across Wales, which support highly able learners, who are provided with subject specific workshops alongside other highly able learners, as well as advice and support with university applications. Learners are selected in a process which is designed and coordinated by each local hub, often based on their GCSE results. The network has been extended to target younger pupils, at the stage before they take their GCSEs. (Montacute, R. (2018). Potential for Success: fulfilling the promise of highly able students in secondary schools. London: The Sutton Trust)

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.

Top Tips for Parents of MAT Learners

1. Be interested in what your child is learning. You could ask them: what they are learning, if it is new content or revision, what is interesting about it and how does it relate to the world around us? Listen to their views.
2. Encourage your child to have a learning routine at home, in terms of planning when they work, where, and to set goals for their learning.
3. Communicate and work with the school to plan how best to manage the learning, and ask for clarification when you are not sure.
4. Contact and work with the school to ensure your child's learning should be stimulating and progressive, not repetitive.
5. Encourage your child to understand that we all learn from making mistakes, and not to become disillusioned when they do, but accept them as a natural part of learning.
6. Make it easy for your child to enjoy time away from their work, by encouraging their hobbies and interests, to ensure a balance between work and social time. Gently make suggestions about other activities if they find it hard to switch off from school work.
7. Encourage your child to improve the depth of processing new information and skills by engaging in programmes that support them with note taking, revision skills etc. Support them in trying new ways of learning and revising.
8. Talk with your child about the current challenges, such as uncertainty about exams and assessments, by reassuring them that answers will come and that everyone involved in their education has their best interests at heart.
9. Don't dismiss their concerns and fears but acknowledge those that are relevant, and try to focus on their goals and the choices they have the power to make.
10. Openly talk about mental health and wellbeing within the family home, and make it ok to have a bad day, to be angry and to be worried, and encourage them to express and share their emotions and to realise what it is that they can and can't control.

Top Tips for Leaders to support MAT Learners with Blended Learning

1. Ensure that all staff have an up-to-date knowledge of who the MAT and SEREN pupils are in the school. Remind staff of these pupils and their needs throughout this time of blended learning.
2. Consider updating the non-negotiables to support MAT learners with Blended Learning Approaches and share with staff as a quick checklist.
3. Ensure MAT learners are referenced in your Blended Learning Policy/Plan.
4. Support teachers on appropriate learning tasks to stretch and challenge the MAT learner through Blended Learning and avoid, repetition of work, low challenge, or lack of informative learner feedback on completion of tasks.
5. More Able pupils who are experiencing aspects of Perfectionism Syndrome can become vulnerable. Ensure they are tracked and monitored and have a teacher/mentor as a point of contact for their wellbeing and progression needs.
6. Value student voice- check in with MAT pupils and listen to their views on their work and progress to ensure their blended learning experience is fit for purpose.
7. Provide parents/carers of the most able students frequent information about what their children should achieve and raise their expectations where necessary.
8. Encourage teachers to use form time to access recorded University Open Days to raise aspirations of MAT learners.
9. Ensure your MAT learners are accessing appropriate support regarding their destinations from Career Wales.

Top Tips for Practitioners

The following tips are offered as ideas that might usefully inform your thinking as teachers about the support that more able pupils might benefit from and some of the ideas are adapted from the Sutton Trust report.

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 their work.
2. Ensure an appropriate blend of support and rigour. If the rigour reduces because the support increases, then that's fine!
3. Differentiation can be used to stretch the highly able even in mixed ability settings, teachers should still be mindful of the difficulty of identifying more able and talented learners from socioeconomic backgrounds and be careful to provide all students with tasks that are challenging and stretching for them.
4. All teachers have the potential to support more able students by monitoring their progression over time.
5. Use optimistic language e.g. "When you move on to V11th form..."
6. Feedback that is regular and personalised will be helpful for MA learners, to keep them reassured and focussed.
7. Outside of the classroom, mentoring and tutoring programmes are promising interventions for more able and talented students and particularly those from disadvantaged backgrounds
8. Give opportunities for pupils to collaborate with others across classes through use of Hwb tools.
9. Unpick your planning to maximise the opportunities for MA learners included in a blended delivery model.
10. MA 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.

Top Tips for Learners

1. Don't become consumed by work and learning. Ensure that you have time for your interests, exercise, family and friends.
2. The work set by teachers in school and at home is likely to be challenging and appropriate for your ability, but if you feel it isn't, talk to your teachers.
3. Don't waste time worrying about things that are outside of your control. Focus on what you can do and not what you cannot. Do not focus too much on the pandemic, your examinations and your school. Look up circles of influence- the things that concern you that you can control.
<https://www.habitsforwellbeing.com/the-circle-of-concern-and-influence/>
4. Don't feel you always need to strive for perfection. Read the link:
<https://www.healthline.com/health/perfectionism#prevention>
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. Congratulate yourself when you complete a task and work towards your goals and targets.
7. Check in with yourself and really consider 'how are you feeling?' It's important to talk about your feelings in and outside of school and to admit when you're finding things difficult. We all can struggle.
8. Be aware of who you can turn to when you're finding things difficult in school and at home.

For more information contact Regional MAT leads:

Kathryn.bevan@sewaleseas.org.uk
anthony.jones@erw.cymru

MairHerbert@gwegogledd.cymru
John.C.Welch@cscjes.org.uk