



# Challenge and Extend Policy

Reviewed August 2025

Next Review August 2027

Reviewed by Challenge and Extend Coordinator/Assistant Head (Assessment and Student Progress)

## What is Challenge and Extend?

At Bedford Girls' School, we seek to ensure that every pupil realises her academic potential to the full. We do not believe in achieving this by merely instructing or conveying facts to pupils, but rather by offering challenging, vibrant and exciting lessons put across by passionate, learned and dynamic teachers. From inquiry led learning and high order questioning to embedding the skills developed within the IB Learner Profile, our students are able to access the utmost challenge and extension in every lesson. In addition, through regular liaison with the Assistant Head (Assessment and Student Progress) and Head of Departments, the Challenge and Extend Coordinator ensures that all pupils are stretched across the different subject areas. The Challenge and Extend Coordinator collates and records the provision for each department through regular contact with Heads of Department and Heads of Year in the Junior School.

Overall, our Challenge and Extend Policy is designed to create an inspiring learning environment that all our students will respond to, and will provide real stimulus in particular to students who are particularly able.

## Why not Gifted and Talented?

Our policy is not to seek, identify and label pupils as Gifted and Talented by only using past quantitative data; the use of such data assumes that intelligence levels are relatively fixed rather than recognising that intelligence is gained through effort and experience. Research on motivation and achievement suggests that if it is assumed by pupils that intelligence is fixed then they seek out relatively simple tasks that validate their intelligence and avoid tasks that are challenging for fear of the risk of failing.

Pupils, however, who subscribe to the belief that intelligence is gained through effort and experience do not mind failing in learning situations because the failure is not a reflection of any innate fixed ability, but rather a particular learning strategy that has gone wrong which therefore needs reviewing. Leading theorist, Professor Carol Dweck suggests that "teaching people to have a 'growth mind-set,'<sup>1</sup> which encourages a focus on effort rather than on intelligence or talent, helps make them into high achievers in school and in life." Her research has shown that embedding this ethos allows pupils become better, more successful learners. In contrast, those identified and labeled as gifted are often poorly motivated and under-perform as they do not recognise the need to try very hard (because they see themselves as gifted), whilst others, not identified, feel "deflated" and not motivated because they had failed to reach the prescribed criteria of being gifted.

Hence, as a school we are wary of labeling giftedness especially using quantitative data. Ultimately, instead of focusing on identifying gifts, we focus on creating gifts by providing opportunities inside and outside the classroom. We do this in a variety of ways:

## IB Learner Profile

We believe that embedding the different aspects of the IB Learner Profile engages all pupils in their learning, but in particular, it engages the more able pupil who thrive as Inquirers and Thinkers. They acquire in depth knowledge and develop understanding across a broad and balanced range of disciplines, developing qualities of open-mindedness, reflection and risk taking. These skills are not only transferable across the curriculum, but are also firmly entrenched in the wide range of independent and collaborative learning projects we deliver at Bedford Girls' School.

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<sup>1</sup> Dweck, Carol. *Mindset: How you can fulfil your potential*. New York: Balantine Books, 2012

## Independent Learning

Our ethos recognises that independent learning and enquiry is open to all pupils and that it challenges and enriches the learning experience of the most able. Rogers<sup>2</sup> showed that ahead of all other forms of instructional delivery, when compared to regular learners, able learners are significantly more likely to prefer independent study, independent projects, and self-instructional materials as they extend their learning beyond the conventional demands of school work. Pupils, in responding to independent learning, self-identify themselves as Gifted and Talented, and thus begin a long journey towards excellence rather than have the excellence title enforced upon them by the school as being labeled as Gifted and Talented. As part of our Challenge and Extend Policy, we use independent learning as part of our teaching strategy.

In addition, we encourage our teachers in their lessons to take a problem-posing as well as problem-solving approach, to emphasise abstracts as well as basic concepts, to avoid repetition and excessive note taking, to encourage the pupils to make connections between different subject areas, to encourage questioning as part of everyday learning and to stimulate thinking and creative problem-solving through a range of activities and questioning.

## Developing Individuals

As a school we are aware that we have pupils who are already achieving at a high level and we need to monitor the efforts of these pupils to ensure they continue to progress at a high level. Whilst the use of quantitative data is certainly a useful factor when ascertaining the particularly able students, we also rely on department information about particular pupils in their subjects who consistently perform at a high level across the curriculum. The Challenge and Extend Co-ordinator also monitors the provision for students who are recognised as achieving within a specific subject. This overall holistic approach is managed using the mediums of MidYis, ALIS, teacher recommendations and data tracking through both formal and internal assessments. We monitor the progress of these individuals without formally identifying them.

Upon admission to the Junior School, all students undertake CATs (Cognitive Assessment Tests). These, along with formal and informal teacher assessments throughout the year, enable us to target teaching effectively. Where there is a disparity in their scores, students are closely monitored to aid in the assessment of learning needs or preferred learning styles. All Junior School staff are proactive with regard to identifying anomalies in data profiles and recognise that a child might need a higher level of support in one area whilst also having a particular strength in another thus championing the school's vision in challenging and extending **all** pupils in school. The Depth of Learning tracking system is used by all teachers to ensure all pupils continue to make progress. The Challenge & Extend Coordinator works alongside Heads of Year to monitor the girls identified by both high CAT scores and teacher assessments to ensure these girls continue to progress at a high level.

This provision is monitored by the Challenge and Extend Coordinator through progress checks, learning walks, tracking and discussion with individual pupils; this allows us to ascertain any necessary intervention, thus ensuring that every pupil in our care has the opportunity to achieve their full potential.

## Providing Co-curricular Opportunities

As part of our Challenge and Extend Policy, we aim to create an environment where pupils are encouraged to be involved with as many areas of interest as possible. We encourage and enthuse them to take part in challenges and projects in all areas of the curriculum. In addition, we teach our students to take intellectual risks by entering competitions and public debates; The Harpur Trust Debating Society, Med Soc and the Oxbridge Colleges essay competitions are just a few examples of such challenge and extend opportunities; similar internal competitions run throughout the school year. We steer them towards new challenges such as additional languages using the Philosophy Discussion Group, the Young Applicants in Schools Scheme and the Extended Project Qualification. We encourage our pupils to participate in special interest activity weekends such as Science Fairs, Political events, residential music colleges and to attend extension lectures at Oxbridge and other institutions. The Challenge and Extend Co-ordinator is also proactive through the provision of outreach programmes within the Harpur Trust.

In the Junior School, the Young Enterprise club and STEM clubs are open to all students but teachers make personal recommendations for particular pupils they have identified from benefiting from these Challenge & Extend

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<sup>2</sup> Rogers, Karen. *Re-forming gifted education: Matching the program to the child*. USA: Great Potential Press, 2002

opportunities.

## **Positive Learning Environment**

We understand that pupils engage in their learning where they are praised and encouraged. Not only do we praise and enthuse when they perform well, but we especially do when the pupils exert effort, take intellectual risks, seek out new challenges or try out novel strategies in the face of setbacks. We recognise that hard work underpins all exceptional performances, we strive to motivate the pupils to persevere and we acknowledge academic endeavor through House Points, House certificates, the Book of Excellence and prizes awarded at our annual Prize Giving. Our annual open morning, in addition to regular parents' evenings and progress reviews are also an excellent way to share individual successes with students, parents and guardians.

In conclusion, here, at Bedford Girls' School we believe in working with pupils to create gifts and talents; we are alert to new learning and teaching methodologies and deliver a forward-looking thinking programme which is informed by national and international research. Ultimately, our success is measured by our pupils' commitment, interest and enthusiasm for learning. To achieve this is the aim of our Challenge and Extend Policy.