

Gifted and Talented statistics: PLASC data and EAL

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Here are some recent statistics from PLASC (Pupil Level Annual School Census)

First Language	Primary schools			Secondary schools		
	Number of pupils	% of G&T group	% of cohort	Number of pupils	% of G&T group	% of cohort
Known or believed to be other than English	32,300	12.0	7.2	33,210	8.1	9.7
English	236,220	87.9	8.3	377,930	91.9	12.9
Total	268,290	100.0	8.1	411,280	100.0	12.6

Table 1 Maintained primary and secondary schools in England, number and percentage of G&T pupils by their characteristics (January 2007, provisional)

What can we say about them? Well, firstly, of course, congratulations and thank you to the PLASC team for making them available and thus rendering the position of students from minority groups more transparent and open to scrutiny and questioning. Statistics rarely provide a satisfactory answer but they do throw up some very interesting questions.

Secondly, we have to build in some large caveats about the validity of the statistics: judgments are made by individual schools and relate to their particular students being compared with each other as opposed to a set of specific, agreed and coherent criteria applied uniformly and reliably across all schools.

Some schools identify students as G&T on the basis of quantifiable exam scores and/or performance level (e.g. membership of a national sports team or orchestra), others use more qualitative judgments (e.g. leadership, perseverance).

Some schools adopt a policy of identifying 10% of the student body as a whole, some schools identify 10% of students from each ethnic group.

The statistics do not differentiate between giftedness and talentedness (and there is anyway some debate as to the usefulness of such distinctions and their ability to capture dual/multiple G&T).

All this notwithstanding, the most obvious features of these headline statistics is that EAL students are less likely to be identified as G&T than their monolingual counterparts and that the gap in identification rate is much greater at secondary school (2.9%) than at primary (1.1%). Why might this be? What is different about the way the two sectors identify students that might lead to such a dip in the recognition of G&T EAL pupils once they move from primary to secondary school? Is information routinely shared between feeder schools that might prevent them falling off the register? Is there something about the curriculum offer or relations between teachers and pupils that would account for it? There is, of course, no reason to suppose that pupils from minority groups are less gifted and talented than their monolingual peers and so we need to consider why so many EAL students are apparently ‘missing’ from the G&T registers.

At the June 29 REAL conference (Realising equality and achievement for learners—a project run by London G&T (see www.londongt.org/real and *NQ* 4.4 for conference report) a number of factors were identified that might account for the absence of certain groups of pupils. This list was not specifically about EAL students but it certainly seems to offer a good fit.

It identifies pupils:

who have an incomplete prior attainment history:

EAL students arriving late or with a disrupted educational background could easily fall into this category. Our failure to understand, capture, or build on evidence of prior attainment may be operating as a significant barrier to early identification.

who achieve relatively less well in written work:

EAL learners will almost by definition not be able to exhibit the ‘up-front’ evidence of G&T garnered from tests, which are usually written in nature. The absence of a specific curriculum for EAL continues to be one of the ways in which their achievement is hidden. Whereas gifted mathematicians, scientists and musicians all have National Curricula frameworks that exemplify and validate pupils’ attainment in specific areas of excellence, EAL students do not have such a curriculum that would provide them with a nationally sanctioned and widely understood and accepted forum for success where their accelerated developmental growth might be made visible. The political right will often deride educationalists for an ‘all must have prizes’ mentality, but this seems not to apply to bilingual students whose

first languages are given only a grudging presence in the curriculum and are often perceived as ‘easy’ options rather than equivalent GCSEs, and the complete absence of an EAL curriculum means that their most obvious area of achievement is rendered invisible, although some encouraging fresh thinking seems to be in the wind. Currently, however, EAL students continued to be measured against NC English, which is at best an inadequate proxy.

whose achievement outside the school curriculum (for instance, culturally specific gifts and talents) are unknown to, or unrecognised by the school: many EAL students are involved in educational, community, and cultural activities outside the school and these are not always recognised or validated. These may include attendance at complementary schools, acting as interpreters, playing ‘ethnic’ musical instruments, engagement in youth work and so on, all of which could provide evidence of G&T. (As with all of these points, it is only fair to point out that in some LAs ground-breaking work in these areas is being done and disseminated via, e.g. the REAL project website cited above.

who are not given the opportunity to demonstrate new or hidden gifts and talents through provision: anecdotally, I have heard of schools where EAL students are almost *de facto* excluded from identification as they are already being given additional support through EMAG funding. A student does not experience their bilingualism and giftedness as two distinct entities and our provision for their needs should not be fragmented but holistic and coherent. Even where such crass and invidious divisions are not made, it is not surprising that early stage learners will find it difficult to demonstrate their abilities where the curriculum or level of EAL support has not been sufficiently accommodating.

whose needs and aspirations do not match the offer from the school: G&T runs the risk of operating within a closed, culturally narrow model of giftedness. The challenge for EAL pupils seems to be that they have to demonstrate that they can ‘pass’—a rather exclusive model of inclusion it seems.

for whom there are cultural or other resistances to participation: for some EAL learners identification as G&T is not desirable as it goes against the grain to appear to be self-promoting and ‘exceptional’. Parents may not be familiar with the notion and may disapprove of their children being ‘identified’, which, after all, generally carries negative connotations. Unequal distributions of power amongst groups in a school can also lead to the exclusion of some (groups of) learners from opportunities to develop their gifts and talents. As reported in the review of Maggie Hawkins’ research in this issue of *NQ*, not all EAL students have the skills to affiliate themselves with peers who can act as enabling sources of educational scaffolding!

who are currently underachieving: see the point about writing above, but this also relates again to the absurd absence of an EAL curriculum and associated assessment system that would more accurately capture their attainment. As seen in the review of Christensen and Stanat’s paper in this edition, the countries that show the lowest gap in educational outcomes between monolingual and bilingual students are those that have a dedicated second-language programme with specialist teachers and assessment systems. We don’t.

for whom ‘potential’ is the strongest indicator for their inclusion: some schools (particularly those with large numbers of early stage EAL learners) have learnt through experience that capturing ‘potential’ can come through more subtle, nuanced assessments of learners, e.g. through attitudes and behaviours such as perseverance, attentiveness, engagement and so on.

G&T by ethnic group

The PLASC data also provides more detailed breakdowns by ethnic group. These figures provide some depressing and some uplifting insights. Again, there are difficulties about interpreting data that lumps together ‘Black African’ when we know that there are significant differences within the constituents of this group. This also applies increasingly to the ‘any other white’ category as Eastern Europeans begin to arrive in more significant numbers and diversity. The table below is an adaptation of the original PLASC statistics designed to show levels of over/under representation of each group. This has been calculated by taking the ‘White British’ category as the norm against which other groups are measured. The degree of over/under-representation has then been calculated on the basis of the percentage figure for that group and then this percentage has been converted into a number of ‘missing’ students based on the number of pupils categorised as being in that group. All the usual caveats about identification of ethnicity apply but given the size of the sample it seems reasonable to assume that overall these figures give us a reliable indicator of the state of play and make it possible to ask some searching questions.

On the positive side, we should recognise and celebrate the superb performance of Chinese students, who account for 18.6% of the G&T cohort, an 8% over-representation against the norm for white British of 10.6%. We should also be asking/researching what it is about this group that leads to such excellence.

On the negative side, the figures for Travellers of Irish heritage and Gypsy/Roma students is a serious indictment of the education system, with the Traveller groups being almost a mirror image in terms of under-representation (– 8.5%) as the Chinese students are of over-representation. However, it is also important to recognise that the number of students affected by this is relatively small (under 1000 for both groups combined).

If we take the example of Pakistani students, on the other hand, the percentage gap between their identification and that of the norm is 'only' 3.6%, but this actually converts to a figure of 7,220 students missing out on the provision they have an entitlement to.

It is difficult to look at these figures and not see evidence of institutional racism. Important work is going on to address these inequalities, most notably London G&T's REAL project cited earlier; and the National Strategy team is also seeking to address the issue of under-representation by particular groups. It is tempting to see G&T as a mirror held up to society providing a reflection of and on our level of inclusiveness. As Vygotsky wrote, 'social relations or relations among people genetically underlie all higher functions and their relationships'. Let's tear down the fences and start building bridges.

Table 2 Maintained primary and secondary schools: number and percentage of G&T pupils by ethnic group (January 2007, provisional)

	No. of pupils	% of G&T group	% of cohort	Over/(under) representation: %	Over/(under) representation by number of pupils	Total number of pupils	% of population
White	568,700	83.6	10.5	(0.1)	(3,360)	5,391,670	82.0
White British	548,810	80.7	10.6	0.0	0	5,172,600	78.7
Irish	2,740	0.4	11.5	0.9	210	23,840	0.4
Traveller of Irish heritage	80	0.0	2.1	(8.5)	(330)	3,920	0.1
Gypsy/ Roma	220	0.0	2.7	(7.9)	(630)	8,020	0.1
Any other White background	16,840	2.5	9.2	(1.4)	(2,610)	183,300	2.8
Mixed	24,700	3.6	11.6	1.0	2,160	212,420	3.2
White and Black Caribbean	7,890	1.2	10.8	0.2	170	72,760	1.1
White and Black African	2,460	0.4	11.2	0.6	120	21,990	0.3
White and Asian	5,720	0.8	13.0	2.4	1,060	43,870	0.7
Any other Mixed background	8,640	1.3	11.7	1.1	810	73,790	1.1
Asian	44,730	6.6	8.9	(1.7)	(8,740)	504,020	7.7
Indian	17,540	2.6	11.1	0.5	850	157,370	2.4
Pakistani	14,010	2.1	7.0	(3.6)	(7,220)	200,030	3.0
Bangladeshi	7,080	1.0	8.7	(1.9)	(1,570)	81,550	1.2
Any other Asian background	6,110	0.9	9.4	(1.2)	(800)	65,070	1.0
Black	22,330	3.3	8.2	(2.4)	(6,480)	271,470	4.1
Black Caribbean	8,170	1.2	9.2	(1.4)	(1,240)	88,700	1.3
Black African	11,500	1.7	7.5	(3.1)	(4,670)	152,430	2.3
Any other Black background	2,650	0.4	8.7	(1.9)	(570)	30,350	0.5
Chinese	4,510	0.7	18.6	8.0	1,940	24,160	0.4
Any other ethnic group	6,030	0.9	8.4	(2.2)	(1,540)	71,410	1.1
Classified	670,990	98.7	10.4	(0.2)	(16,020)	6,475,160	98.5
Unclassified	8,880	1.3	.	.	(1,660)	99,410	1.5
Minority Ethnic Pupils	122,180	18.0	9.4	(1.2)	(16,020)	1,302,560	19.8
All pupils	679,870	100.0	10.3	(0.3)	(17,680)	6,574,570	100.0