

5

Leadership and whole school evaluation

What does rurality mean for school leadership?

National policy for G&T education is changing, with the expectation that the school should do more for itself, with less outside support. As a result, leadership of the G&T strategy will be largely shaped by whole school priorities for improvement – how the school sees itself and what it is actually doing.

For those leading the G&T agenda in the school, the task clearly relates to how the needs of rural G&T learners can be writ large within these priorities and how the G&T agenda can ally itself to staff development.

In broad terms, the IQS point to effective leadership as:

1. Self-evaluation and improvement planning
2. Recognising and championing the school's G&T learners
3. Distributing leadership of provision
4. Achievement and progression.

In addition to reviewing the content of the other sections of this guide, the themes and activities on

the following pages could serve as a useful starting point or as a checklist to assess the extent to which current processes are sensitive to these issues.

Self-evaluation and planning

As part of the school's regular processes, provision for its rural G&T learners should be regularly and explicitly reviewed. The school needs to decide how often and how explicit this process is and to balance the consideration of this agenda with the many others it faces.

The overall effectiveness of a school depends to a large extent upon how clearly the leadership team see, and act upon, issues of diversity and equality. Alongside safeguarding, achievement and capacity to improve, these two aspects are currently seen by Ofsted as limiting in assessing a school's overall effectiveness (affecting all other judgements). Consequently, issues surrounding rurality and isolation are critically important for the leadership of schools who are either entirely or partially operating in a rural setting.

Self-evaluation and planning

How can a leader make it happen?

Internal processes:

- Ensure that your school's self-evaluation includes relevant commentary relating to G&T and rural learners
- Conduct a thorough analysis of the effects of rurality on your capacity to provide for all learners, including the G&T cohort
- Looking at the overall 'best fit' judgement in your IQS, question how this would be different if it *only focused on your provision for rural learners*
- Consider your school's self-evaluation and improvement process in order to investigate which issues your school finds most difficult to address
- Review how your current whole school initiatives can address the issues of rurality, either directly or indirectly.

External processes:

- Explicitly review the effects of rurality with your management team
- Consider how issues relating to (i) G&T; and (ii) rurality were either explicitly or implicitly considered in your school's most recent Ofsted report.



Recognising G&T learners

Whether or not rural learners are in the minority, a fixed or cohort-based view of G&T is unlikely to be sufficiently flexible to accommodate their needs explicitly. The needs of rural learners may be lost within the range of activities in a G&T strategy. What we seek within this guidance is more compatible with a 'talent-pool' approach.

Rural schools are presented with significant opportunities by virtue of their location. Rural learning offers authentic experiences that can reveal potential in any learner. Identification through provision (where the potential of each child is actively explored) then becomes the driver.

But how many potential futures are explicitly linked to the need for high achievement? This question is not posed to undermine the needs of high achievers or to dismiss rural skills are merely vocational. But it may be the case that the traditional view of identification may be predicated on more metropolitan views of what makes for success. Rural skills typically bridge the artificial divide between 'gifted' and 'talented'.

How can a leader make it happen?

Consider the representation of your school's rural learners on the G&T register, in terms of the spread of attainment, participation in enrichment activities (particularly those aimed at broadening awareness and experience such as University master classes or urban and international links).

Agree and promote a policy to ensure that teachers and teams identify your rural G&T learners and actively pursue those with as yet untapped potential to reveal and develop their individual expertise.

Provide opportunities for your rural G&T learners to make their interests and abilities known and visible throughout the school, particularly those which exist outside the curriculum, in ways which will make these useful in day-to-day learning.



Leadership of provision

Our experience has shown us that there is a tendency for leadership of G&T in school to be concentrated in the roles and job descriptions of relatively few colleagues. Whilst these may have the responsibility for the design and implementation of a strategy, it is clearly more beneficial to involve a much wider group of colleagues. Issues relating to rural provision tend to be expressed through the needs of specific rural learners. It is therefore necessary for all staff to be able to act as advocates for these learners.

Rural schools, especially small schools, may need to work together to create capacity to extend and enrich provision, as they may lack some of the specialist skills required, as well as for economic reasons and to avoid significant duplication of effort.

Whilst this is not necessarily particular to rural schools, all schools should seek to involve learners themselves in leadership opportunities throughout the school. Some schools report a significant impact on the learners' self-confidence and aspirations, when these were previously seen to be adversely affected by rurality.

How can a leader make it happen?

Encourage the exploration and sharing of ideas and advocacy for individual learners – by reporting back on your CPD opportunities – perhaps starting staff meetings with a sharing of 'problem solutions' for individual learners.

Where budgets allow, address any difficulties of capacity in relation to your curriculum coverage through creative use of part-time teachers, specialist and semi-specialist teaching.

Work in partnership with other schools to increase your capacity and share expertise and costs. Curriculum enrichment can occur through cluster activities and draw in local people to the work of the school. Delegate curriculum responsibilities across a cluster of schools.

Take on a leadership role in your rural community, by developing the school as a community hub, enhancing community life through a focus on:

- a sense of place in learning
- extending community networks
- developing an in-school knowledge and understanding of your community
- contributing to an improvement of your community environment/quality of life.

Provide opportunities for your rural G&T learners to develop leadership skills through involvement in curriculum design, teaching and learning and wider school life.

Achievement and progression

Attention to rates of progression is more consistent with the 2010 Ofsted framework than simply dealing with high attainment. Those making higher than expected progress are at least as important for the school as those for whom expected levels have already been achieved.

It can be an interesting exercise to relate high achievement to non-identification. Are there high achievers in national tests whose potential has not been recognised or 'seen' in the G&T cohort?

What, for instance, does analysis of the percentage of pupils achieving two to three level 5s at Key Stage 2; or three A/A*; or five A*–B grades at GCSE, tell you in relation to those not identified? For instance, recent NRN analysis of Key Stage 2 results showed that 55.0% of identified G&T rural learners achieved L5 in both English and Maths against 17.4% of those not identified.

Focusing on sub-groups within the school population, whether they are part of the identified G&T population or not, allows the school to explore its talent pool, in particular to identify any unconscious stereotyping which may occur.

Achievement and progression

How can a leader make it happen?

Analyse whether:

- the attainment of your rural learners stands comparison with the rest of your school population or with those in similar schools
- your identified group of rural learners progress in relation to their prior attainment and potential
- rural learners fit into pockets of underachievement within your school
- there are rural learners who are high achievers in national tests whose potential has not been recognised, either as identified within the cohort, or in individual subjects
- the destinations of your rural learners with regard to schools, employment and higher education reflect the broadest view of potential in your school.

A final word

This document has been written to support dialogue in schools about the impact of rurality on both the identification of G&T learners and on the provision that is offered to challenge them. It presents starting points and raises significant questions that schools can engage with.

It refers to our website, www.ruralgandt.org.uk, which will hold detailed resources and suggestions from current interesting practice as our team continues to find them.

We would welcome examples of practice from schools using these materials or who have developed their own resources and strategies relating to the impact of rurality on G&T provision.

