

Gifted students could be accelerated to keep them challenged

January 13 2016, by Anna Kellett

Gifted students could be given the choice of accelerating their education so they don't get bored and drop out of school, according to a University academic.

Dr Janna Wardman, of the University of Auckland's Faculty of Education and Social Work, says it's estimated that one in 50 students in every school is sufficiently gifted in a broad range of subjects and socially mature enough to enable them to be accelerated a full year, if they wish.

Discussions around how to best serve [gifted children](#) are flourishing at the Ministry of Education online learning site, Te Kete Ipurangi (TKI), which has a section for the gifted and talented community. But New Zealand has no set definition of what makes a gifted student, and no set of rules on how they should be progressed through the school system.

In 2005, the Ministry decided to categorise gifted and talented as a section within special needs students, but this has so far not assisted their cause, and there is still no targeted budget to assist [gifted students](#) in schools. Acceleration as a strategy, however, does not require extra funding; it simply requires a willingness to consider the full year acceleration option that has been proven around the world to be the best strategy for even moderately gifted students.

Many New Zealand schools have programmes in which gifted students accelerate in a few individual subjects, but full-year acceleration allows

students to progress at a faster rate in all subjects and some finish secondary school in just four years. This allows early progress to university study, or to follow another pathway. But not all schools offer such strategies and without it, Dr Wardman says some gifted students drop out of school altogether.

"I call them 'The Lost Gifted' because I became aware that a number of very bright students become so bored with the pace of the curriculum that is offered to them that they play up," she says.

There are no data on New Zealand gifted students who exit early, but overseas it is estimated up to 20 percent leave school early with no or few qualifications.

Rather than allowing this to happen, Dr Wardman would like to see a set process where students are identified as gifted as early as possible. In secondary schools testing is usually done at the beginning of year 9. If multiple forms of identification agree, at the end of term one, they could be moved to start term two up a grade, in year 10. Some profoundly gifted students require a two grade acceleration to keep them challenged and engaged in their learning. The process at primary school is similar; multi-level classes make it easy for gifted students to progress with their ability peers rather than being retained with their age-peers.

Dr Wardman is also working on steps that can be taken at the university level.

Plans are underway at the Faculty of Education and Social Work to offer two online courses at post-graduate level to identify and provide for gifted students. These courses will be open not only to teachers in the various sectors in education, but also anyone else interested in gifted.

Dr Wardman first started researching gifted when she was studying for

her M.Ed at the University of Melbourne. The former secondary [school](#) teacher says it gave her the time to reflect on her teaching practice for the first time.

"When I thought about it, I realised the students that were the most disadvantaged were the bright students in the schools, whereas most of my focus at that time was lifting up the students who were at the lower end of the ability spectrum. I came to the conclusion the ones that I had missed out on, were the ones at the higher end of the ability spectrum. To me it's not an either/or argument, all kids deserve the opportunity to reach their potential."

Provided by University of Auckland

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