

A curriculum for the most able through searching self-evaluation: East Barnet School

URN: 136658
Region: London
Remit: Schools

Provider background

[East Barnet School](#) in North London has technology college status and is a leadership partner school and a national support school.

Brief description

This good practice example shows how school leaders at East Barnet School have used self-evaluation to improve the quality of the curriculum for the most able students.

It illustrates how teachers have been challenged to ensure that the experience students receive in lessons and the wider curriculum is securing high academic and personal outcomes. In doing so, it demonstrates how senior leaders exhibit some of the effective practice cited in the 2015 Ofsted report: '[The most able students: an update of progress since June 2013](#)'.

The good practice in detail

Nick Christou, headteacher, is clear: an unrelenting focus on improving teaching based on the school's philosophy of 'learning without walls' is paramount to students improving performance:

'East Barnet School recognises that its most able students could be tomorrow's social, intellectual, economic, business, sporting or cultural leaders. Students who have particular gifts and talents are recognised by the school and supported in their development, within and beyond the classroom.'

The school was [last inspected in April 2012](#), when inspectors found:

‘The rich and purposeful curriculum provides many opportunities for memorable, high quality learning. Review and evaluation ensure that it meets the needs of learners exceptionally well. An extensive extra-curricular programme provides outstanding opportunities for students’ spiritual, moral, cultural and social development. This includes a large number of opportunities for trips, visits from guest speakers and lecture programmes and entry to national and international competitions.’

Since that time, senior leaders have not been complacent. They have challenged themselves, their staff and their students to pursue a journey of excellence.

A strong emphasis is placed on inspiring and motivating the most able students, as well as promoting their academic achievements. This is very successful and is echoed in every aspect of the school. Large scientific instruments are displayed around the school, designed by students alongside experts to measure the speed of falling objects, the passing of time and the movement of cogs and wheels. Top figures in their field provide lectures for the most able students to raise their awareness and aspirations of what they might be able to achieve. Recent lecturers include: the Director of the BBC, the American Ambassador to the UK, the Astronomer Royal and a large number of university professionals who are experts in their field.

Underpinning the school’s success is a series of searching self-evaluation questions. This has helped to improve the quality of the curriculum and students’ learning. The questions are given below.

How do we ensure that work in Key Stage 3 is challenging and demanding for our most able students in all subjects?

Leaders and managers have created an ethos where the most able students can flourish in Key Stage 3.

The curriculum is carefully structured, taking into account the most able students’ knowledge and understanding from Key Stage 2 onwards:

- Leaders ensure that activities carefully build on this knowledge and understanding alongside the strong development of resilience and mastery.
- Highly detailed subject-specific criteria are used across all subjects to identify and carefully monitor the achievement of the most able students. This ensures that their progress is not limited to core subjects.

Close attention is given to nurturing and encouraging those with particular gifts and talents in all aspects of the school’s work:

- Information is gathered during transition meetings with primary schools on specialist areas of high academic attainment evident in school and other specific skills pupils use out of school.

- A register of all skills is set up before students start at the school and shared directly with all staff. This close attention to detail, gathered through careful research, monitoring and evaluation of the quality of teaching and students' work, is given equal weighting at all key stages, not just Key Stage 4.
- The school employs a well-trained and dedicated leader to oversee this specific aspect of its work.

The most able disadvantaged students receive bespoke experiences depending on their personal and academic needs. Routine practice at the school to support these students includes:

- one-to-one mentoring and guidance
- paying for trips, books or resources to aid learning
- funding interview practice
- paying for university visits
- accompanying these students to visits and interviews where necessary.

The school promotes enhancement, enrichment and extension as the norm in Key Stage 3 through its 'triple-e' curriculum offer:

- For two afternoons each week during Years 7 and 8, students follow modules of four to six weeks of a 'learning through inspiration' programme.
- Stimulating activities capture students' imagination – such as CAD drawing of cityscapes and buildings or 3D modelling and graphic design.
- Such opportunities enable the most able students to nurture their interests and apply the knowledge and skills they have learnt in the classroom in wider contexts.

The work of professionals in residence such as artists, actors or designers results in high quality sculpture and design work being incorporated within the learning environment:

- Support from a writer in residence through the [National Theatre playwriting competition](#) led to one student having her play performed by a professional theatre company.
- Students are currently involved in researching and developing a timeline around the school to illustrate the chronology of world events.

Are the most able provided with the same curriculum as all students in each key stage?

The views of the most able students are routinely gathered and acted on to improve the curriculum. As a result, senior leaders ensure that the curriculum is tailored for the most able at all key stages, not just at Key Stage 4.

The school is determined to provide the necessary additional opportunities for the most able students and allow them to achieve accreditation where possible in a range of subjects. For example:

- two students achieved GCSE astronomy with the help of telescopes provided by the school
- talented musicians are challenged and entered for grade 5 theory exams as soon as they are ready for them, most recently in Years 8 and 9 for two students
- an elite athletics programme at Middlesex University is used to deliver specialist psychology sports training. Talented sports students are fast tracked and complete GCSE physical education by the end of Year 10. In 2014, 94% gained A*–B grades. In Year 11, students progress to a sports leadership award and start the A level course.



How does the homework offered to the most able students differ from that given to other students? How do we know that it is challenging enough?

The school has adopted a strategy for homework and lessons that requires the most able students to investigate more complex issues and problems and use **higher order evaluative skills**. Students welcome the element of choice they receive and the opportunity to be creative in the completion of tasks set.

Homework is planned to meet the specific learning needs of the most able students. Students who require additional stretching in their reading are challenged to use a wider range of sources to complete historical research, for example on Henry

VIII's implementation of the [statute of six articles](#). In Year 8, students working on the area of circles are expected to use the knowledge gained from the activity to calculate the circumference and diameter of the earth.

Extensive support for the most able disadvantaged students to complete homework at school is proving very successful:

- Students attend the breakfast club from 8am or the school library with support from subject specialist staff to help with their queries and provide feedback on homework.
- Homework clubs run each lunch time and after school for every year group with the sixth form study area open until 7pm daily.
- A monthly Saturday school is provided for any disadvantaged students in Key Stage 4 who have fallen behind with their homework.
- This in-school support is supplemented by additional resources, including early support for interview technique and preparation for any future application process.

What enrichment programmes and opportunities do we provide for our most able students? What difference do they make?

The school works exceptionally hard to develop students' interests beyond the classroom.

- Enrichment and extra-curricular activities are used for additional experiences, such as different sports or cultural development through theatre trips.
- Talented musicians deliver workshops and contribute to lessons for Year 7 students.
- The most able mathematicians are used as 'maths leaders' within local feeder primary schools to deliver mathematics programmes including current Level 6 work for the most able primary pupils.

The school is a national leader in the development of robotics. The most able students in Years 9 to 13 gain exceptional expertise in designing and building automated devices using industry standard software. Students regularly win national competitions and one disadvantaged student involved in the robotics programme achieved a place at Oxford. Two teams represented UK schools in the international robotics competition in California.

What training and support have we provided for our staff to meet the needs of the most able students?

School leaders are clear that improving the learning of the most able students does not happen by chance. Leadership programmes are seen as an essential and integral part of the school curriculum:

- Senior leaders ensure that all teachers receive training to meet the needs of the most able students.
- Leaders do not focus the skills of their best teachers disproportionately on the upper key stages.
- Subject specialists using their expert subject knowledge to challenge and stretch the most able students are the norm in all key stages. This enables teachers to plan lessons that accelerate the learning of the most able students.

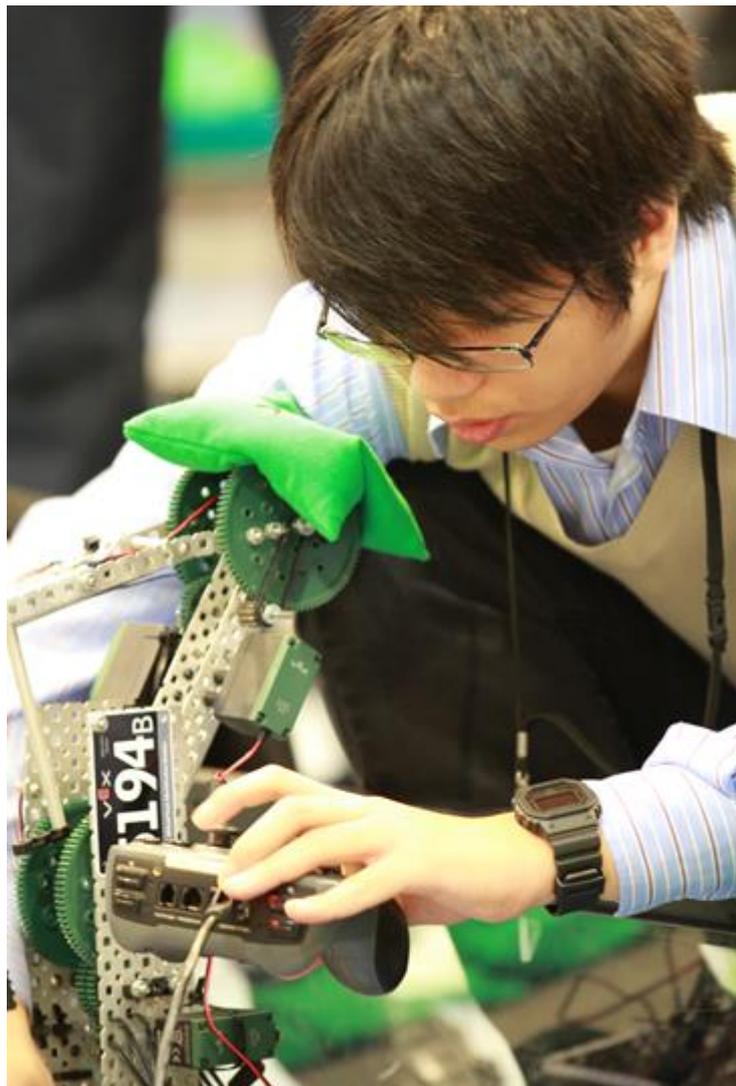
As a leadership partnership school, senior leaders focus on developing the leadership skills not only of staff but also of students. Coaching for improvement is therefore an embedded part of the [professional development culture](#) within the school:

- Experts provide four to six weekly feedback sessions for staff in order for them to reflect on and improve their performance.
- The strong emphasis on the impact of teaching on students' achievement is at the heart of every learning conversation.
- The findings from this process are carefully analysed and used to plan for additional training and support or further amend the curriculum offered.

The impact of such a strong emphasis placed on this aspect of the school's work is evident in the success rates to further destinations. In 2014, 102 students gained places at universities, including 20 at Russell Group destinations.

How well does the curriculum guide and support the most able students when making their A-level choices? What support is given to selecting academic subjects to study?

Senior leaders within the school do not view careers guidance, advice and support



as separate from the curriculum offer, but integral to it.

A dedicated member of staff is employed to support students through the (Universities and Colleges Admissions Service (UCAS) application process.

The school has worked hard to develop exceptionally strong links with many different universities, former students, leading businesses and national institutions.

- Formal visits to universities take place for students from Year 9 onwards.
- University staff from Russell Group universities, Oxford and Cambridge provide regular guidance on the application process and being successful at interview.
- Trips to science and higher education fairs, 'Inspire' sessions at Imperial College London or summer school taster sessions at London universities are routine. Such sessions raise students' aspirations and their awareness of what choices and options are available in the next phase of their education or training.
- Such experiences are not limited to universities alone. Ernst and Young accountants provide training days and London law firms provide work experience for students who demonstrate interest and promise.

The school is careful to ensure that students are given the highest quality guidance from school staff to ensure that they can make informed choices about the correct courses and routes for their future education or training.

- Six-weekly tutorial programmes support students when writing their personal statements.
- School staff work alongside university lecturers to help prepare students for interviews.
- Formal partnership arrangements with Sussex University enables 100 Year 11 students to attend open day experiences.
- Former students including doctors, lawyers and accountants regularly give talks about their career routes and courses to show what is possible.
- Those students who are the top achievers and also in receipt of the pupil premium receive guaranteed university offers.

Conclusion

As a result of this collective effort, outcomes for the most able students have continued to rise since the time of the last full inspection. The progress made in the EBACC and 'best 8' subjects is well above the national average. In 2014, over two thirds of the most able students achieved A*–A in English and mathematics. The proportion of students achieving A*–A grades in the nine science, mathematics and technology subjects is well above the national average and a key strength of the school.

The good practice case studies that Ofsted publishes highlight specific examples of practice that providers of education, learning and children's services have used to achieve successful outcomes.

For education, the case studies do not recommend a single particular approach to teaching and learning. Ofsted has no preferred lesson structure or teaching style. We showcase and share a wide range of approaches that providers have found work well for them in achieving good outcomes for children, young people and learners.

Are you thinking of putting these ideas into practice, already doing something similar that could help other providers, or just interested? We'd welcome your views and ideas. Complete our survey [here](#).

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