Perspectives and Practices of the Staff of an Irish Post-Primary School in Addressing the Needs of Exceptionally Able Pupils

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Abstract

Given the dearth of research in relation to exceptionally able pupils in Ireland, the aim of this study was to add to the literature by way of further understand the ways in which these pupils are viewed, and how they are identified and provision is made for them. As a duel exceptional learner myself (one who is both intellectually gifted and disabled) I've been fascinated by society's delight in pathologising difference, and the cost that is accrued not only by the individuals mislabelled, but to society as a whole. In every school classroom throughout Ireland there is likely a cohort of exceptionally able pupils who need opportunities to maximise their potential. Of this group, between 1/5 and 1/6 of them are also disabled. In Ireland, exceptionally able pupils are included under the category of pupils with special educational needs in the 1998 Education Act, while The Education for Persons with Special Educational Needs (EPSEN) Act, 2004, does not explicitly refer to such needs and the Exceptionally Able Students Guidelines for Teachers have remained in draft form since they were published in 2007. Given this confusing and contradictory landscape it is unsurprising that many schools do not have a formal system of identifying exceptionally able students and the aim of this study was to find out what was happening in one post-primary school in Ireland. First, a specially designed questionnaire was sent to every member of staff of the school with either teaching or care responsibility of these pupils in order to get a broad outline of how staff in the school conceptualise exceptional ability, and how they identify and make provision for exceptionally able pupils. This is followed by an in-depth examination of the main issues with five members of staff who volunteered to participate in one to one interviews. The findings from the interviews expanded (sometimes contradicted) the findings from questionnaire as participants report on their day-to-day experience of interaction with this cohort of students. In general, the staff were supportive of providing support for the students, however on a practical level this support was ad hoc and hampered by an uncertainty as to what constituted an exceptionally able pupil. In particular, the egalitarian educational outlook prevalent in Irish schools places an emphasis on pupils with learning difficulties and raising their test scores with little or no emphasis on ensuring the exceptionally able reach their full potential. Finally, staff reported a requirement for further training in this area, as they felt they lacked both the skills and knowledge required to deal with these exceptionally able pupils.

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Abbreviations

ADHD	Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder
ASD	Autism Spectrum Disorder
CPD	Continuing Professional Development
CTYI	Centre for Talented Youth, Ireland
DCU	Dublin City University
DEIS	Delivering Equality of Opportunity in Schools
DES	Department of Education and Skills/Science
EPSEN	Education for Persons with Special Needs
ETB	Education and Training Board
EU	European Union
NAGC	National Association of Gifted Children
NCCA	National Council for Curriculum and Assessment
OECD	Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
PIRLS	Progress in International Reading Literacy Study
PISA	Programme for International Student Assessment
QUAL	Qualitative
QUAN	Quantitative
SERC	Special Education Review Committee
SESS	Special Education Support Service
SNA	Special Needs Assistant
STEM	Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics
TIMSS	Trends in International Mathematics and Science Study

Chapter 1 – Introduction

1.1 Background

This chapter sets out the context within Ireland to this research. In doing so it sets out the definitions of exceptional ability and the legal requirement for the provision of the special educational needs of this cohort to be satisfied. It also investigates the attitudes and opinions of the staff of one post-primary school with an Educate Together/ETB ethos. It also looked at how exceptionally able students are identified within an Irish school system.

1.2 Position of the Researcher

This study has both personal and professional significance for me. In addition to my role as the volunteering coordinator for a large corporate multinational business in which I have numerous interactions facilitating learning opportunities for underserved communities, I am also a dual (or twice) exceptional learner. As well as being neurologically diverse (I have an official diagnosis of Autism Spectrum Disorder, Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder, Dyslexia, and Depression), I'm also intellectually gifted. Depending on the instrument being used to assess my cognitive ability I would rank as being either mildly, or moderately gifted as defined by François Gagné's differentiated model of gifted and talented. Unfortunately, none of this was realised during my formative years in either primary or post-primary education, and so I had to contend with operating within a system that was not designed for me.

During my short career as a further education teacher, and my subsequent role as a volunteering coordinator I have had numerous interactions with exceptionally able pupils, that both they and their educators are oblivious to their potential. My imperative for conducting this research has been to not only deepen my own understanding of the interaction between this cohort of students and the Irish educational system, but to also formulate concrete steps that can be taken to improve the educational outcomes for this underserved community.

1.3 International Overview

Educational programmes are defined through social policies which never exist in a vacuum, but are embedded and intertwined with a wider social and political web of issues, emphases and historical experiences which characterise a country, nation, or region.

Gifted and talented education is no exception. Whether or not a country acknowledges the existence and needs of talents, and how it attempts to enhance their development, tells much about the visions shared and challenges faced by that nation. Other interplaying circumstances are also important to acknowledge, such as matters of political philosophies, national GDP, geopolitical phases of hostility in the region versus long-lasting peace, as well as society's view on what talent is. Ambrose (2009, p. 889) even categorised societies into three main types and proposed that the value systems which differentiate these groups of societies also "represent very different contexts for the development and employment of high ability." He suggested that talent in poor or war-torn pre-modern societies of developing countries would be spent on securing day-to-day survival rather than on self-fulfilment or creative production. In contrast, talented children in materialistic, modern countries (such as the USA and Japan) will be able to translate their talents into material success for themselves. Meanwhile, talents in societies transitioning to the postmodern category (favouring aesthetics, diversity, altruistic morality, individual authority over materialistic gain) will be able to contribute to social causes and the general good (such as in Canada, Scandinavia and the Netherlands).

According to the National Association of Gifted Children (NAGC), a US organisation of parents and educators, talented students need to be challenged in order to make continuous progress in school and avoid boredom and dropping out. They point out that:

- gifted students are not challenged in standard classrooms because of the lack of training of teachers in gifted education or because educators prioritise supporting struggling students;

- several longitudinal studies have shown the benefits of gifted programmes in positively influencing students' futures:

1. talent programmes enhanced participants' post-secondary plans and academic achievements at higher education institutions;
2. benefits stretched as far as the extent of time gifted students remained in creative, productive work post-graduation as well as their chances of achieving outstanding accomplishments in middle age, as indicated by awards won, innovations created, number of patents owned and books authored.

An educational programme in gifted education is "an educational experience that is planned and implemented in a specific location or region for the purpose of enhancing the development of identified gifted and talented students." (Moon & Rosselli, 2000).

1.4 An Irish Context

A definition of exceptionally able pupil as an agreed concept does not exist in the educational sector of Ireland. The draft guidelines from the NCCA states that this covers students "who require opportunities for enrichment and extension that go beyond those provided for the general cohort of students" (NCCA, 2007), but even they contends that this is merely a working definition rather than the final word on the subject.

Given this definition, and in line with the number of students conceptualised by Gagné's framework, this definition would capture approximately 10% of all pupils within this school who would have very high levels of attainment in one or more of the following areas:

- general intellectual ability or talent
- specific academic aptitude or talent
- visual and performing arts and sports
- leadership ability

- creative and productive thinking
- mechanical ingenuity
- special abilities in empathy, understanding and negotiation (NCCA, 2007, p. 8)

While current policy within Ireland is that of inclusive education, where students with special educational needs are taught in mainstream schools. Provision is made available to address the needs of students from disadvantaged backgrounds, such DEIS (delivering equality of opportunity in schools) funded schools can access additional support for literacy and numeracy, however when it comes to students with exceptional ability, their needs must be met without additional resources.

In 1993 the special education review committee (SERC) published a report advising that gifted students have the right to an education that provided sufficient stimulation and additional arrangements should be provided, including practices like acceleration, compacting, target grouping (Ireland, 1993). While key provisions of the Education for Persons with Special Needs Act (EPSEN) are still awaiting commencement, this fact is irrelevant in light of all mention of exceptionally able pupils has been removed from this legislation.

1.5 International Assessments

PISA is the OECD's Programme for International Student Assessment. PISA measures 15-year-olds' ability to use their reading, mathematics and science knowledge and skills to meet real-life challenges. It began in 2000 and is carried out every three years, with Ireland participating in every cycle of PISA since its inception.

In PISA 2018, 15-year-old students in Ireland performed above the OECD average in reading literacy, science and mathematics. Student performance in Ireland in reading literacy continues to be amongst the highest across OECD and EU countries. However, while students in Ireland achieve significantly above the OECD average in mathematics and science, the gaps in average student performance relative to the highest-performing countries remain. Ireland has

below average percentages of low-performing students in all three domains than on average across OECD countries. Despite relative stability in overall student performance in Ireland, a challenge remains in supporting students to maximise their potential at the highest levels of proficiency in science and mathematics (Mckeown et al., 2019).

Looking at these results, it is commendable to see the overall performance of Irish students, however, higher proficiency students are not reaching their full potential in either science or maths, a situation unlikely to change in the near future.

1.6 Irish Research

There is limited research within the Irish educational system in regards to exceptionally able pupils in mainstream schools. A small number of studies address issues while not specifically focused on everyday practices, is still enlightening as to the subject under discussion here. Using a short survey, McGrath (2017) contacted young members of Mensa (aged 4 to 20) to support anecdotal evidence around concerns parents had about the lack of provision for gifted students attending primary and secondary schools in Ireland. With a response rate of 39% of the total membership in this age bracket, the results from this self-selecting cohort indicated that they did not believe that their educational needs were being met by do schools in Ireland. Highlighting issues such as the difficulty of the material and the pace of instruction were not sufficiently challenging. The main provisions for gifted students to excel could be found in both amateur sports and musical productions, within and/or outside of school.

A more recent study by Cross et al. (2018a) indicates that gifted education provision had not been formalised in the Irish educational system. This nationwide survey sought to ascertain the attitudes of educators regarding the gifted students utilising Gagné's original survey instrument (Gagné & Nadeau, 1985). The results of the survey showed that respondents

were moderately supportive for special services for gifted students, while also being moderately opposed to great acceleration, a service option that has significant research support for its effectiveness. Another major finding of the study felt that there was no provision for specialist to assist them in the teaching practice. Respondents also indicated that while being receptive to expanding gifted education in our classrooms, but lacked the time, training, and resources to do so.

1.7 Overall Research Aim

The aim of the study is to explore how the staff of an Educate Together/Educational Training Board School respond to the needs of exceptionally able pupils. In 2007, the National Council for Curriculum and Assessment (NCCA) issued "Exceptionally Able Students: Draft Guidelines for Teachers" to all schools in Ireland. In those guidelines, the term “exceptionally able students” refers to pupils who require opportunities for enrichment and extension that go beyond those provided for the general cohort of students.

1.8 Organisation of the Dissertation

This introductory chapter presented the research aims, objectives, and rationale that this study seeks to address. It outlined both the Irish and international contexts which gave rise to the research questions, specifically, the dearth of research in the area of gifted education. Chapter 2 draws on, and critically analyses research and theories from the extensive literature on gifted education from which the specific research questions evolved. Chapter 3 describes not only the data collection methods considered most suitable to answer the research questions, but also describes research strategy and design which underpins this study. Chapter 4 presents the findings. Finally, after a brief summary of the findings and implications, chapter 5 provides recommendations for both staff and schools, along with recommendations for future research.

Chapter 2 – Literature Review

2.1 Overview of the Chapter

This literature review presents the research questions that this study has attempted to answer, firstly by examining the multiple conceptualisations of intelligence, followed by an in-depth look at the identification and provision for exceptionally able students, and finally we will look at the impact of the attitudes held by educational professionals of these gifted students and the ramifications of such.

2.2 Introduction

The aim of this Case study is to explore what is currently happening in one post-primary school with regard to exceptionally able pupils. The views of the teachers/SNAs in this Educate Together/ETB School will be gathered via a questionnaire and one-to-one interviews on the following research questions:

1. How do teachers/SNAs in this post-primary school conceptualise exceptional ability and how do they define exceptionally able pupils?
2. How do they identify these pupils?
3. What provision do teachers/SNAs make for exceptionally able pupils?

This literature review is divided into three main sections. The first section explores a number of different ways in which exceptional ability (or giftedness) can be viewed and how that view has changed over time. The second section looks at the kinds of environment (identification & provision) in which gifted persons learn and how this will have a significant impact on gifted success rates. The third section examines research on how attitudes within the school, and the underlying knowledge of staff in relation to exceptional ability, play a significant role in how staff respond to the challenges of educating these pupils.

2.3 Theories and Conceptions of Intelligence and Giftedness

Your conception of intelligence is important and informs how you approach teaching. Authors, such as Carol Dweck (Dweck, 2006), have shown that how we view intelligence, as either a fixed or malleable thing, impact our effectiveness as educators. Teachers who hold the view that intelligence is a malleable construct, changing over time with new experiences, are more successful in their efforts at education than those who don't hold this view. It is important that when we discuss provision students with the highest ability, we also discuss what we mean by ability and this brings us back to the concept of intelligence and how we view it.

For much of the history of intelligence research conceptions or theories of intelligence could be broken down into two major types, domain-general and domain-specific. IQ testing and other psychometric tests are often key to those of the first type, while those of the second type are often critical of the reliance on psychometric testing as a measurement of intelligence, needless to say, intelligence as a concept is mired in many arguments and debates over its precise nature (Gardner, 2000).

Domain-general theories of intelligence are typified by Spearman's 'g' (Spearman, 1926). They think of intelligence as an innate, hereditary thing. They are driven by psychometric measurements, or at least have been since around 1906 when Spearman first described 'g', a number describing the correlation between a number of different measurements of cognitive ability (Kamphaus et al., 2018). Domain-general intelligence models put forward the idea that human cognitive abilities are founded upon some pervasive factor that determines performance in all of these abilities. Having a high amount of this factor will see high performance, or the potential for high performance in a number of different areas. A measurement that many people are familiar with, IQ, was developed out of this sort of theory (Kamphaus et al., 2018).

On the other hand, Domain-specific models either play down or wholesale reject the idea of a single underlying factor of intelligences. They instead divide intelligence into a number of separate intelligences or capacities. There are often capacities included in these models which are recognisable as being tied to IQ measurements, such as language, comprehension, or analytical ability. However, there are often other more difficult to measure capacities such as leadership, or intrapersonal intelligence included in these sorts of models.

A key example of this sort application is Gardner's theory of multiple intelligences (Gardner, 2000). Gardner specifically wanted to counter the overemphasis on psychometric testing, which he perceived in the field; as well as encouraging educators to look for and nurture ability in areas beyond the linguistic or analytical. As intelligence began to be divided into subdomains giftedness researchers began to posit domain-specific conceptions. A prime example is the use of Gardner's theory of Multiple Intelligences in the field of gifted education. Conceptions which build in Multiple Intelligences theory posit that giftedness is specific to a given domain, e.g. numerical, verbal, kinaesthetic, or interpersonal. Arguments over the validity of the underlying theory of intelligence haven't stopped many educators from applying Multiple Intelligences theory as a framework for interventions in gifted education.

Sir Ken Robinson, educationalist and presenter of the most popular TED talk ever, speaks passionately about how an unwieldly educational system is suppressing the talents of many of our most able students, as well as influencing how students think not just about themselves (including this one) but also about the educational sector in general (Robinson, 2006).

Given his own background with disability (he contracted polio at the age of four) it is unsurprising he was quick to highlight the journey of Gillian Lynne (Andrew Lloyd Webber's choreographer for CATs) from suspected ADHD to that of a kinaesthetic learner who was able to flourish once her learning style was properly harnessed and channelled (Robinson, 2006).

He also captures the hierarchical nature of mainstream education, with mathematics and languages at the top, followed by humanities and finally at the bottom are the arts highlighting the difficulties that may be experienced by students who may well be gifted but not in subjects for which the educational system is set up to recognise.

Previous arguments over the qualitative vs. qualitative measurement of ability continued with the added wrinkle of domains for which no reliable quantitative measures had been developed. These arguments have continued into the present day. While theories of intelligence have largely turned back towards quantitative measures and the relationships between domains of intelligence in a statistical sense; conceptions of giftedness have moved to models which take in more than the measurable abilities of the students.

More recently hierarchical models of intelligence have been a strong topic of research (Lichtenberger et al., 2012). This sort of model conceives of intelligence as having ordered layers or strata of generalisability. They combine aspects of both domain-general and domain-specific models such that intelligence is underpinned by some general factor but there are also a number of sub-factors representing fluid, crystallised, or perceptual abilities. There are then further sub-factors linked to even narrower abilities or skills within these domains.

Today one of the most extensively used of these theories is the Cattel-Horn-Carroll or CHC theory. While it does set 'g' as a general underlying factor governing more domain specific intelligences, CHC theory is concerned mostly with the middle of three strata that it proposes. The middle stratum is the one that resembles most the previous domains proposed in previous domain-specific models and CHC theory has informed, strongly, the development of newer IQ scales which look to measure ability in these middle stratum domains (Lichtenberger et al., 2012).

A reimagining of the question nature versus nurture, is proposed by Matt Ridley in 'Nature via Nurture' (Ridley, 2011) coming to the startling conclusion that both conditions are

interdependent. Nowhere is this truer than when addressing the concept of intelligence, detailing the horrific consequences of early crude and culturally biased IQ tests led to forced sterilisation of those who are considered mentally defective. A sample of 350 twin pairs showed that living in abject poverty can have a detrimental impact and any variability was accounted for by shared environment and non by genetics, whereas in more affluent families the opposite was true, i.e. whether your family income was $40,000 or $400,000 made little or no difference, and there seem to be a threshold of adequate parenting after which genetics played a larger role.

I have also chosen to include the theory of positive disintegration (TPD) by Kazimierz Dąbrowski, not as a theory of personality development (for which it is more widely known), but rather as a lens to view Giftedness and Disability as two sides of the same coin (Webb et al., 2005). Unlike mainstream psychology, Dąbrowski's theoretical framework views psychological tension and anxiety as necessary for growth, so to advance into disintegration and into the higher levels of development is predicated on having developmental potential, including overexcitabilities (OE), an above-average reactions to stimuli (Mendaglio et al., 2006). Dąbrowski's basic message is that the gifted will disproportionately display this process of positive disintegration and personality growth, but which society has chosen to pathologise.

As educators, the practical application here is to consider how one views intelligence in practice. Are we looking to find multi-talented students who excel in a range of different domains or are we trying to nurture the talents of students who display high ability in a single domain. Do we consider creativity, spatial ability, linguistic ability, leadership, and emotional intelligence to be of equal import or does current practice highlight some domains over others.

2.4 Identification & Provision

Findings from research over the past 15 years indicate that Irish teachers are vague in their knowledge about the concept of exceptional ability and do not know how they would

identify such pupils (Daly, 2015), and familiarity with the NCCA guidelines (NCCA, 2007) is very limited with few teachers having seen or used them. These results are unsurprising given that, currently, there is little input regarding exceptionally able pupils in initial teacher training, and professional development in the area of gifted education in Ireland is rare (Cross et al., 2018a).

Dabrowski (Dabrowski, 1966) put forward that gifted individuals were likely to demonstrate a heightened response to stimuli, or an overexcitability.

"This powerful neural excitation comes in five varieties: psychomotor, sensual, imaginational, intellectual and emotional" (Silverman, 2019). This can present in many forms. They may be strongly affected by world issues or the plight of people in a very difficult position compared to their peers. They have a deep sense of right and wrong, and often demonstrate quite strong feelings in their school work and classroom discussions. For others it can be a heightened sensitivity in a sensory capacity - extremely irritated by a twisted sock or the label on a t-shirt.

If we define twice exceptional or multiply exceptional students as those who give evidence of the potential for high achievement capability and also give evidence of one or more disabilities, then Brody & Mills (1997) highlights the fact that standardised assessments are generally not designed to account for multiple exceptionalities and may not allow students to fully express their abilities, meaning that they cannot be viewed as conclusive when it comes to these students. The obstacles facing all gifted students are magnified for multiply exceptional students, making identification and suitable provision all the more crucial. For some of these students, their multiple exceptionalities can mask each other, preventing them from displaying their giftedness in the classroom or on assessments. A dyslexic student's exceptional verbal reasoning might hide their below average verbal working-memory, and vice versa. Without standing out at either end of the spectrum, this student may never receive the full battery of

tests which would show their highly uneven ability profile and be left to go without support for their disability or their talent development (Webb, 2012).

Betts & Neihart's (2010) revised profiles bring to life what it means to be gifted. They assert his is really important for educators as it is fundamentally about personality, bringing into greater focus the student and thus how better to help that student to achieve to their potential. It is also important to note however, that students will not display this behaviour at all times. Thus, for example, in school they may be considered to show Underground behaviour, but in a gifted programme that supports their individual needs, they may be found to be the Creative student. Parents are therefore important in this regard, as those who understand the full extent of their child's abilities and understand the most suitable learning environment for them.

Gifted Profiles

1. The Successful gifted student is one who works well at school, but is not particularly self-assured and does not really have a plan for the future in mind.
2. The Creatively gifted are unsurprisingly highly creative, however they can be challenging in their interactions with teachers and parents
3. Underground gifted students tend to be very insecure socially, and they tend to have a low sense of themselves
4. The At-Risk gifted student has a rebellious demeanour and can cause problems and trouble.
5. Also known as dual exceptional, the Twice Exceptional student can be difficult to identify. These students are gifted but with a specific learning difficulty, such as dyslexia, dyspraxia, ADHD, Asperger's Syndrome, to name a few

6. Autonomous Learner are self-confident, positive, intrinsically motivated, determined, have a high self-concept and consider their ability in growth terms (Betts & Neihart, 2010)

Although giftedness is assumed to be equally distributed among the population (Borland & Wright, 1994; Papageorge & Thom, 2018), gifted programmes often do not reflect this. In-school and out-of-school programmes for high ability students across Europe and the world fail to reflect local demographics, with an overrepresentation of students from affluent backgrounds and certain cultural groups at the expense of others.

It has been suggested that school is one of the few places where we organise people according to when they were born (Robinson, 2013). One of the problems with this approach to organising learners is that it assumes "a norm" or "an average" that we should reach by a certain age. This categorisation by age starts before school with much information about developmental milestones available on websites. These milestones set out what youngsters will or should be able to achieve by a certain age (Gladwell, 2008). This continues into school where classes and indeed curriculum are often organised around expected norms. One of the problems with this approach is that learners don't learn in a linear fashion and this is particularly true of gifted and talented learners who may present with asynchronous development. (Happé, 2013)

In some ways, the issue is not whether to accelerate, gifted and talented learners require some form of acceleration, the issue is what form the acceleration should take. In relation to classroom organisation the following are the most common ways of organising pupils for learning with each one offering an opportunity for acceleration in learning (Hornby & Witte, 2014):

1. **Setting** refers to the use of ability grouping only for specific curriculum areas, typically literacy and numeracy, for students who therefore spend most of their time in mixed-ability classes
2. **Within-class grouping** involves dividing students who are in mixed-ability classes for most of the school day into groups within the same class for specific tasks, such as, for example, putting children into groups of similar levels of spelling achievement to work on spelling
3. **Streaming:** Between-class ability grouping involves placing students in different classes on the basis of ability.

There are many layers to the education system, and the education system is also connected to a range of community services. Principals should draw on these layers and range of services as they develop support across the school for gifted and talented pupils (Smith, 2005).

Enrichment offers schools the opportunity to extend, expand and develop the curriculum and lessons. Topics can be looked at in more depth, from a different perspective or in more in depth and complex ways. This can be done within the classroom or sometimes schools build in special trips or organise events and focus weeks that can facilitate enrichment. Pupils might also work with experts or mentors or engage in their own research. Enrichment works well for all learners but with planning it can offer exciting learning opportunities for gifted and talented learners (Hornby & Witte, 2014).

An interesting question about how much the gifted contribute to social prosperity and progress is considered in a study by Rindermann, Sailer, and Thompson (Rindermann et al., 2009). The authors assumed that the gifted contribute disproportionately. They call this the smart fraction theory. Among other things, they substantiate their assumption with data from international student assessment studies such as TIMSS (Trends in International Mathematics

and Science Study), PISA (Programme for International Student Assessment), and PIRLS (Progress in International Reading Literacy Study) over a number of years. The focus of their study was whether it was more important for a country that it's best students, its average students, or its worst students scored particularly well in the international student assessment studies compared to other countries.

It turned out that how its top students performed was of particularly importance. For example, if the smart fraction did well, the country's economy was better or more innovative and confirms the general assessment that investment in education for gifted students pays off disproportionately, and so, by not doing so, the Irish educational system is squandering a valuable resource by not explicitly providing provision for this cohort.

2.5 The Impact of Attitudes on Gifted Students

Expectations greatly affect teacher's behaviour towards students in the classroom. Usually these expectations are based on accurate information which teachers get from different sources, for example, school documents, student's previous performances, testimony from parents or teachers who taught the students in previous years, but it could happen that they are also influenced by myths, stereotypes, or negative attitudes towards gifted students. Teachers' expectations shape their teaching and motivational strategies, the use of grouping practice, types of feedback, evaluation methods, and the quality of the relationship between the teacher and the student (Rubie-Davies, 2015)

Faulty expectations, expressed by teachers through verbal and/or non-verbal behaviour, influence students' perceptions about themselves as learners and human beings, hence directly influencing their motivation and learning as well as indirectly influencing their academic performance and academic achievements. In this regard, teachers' original expectations are essentially fulfilled (Jussim & Harber, 2005; Weinstein, 2009).

Babad, Inbar, & Rosenthal (Babad et al., 1982) addressed two main effects related to the fulfilment of teachers' original expectations: Golem and Galatea effect. Golem effect occurs when teacher's low expectations towards a particular student obstruct the realisation of the student's learning potential, whereas the Galatea effect occurs when teacher's high expectations positively influence the student's learning and academic performance. In the domain of gifted education, the Golem effect can be especially harmful when oriented towards marginalised groups, e.g. twice exceptional students, ethnic minorities, students from socioeconomically disadvantaged backgrounds, etc. In the domain of education, the labelling of gifted students, which might produce positive or negative expectations in a different social context, is therefore a highly professional issue.

If we consider George Bernard Shaw's play, "Pygmalion," (Shaw, 2009) wherein he describes the effect by explaining that the difference between a lady and a flower girl is not the dress or how she speaks, rather it is the way others behave toward her, and how we can allow external factor to define us.

The Pygmalion effect illustrates how teacher biases impact the performance of their students and was first described by researchers of this paper. This effect works in a very subtle way by unconsciously transmitting both positive and negative assumptions, including unreasonably high teacher expectations of students (Rosenthal & Jacobson, 1968).

The Pygmalion effect states that, ultimately, students subjected to these expectations will fulfil them, providing an explanation as to why statistics illustrate a pattern in which Caucasian students, or students from the majority culture, score higher than Blacks, Hispanics, and Indigenous students. It also provides evidence that explains why children of academic families are nominated more often than their peers for gifted identification.

The most well-known instrument for determining attitudes in the field of education is the questionnaire of authors Gagné and Nadeau (Gagné, 2018; Gagné & Nadeau, 1985), which

is also the most frequently used one in research for this purpose. The results of numerous studies have shown predominantly positive attitudes of teachers towards gifted students, in particular to identifying their needs and support, while teachers' attitudes to the accelerated promotion of gifted students is predominantly negative. Teachers' views on gifted students may also be neutral and ambivalent. Negative attitudes towards talent and gifted students impede effective education and limit the development of programmes in the education of gifted students (Geake, 2008). Research also suggests that teachers, who recognise themselves as gifted, have more positive attitudes towards gifted students (McCoach & Siegle, 2007).

There is evidence teachers who are more educated in the field better understand giftedness and education of gifted students, and they also better recognise their own beliefs and break up the myths about gifted students (Goodnough, 2001). Teacher education also makes an important contribution to the better results of gifted students (Tortop & Kunt, 2013). Strong attitudes are linked to basic personal beliefs and are therefore stable, resistant to influences and more difficult to change. Further education, however, does influence changing attitudes, developing them based on knowledge (Lavine et al., 1998). The Geake survey (Geake, 2008) showed that even the teacher's unconscious negative attitudes towards talented learners may change with involvement in training programmes, in which teachers learn about the characteristics of gifted students and their educational needs. This requires the attribution of importance to the role of a teacher, and teachers' awareness of the responsibility towards all students in the class. Therefore, it is very important that teachers are willing to further educate themselves in the field of work with gifted students and accept facts about gifted pupils on the basis of research (Cross et al., 2018b). It is also important to further improve the teacher training programmes in understanding giftedness and the importance of gifted education.

2.6 Conclusion

The role of a teacher is very much like that of a general practice doctor – we are expected to have a good understanding about every aspect so that you do not overlook something significant. Being a teacher you must be capable of noticing the subtleties that point toward your students' learning needs. So understanding the manner in which gifted children learn and behave is central to them being noticed and then formally identified as gifted.

As we have explored a range of strategies, remembering that gifted and talented learners are individuals and will respond in different ways and at different times to the opportunities they are offered. No one strategy offers the solution for challenging gifted and talented learners. We need to take account of:

1. the individual learner
2. the context
3. the resources available

The attitudes of teaching professionals can have a phenomenal impact on the outcomes for these specific students, as gatekeepers to educational provision the school environment can play an important role in the lived experience that these students have to navigate. Failure to correctly identify (or significantly worse, misattributed) behaviour that stems from an inappropriate learning experience commensurate with their abilities can often manifest as frustration, boredom, or chronic underachievement. This will ultimately result in disengagement of these highly able students through no fault of their own. The role of beliefs, attitudes, and classroom practice are essential for exceptionally able pupils to have full teacher/SNA support so that high quality learning opportunities are available to them.

2.7 Research Questions

The research questions went through numerous iterations during the development of this research project. It was subsequently distilled into three distinct questions that shaped all of the research objectives, scope of the literature review and the ultimate approach taken to data collection and data analysis.

It ensured that exceptional ability (as defined in the education act, 1998) was the common terminology used throughout to describe the phenomenon of gifted and talented, as it is this legislation that provides for the legal requirement for special educational provision being made to this cohort of students.

1. How do teachers/SNAs in post-primary school conceptualise exceptional ability, and how do they define exceptionally able pupils?
2. How do they identify these pupils?
3. What provision do teachers/SNAs make for exceptionally able pupils?

Chapter 3 – Research Methods

3.1 Introduction and Overview

In this mixed method case study into the attitudes towards, identification of, and provision for, gifted students, this chapter well explore the methodological underpinnings of the research carried out, provide justification for the approach taken to answer the research questions.

Given the researchers status as both a dual (or twice) exceptional learner, and as a neuro-atypical individual with weak central coherence (Happé, 2013) & a bottom-up learning style, a mixed method case study format was an inspired choice for them. The researcher discovered that if they wanted to learn anything, they were required to look at the same topic from multiple perspectives and learning modalities before the information 'clicks'

In this case study, the conceptualisation, identification, and provision of exceptionally able pupils were explored from three perspectives: school management, subject education teachers, and finally, special needs assistants from one school who participated in both a survey and a semi-structured interview (Creswell, 2009).

The insertion of a pre-existing and validated survey instrument (Gagné, 2018) (albeit with a slightly different format that was recommended by the original author) allows for increased reliability and validity, while also allowing you to focus on research questions that require real-life conceptual understanding of the students in question.

It also discusses framework for the analysis, while at the same time showing how the findings were analysed, what actions were taken to ensure quality and addressing the inherent limitations of the research using this research approach. Finally, it also addresses the ethical considerations for the study taken as a whole.

3.2 Research Sample

As this case study was conducted within one of the small (but growing) number of co-patronage schools between Educate Together (ET) and an Educational Training Board (ETB), it is important to highlight the unique ethos that these schools operate under. ETB schools are state, co-educational, multidenominational schools underpinned by the core values of Excellence in Education, Care, Equality, Community and Respect (Oideachais & Éireann, 2020), whereas with Educate Together the ethos rests on four core principles: equality-based, co-educational, learner-centred and democratically run (Mihut & Mccoy, 2020).

This case study aimed to investigate how a purposive sample of staff in one Educate Together/ETB school viewed exceptionally able pupils and whether and/or how they were meeting the special educational needs of these pupils. A qualitative survey of the school provided a broad sweep of information regarding practices in this area and the subsequent qualitative phase gleamed deeper understanding of the issues. After obtaining permission from the board of management, the survey instrument was distributed by the principal of the school resulting in a 23% response rate. During this phase participants were requested to indicate whether or not they would willing to participate in a further qualitative one-to-one interview, and of this sample, 29% agreed to be interviewed.

3.3 Overview of Information Needed

The school in this case study has a designation of a multi-denominational ethos according to the Department of Education, a segment that makes up 46.1% of total enrolments as of September 2020 in the post-primary sector. It is also part of the fastest growing sector with a 3.2% increase year-on-year (Department of Education, 2021a). As a school patron, Educate Together operates a national network of 95 primary schools and 19 second-level schools in Ireland, catering to over 30,000 students, whereas Education and Training Boards

(ETBs) are currently patrons of 245 Post-Primary and 27 Community National Schools (Mihut & Mccoy, 2020). While ETBs (in one guise or another) have been part of the administration of education in Ireland since the formation of the state, the first Educate Together School was only opened in 1978 and in the face of substantial opposition (Hyland, 2020).

As this is a relatively new school (as would be the case for any post primary educate together school) I specifically excluded most demographic questions from my survey for fear of making both the school and/or individuals too easily identifiable. A cursory review of secondary data from the teaching Council of Ireland register revealed the following information, there is a 70% female/30% male distribution of teachers the school, which is broadly in line with the trend nationally (Department of Education, 2021b; Teaching Council of Ireland, 2021). In relation to the length of teacher registration, this is a young school, with on average its teachers have 5.6 years of experience (with both the median and mode being 5 years) since first registering with the teaching Council. The main demographic information that was obtained by the survey was in relation to educational attainment (specifically as it related to professional development in the area of providing for exceptionally able pupils) and professional role within the school.

In many ways this thesis is all about perception, as it is our perception (conceptualisation) of what constitutes an exceptional able pupil that drives both the identification of this cohort, and what educational professionals feel is equitable provision for them (Draaisma, 2017). As the Thomas theorem states: *"if men define situations as real, they are real in their consequences"* (Thomas & Thomas, 1928), unsurprisingly these students are often overlooked (Mcgrath, 2019).

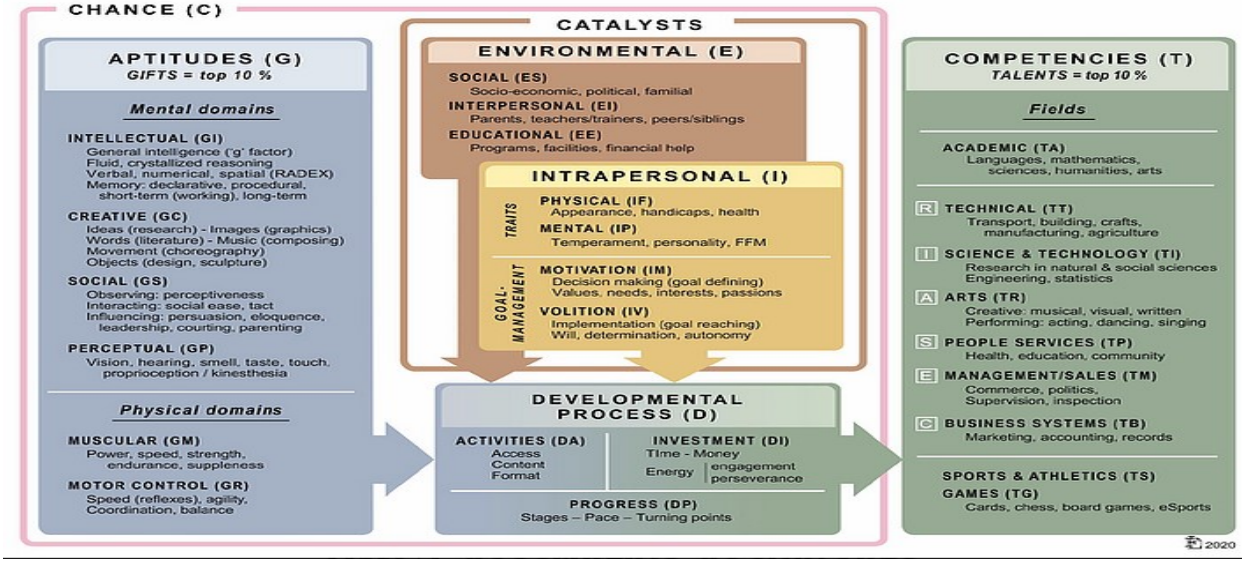
It is for this reason that I have chosen the theory of positive disintegration (TPD) by Kazimierz Dąbrowski, not as a theory of personality development (for which it is more widely known), but rather as lens to view Giftedness and Disability as two sides of the same coin

(Webb, 2005). Unlike mainstream psychology, Dąbrowski's theoretical framework views psychological tension and anxiety as necessary for growth, so to advance into disintegration and into the higher levels of development is predicated on having developmental potential, including overexcitabilities (OE), an above-average reactions to stimuli (Mendaglio et al., 2006).

Dąbrowski's basic message is that the gifted will disproportionately display this process of positive disintegration and personality growth, but which society has chosen to pathologise. While it may be inappropriate to medicalise the exceptionally able pupil, as the 1998 education act describes, these are students with special educational needs and should be treated accordingly (Webb et al., 2012).

The other theoretical lenses used in this thesis are both from the work of Dr François Gagné, firstly his **D**ifferentiating **M**odel of **G**iftedness and **T**alent (DMGT) where he clearly demonstrates the difference between gifts that must go through a developmental process before they can become talents (Gagné, 2020), and secondly his Opinions about the Gifted and their Education (OGE) opinionnaire (Gagné, 2018) which forms the basis of the quantitative survey used in this thesis.

Figure 3. 1 **DMGT** = **D**ifferentiating **M**odel of **G**iftedness and **T**alent



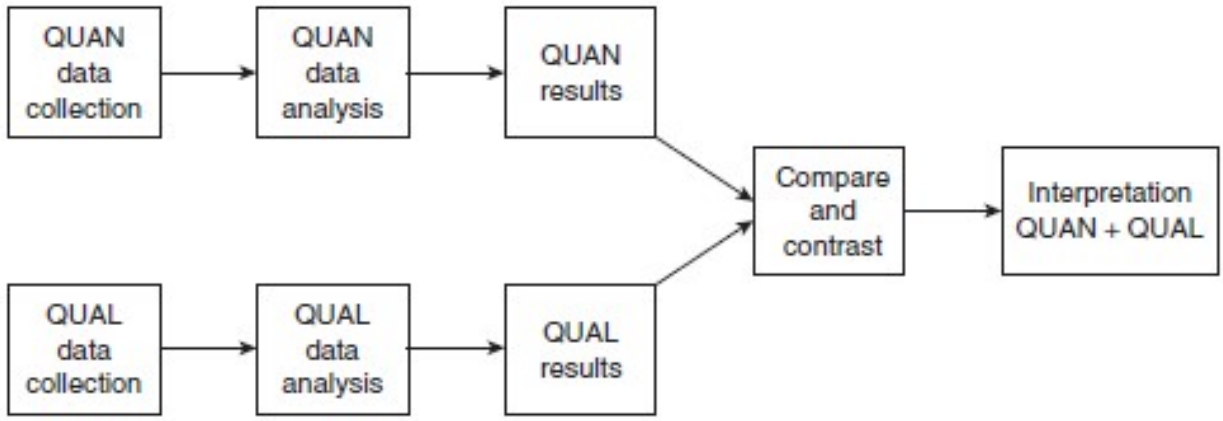
Graphic based on (Gagné, 2020)

3.4 Research Design Overview

In general, a research strategy is a broad approach to planning a project that involves underlying philosophical assumptions about the nature of social reality and how it can be studied, as well as the purpose and design principles of the study (Denscombe, 2017).

For this thesis specifically, a Mixed methods single case research (MMSCR) was used, which can be defined: as research in which single case experimental and qualitative case study methodologies, and their accompanying sets of methods and techniques, are integrated to answer research questions that concern a single case (Onghena et al., 2019), using a Triangulation Design: Convergence Model based on chapter 4 of Designing and Conducting Mixed Methods Research (Creswell, 2009) and The Essential Guide to Doing Your Research Project (O'Leary, 2017), see figure 3.2.

Figure 3. 2 Triangulation Mixed Method Design



Graphic based on (Creswell, 2009)

The researcher conducted both primary and secondary research. The secondary research began with a comprehensive review of the literature surrounding the research topic. The primary data collected was through both Quantitative and Qualitative methods. The specific type of qualitative data collection was conducted through semi-structured interviews, with the quantitative data being collected via questionnaire.

The researcher gathered rich information and opinions which offered further insight into this area and addressed the aims of the research. The research theory that underpins this study is grounded in pragmatism.

3.5 Pragmatism

Both philosophically and methodologically, pragmatism occupies a useful middle-ground, and provides a "third way" in our assumptions about knowledge and enquiry that distinguishes it from either a purely qualitative or quantitative approach (Denscombe, 2008). From an ontological perspective, there is a single universe, and individuals have a unique interpretation of it, while the epistemological default position is that knowledge is both constructed, but also has its foundation in the reality of the world as experienced by individuals (Morgan, 2007). Pragmatism is ultimately focused on what works, and finding solutions to problems, which makes it an attractive option open to researchers if they find that neither qualitative nor quantitative research individually will provide appropriate answers for the particular research question they may be considering (Morgan, 2007). For example, mixed methods research can include inductive, deductive, and abductive logic models (Morgan, 2007) which allows for the cross pollination of results from one phase of the study which can then serve as inputs to the next phase (Morgan, 2007).

3.6 Data-Collection Methods

Conducting primary research during the middle of a pandemic (Covid-19) was never going to be easy. It required exquisite attention to detail in overcoming the obstacles presented in a world where face-to-face interaction was legally prohibited. This immediately curtailed certain survey design proposals and required a pragmatic approach to what was and wasn't possible under the circumstances.

Unless one intends to conduct a census of an entire population of their target audience, there will need to make a number of decisions in relation to the type of sampling strategy they wish to utilise (O'Leary, 2017), and while the survey in this study was distributed to all the teachers and SNAs in the school, the participants were self-selecting in who choose to respond.

Prior to the survey being distributed, a number of antecedent actions were taken, namely the researcher obtained the agreement and support of not only the principal of the school, but also from the board of management. Also, instead of distributing the surveys themselves from their student email address, the principal agreed to publicise the survey themselves, noting that the board had approved participation in this research.

After two weeks (and after observing a low response rate) the researcher contacted the principal again and ask for them to submit a reminder on their behalf, which they duly obliged. Unfortunately, the researcher was still left with quite a low sample size, and on the advice of their supervisor, they requested for the principal to re-canvas their staff, this time with an accompanying short video message from the researcher asking for their assistance. Thankfully this final stepped proved fruitful, resulting in an almost 50% increase in survey response, of which almost half of the total respondents indicated they would be willing to engage in the qualitative phase of this research.

The difference between non-probability and probability sampling is that non-probability sampling does not involve random selection and probability sampling does. This doesn't necessarily mean that a non-probability sample isn't representative of the general population. But it does mean that non-probability samples cannot depend upon the rationale of probability theory. With a probability sample, we know the odds or probability that we have represented the population as a whole quite well. We are able to estimate confidence intervals for the statistical data collected. With non-probability samples, we may or may not represent the general population well, and it will often be hard for us to know how well we've done so, if at

all. In general, random sampling methods are preferred over non-probability ones, because they are considered to be more accurate and rigorous. However, in certain areas of research there may be circumstances where it is not feasible, practical or theoretically sensible to do random sampling, as was the case here.

In purposive sampling, we sample with a purpose in mind. We usually would have one or more specific predefined groups we are seeking. Purposive sampling can be very useful for situations where you need to reach a targeted sample quickly and where sampling for proportionality is not the primary concern. With a purposive sample, you are likely to get the opinions of your target population, but you are also likely to overweight subgroups in your population because they are more readily accessible (Etikan et al., 2016).

Operating within this purposive sampling framework, a survey approach was initially used to canvas the views of staff within the school, followed by semi-structured interviews with school management, subject teachers, and special needs assistants which facilitated a deeper insight into these different cohorts' perspectives on the issues at school and class level.

According to (Denscombe, 2010), there are a number of advantages in conducting a survey as a data collection method. Firstly they produce empirical data, the respondents were all individuals who had daily contact with post-primary school students and it was for this reason we wanted to know how they conceptualised exceptionally able pupils. Secondly, it allowed for wide an inclusive coverage of staff members that were not centrally located in a school during the research period due to Covid-19. Thirdly, surveys by their very nature lend themselves to quantitative data which can then be statistically analysed. The only major disadvantage that was applicable during this research to electronic surveys, is the fact that they are easily ignored in spite of the remedial actions that were already taken and referenced previously, but still resulting in a relatively low response rate.

The survey was piloted with one other post primary school teacher, and their suggested amendments incorporated into the final product to ensure that both the researcher and respondents had a common understanding of the questions being asked (Malmqvist et al., 2019). The final questionnaire/opinionnaire (Appendix A) was formatted on Google forms and divided into five sections, each with its own heading to signpost the overall logic of the survey design.

Section A: School information

Section B: Policy

Section C: Opinions on Provision

Section D: Identification

Section E: Additional information

The second phase of this research was conducted using semi-structured interviews, which involved the principal (school management), two subject teachers, and two SNAs. There was also an additional request from another teacher within the school who had not completed the questionnaire (or had not indicated on the questionnaire that they wished to be interviewed) and for this reason their offer was not acted upon.

If surveys are all about going wide, then interviews are most certainly about going deep. Prior to initiating the one-to-one semi-structured interviews, the interview schedule was first piloted with the researcher's supervisor and the same post primary school teacher that had assisted with the quantitative phase of this research. This resulted in a number of changes (particularly around language choice) being implemented into the schedule and confirms that the allocation of between 30 and 40 minutes was more than sufficient to conduct these interviews.

For the interviews a semi-structured approach was taken, so that while the researcher started with a defined questioning plan, it also allowed the conversation to pursue interesting tangents if and when they occurred (O'Leary, 2017). It also followed a question driven approach (O'Leary, 2017), which is a direct operationalisation of the triangulation approach discussed in the literature review chapter. While O'Leary contends that this approach is independent of paradigm, this researcher would contend that it is in its essence pragmatic, as the strategy simply seeks to use whatever is needed to get credible data to answer the research questions.

The one-to-one interview schedule (Appendix B) was designed based on issues similar to those covered by the questionnaire. The three main areas covered related to how the school staffed defined or conceptualised exceptional ability, how exceptionally able pupils were identified, what type of provision worked well, and the challenges that arose in providing support for these pupils.

In light of the restrictions put in place in the face of the Covid-19 pandemic (Ireland. Department of the Taoiseach & Ireland. Department of Health, 2020), in person interviews were not a practical (and or legal) option necessitating all interviews to be held in a virtual setting (Roberts et al., 2020). Thankfully, as these restrictions had been in place for quite some time before these interviews had taken place, all of the individuals that the researcher interviewed had become quite au fait with this technology, and many of the reservations expressed by previous research were no longer applicable (O'Leary, 2017).

The virtual interviews lasted between 30 and 40 minutes. At the end of the researcher summarised and recapped the main points and asked the participants to verify these summations, adding to the validity of the accounts. Utilising the auto transcription features of the Zoom platform, the accuracy of which was checked against the original recordings and any

amendments required were made, the researcher then added short notes covering issues such as general atmosphere and reactions of the participants to the issues discussed.

3.7 Data Analysis and Synthesis

The essence of data analysis can be distilled to 3 main activities, reducing the raw data, methods of displaying the data, and finally conclusions may be drawn from the data (Miles & Huberman, 1994). In the main, quantitative data is displayed to the use of graphs and tables, in this specific case that process was facilitated by the use of Tableau software. For qualitative data this process is achieved through the use of summaries, causing, and written memos, which in this project was facilitated by using Computer-assisted (or aided) qualitative data analysis software (CAQDAS) Quirkos.

Along with collecting the data itself, these three activities form a continuous iterated process (Miles & Huberman, 1994). In this mixed method case study, a number of different approaches used in the data analysis for each of the two strands, and the findings from both are fully described in chapter 4

Organisation and Analysis of Quantitative Data

As discussed previously, the questionnaire was submitted to the principal of the school in question, who then forwarded the instrument along with a cover letter and statement certifying that this research had been approved by the board of management of the school. Given the impact of Covid 19, the survey was administered in an online format only.

In relation to the open questions in the questionnaire, the same steps taken to analyse the data from the one-to-one interviews was utilised here also, however the analysis of the open-ended question data was carried out before the second phase had begun. Each of the

variables was converted to a numerical format to allow the tableau software correctly interpret the data.

Organisation and Analysis of Qualitative Data

Utilising thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2012), the six phases of this process were carried out:

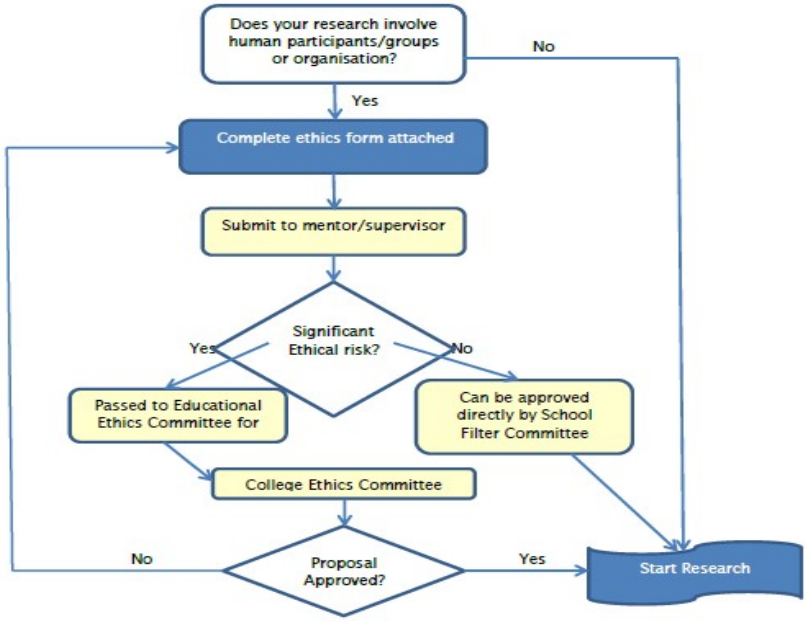
1. Data preparation: the audio-visual recorded one-to-one interviews were transcribed into a word processing file, and responses to the open questions in the questionnaire were written up. The painstaking process of checking transcripts for accuracy was carried out.
2. Data exploration and familiarisation: this stage required the researcher to review all of the data to formulate a general understanding of the dataset. Initial thoughts and ideas were recorded at this stage. Assign preliminary codes to your data in order to describe the content.
3. Data analysis: Search for patterns or themes in the transcriptions in order to describe the content. Whereas codes identify interesting information, teams are broader and involve active analysis and interpretation of the codes and the data.
4. Reviewing themes: In the words of Braun and Clark "Data within themes should cohere together meaningfully, while there should be clear and identifiable distinctions between themes" (Braun & Clarke, 2012). At this stage you may have to consider splitting a theme if it has become too broad or moving some of the codes into an existing segment where they may fit better.
5. Defining and naming themes: At this point of the analysis, you should have been able to peel back your data like an onion so as to define the essence of each theme.
6. Producing the report: Unlike quantitative analysis, we do not finish our analysis and then righted up, it is an iterative process of analysing and writing, from the informal

notes produced at the start of the process, to the more formal process of analysis and report writing.

3.8 Ethical Considerations

According to John Creswell (Creswell, 2009), the issue of ethics is something that needs to be considered across all stages of one's research and are guided by certain principles. In addition to following the Ethical Codes for Education Programs Research guidelines (National College of Ireland, 2019) process for seeking Ethical Approval (see figure 3.3).

Figure 3. 3 Ethical Approval Process



Graphic based on (National College of Ireland, 2019)

This researcher also took note of the three guiding principles of:

- Principle 1: the interest of participants should be protected (Denscombe, 2010)

Those who contribute to research should not suffer as a consequence of their involvement and according to this principle it is beholden on the researcher to ensure that no harm comes to them, and as such must consider in advance whether participation in their study has the potential to cause physical, psychological, and/or reputational damage. Due to the danger posed by Covid 19, this principle ensured that all interactions were conducted in a

virtual setting with no face-to-face meetings, both the participants and the school their work in were all anonymised, and in relation to any of the views expressed by the participants, they treated them with positive regard (Rogers et al., 2012) at all times.

- Principle 2: researchers should avoid deception or misrepresentation (Denscombe, 2010)

For many autism is considered as a negative condition (the medical community considers it a disorder) (American Psychiatric Association, 2013) and while certainly not universal, our views on deception in general would be that it is anathema to us, so much so it is actually one of the defining characteristics of the condition i.e. lack of social imagination, an argument could be made that autistic researchers possess a competitive advantage over our neuro-typical peers in certain areas of the research process (Silberman, 2015).

Regardless, the ethical and moral duty remains the same, this researcher was also conscious of the fact that his very personal interest in this area could potentially contaminate the views of their research participants, and for this reason only spoke about their rationale for undertaking this project until after interviews were conducted, as part of the debriefing process.

- Principle 3: participants should give informed consent (Denscombe, 2010)

This principle is based around the idea that participation in a research study must not only be voluntary, but the participant was also given sufficient information about the research so as to arrive at a reasoned decision as to whether or not they wish to participate.

During the study all participants were made aware of the voluntary nature of their participation, including the right to withdraw at any stage, and were also asked to sign a consent form (Appendix C) as part of their involvement with the interview process.

Since the advent of GDPR (General Data Protection Regulation) on 25 May, 2018, the core principles of GDPR have become the principles of ethical data management which can be summarised as follows:

- Collect no more data than is necessary from an individual for the purpose for which it will be used;
- Obtain personal data fairly from the individual by giving them notice of the collection, and its specific purpose;
- Retain the data for no longer than is necessary for that specified purpose;
- Keep data safe and secure;
- Provide an individual with a copy of his or her personal data if they request it (Data Protection Commission, 2019)

The Researcher adhered to all these principles; only data that was absolutely necessary was requested from the participants, the personal data was fairly obtained by ensuring informed consent was given, the participants were informed of how long the data would be retained in line with National College of Ireland ethical practices and procedures, all data has been securely stored on a password protected server, and any working paper copies have been destroyed, and finally the participants data will be made available if/when they make a request for their personal information.

3.9 Issues of Trustworthiness

Whether the approach is quantitative, qualitative, or mixed methods issues of quality assurance are key components of the research process. Two of the main components of this process are validity and reliability. Validity concerned itself with the relevance of the data in relation to research questions posed, while also ensuring that the data collected is accurate and precise (Bui, 2019; Denscombe, 2010). On the other hand however reliability is concerned with consistency and whether or not the same research instruments would produce similar findings if conducted by different researchers on different occasions (Denscombe, 2017; O'Leary, 2017).

While not without limitations that have been well highlighted (Denscombe, 2010), i.e. that not knowing why a study is being conducted might produce artificial responses, or due to social pressures may be inclined to give the answers they think you want hear. These issues were addressed in the covering letter (Appendix D) which was circulated by the school principal and openly declared the purpose of the study and made assurances in regards to confidentiality and ethical procedures in place.

The qualitative phase was no less stringent, reliability here was obtained by maintaining an audit trail, which is one of the preferred strategies to ensure replicability (Denscombe, 2010). It included raw data such as transcripts of the interviews, as well as details of coding and data analysis.

3.10 Limitations and potential problems

This study was obviously not without limitations. The pool of participants was limited to the educational staff within one school. However, the widespread of response of the different staffing roles covered, the use of a pilot with teachers in a similar position, and a satisfactory response rate to the questionnaire, coupled with the additional data from the in-depth interview participants, will allow for tentative generalisations to be made.

It must be acknowledged that while this research process was conducted with the full approval of the school's board of management, the possibility remains that neither the questionnaire respondents nor the staff interviewed were fully representative of the general population of the school. It is possible that the participants who did engage were more invested (and interested) in the area of gifted education than those who did not respond. Therefore the data gathered from those staff that did participate may reflect more positive attitudes towards the exceptionally able pupils in the school than might have been generated by a more representative sample. The flipside of this though is that if this more engaged cohort of

educational staff are struggling in relation to conceptualisations, identification and provision, is probably even more true that this is the case of non-responding participants of this case study.

Although this study focused exclusively on the educational staffs' perspectives, there would be other perspectives worthy of investigation, particularly those of parents of exceptionally able pupils and that of these pupils themselves, but these were outside the scope of the study, and are an issue for further research.

3.11 Summary

The structure introduced the research design four this mixed method case study, and the adoption of a pragmatic framework. A detailed description of the data collection methods used in both phases of the research was provided, as were all ethical issues.

Chapter 4 – Results & Findings

4.1 Introduction

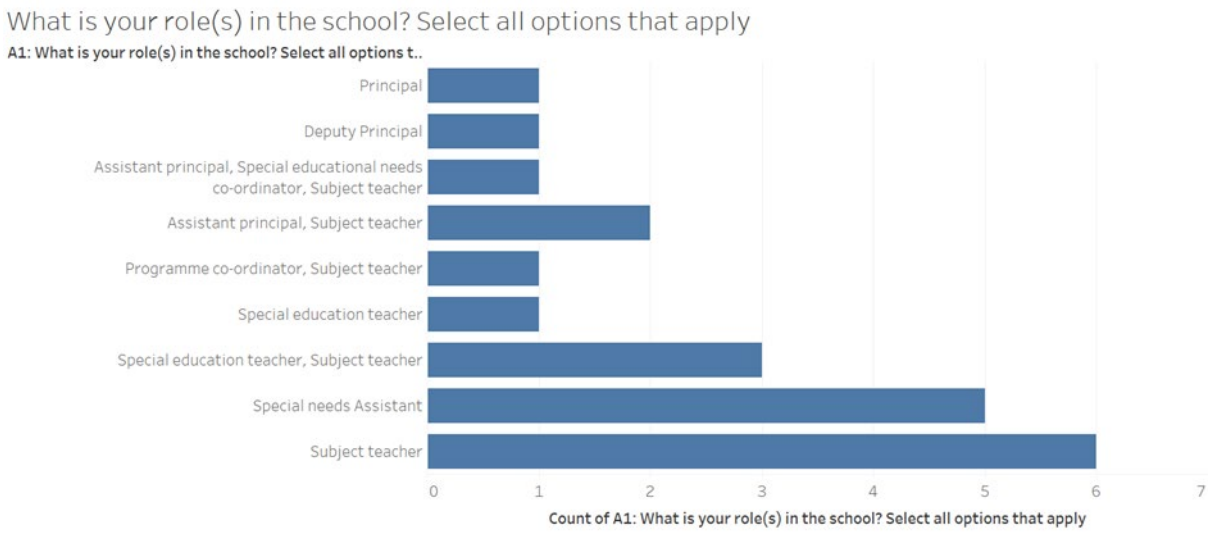
This study aimed to explore how the staff of one post-primary school think about and identify exceptionally able pupils, and how they cater for the needs of those pupils. To this end, one Educate Together/ETB school was surveyed (N =21) and one-to-one interviews were conducted with the principal, two subject teachers, and two special needs assistants (SNA's) who volunteered to participate. This chapter reports the findings of the study. It is organised into four main sections, the first, a short section reports on the analysis of the questionnaire data in regard to the demographic of the respondents. This sets the context for the main findings of the study, which is a mixed method case study combining both quantitative and qualitative data. These findings, presented in the subsequent sections, outline the answers to the three research questions in regards to: the attitudes towards, identification of, and provision for, gifted students.

The most significant findings in this case study are predominantly the result of qualitative work, especially in relation to the attitudes of the staff of the school towards students who are exceptionally able. In fact, the nuance of differing opinions amongst the staff are borne out by the interplay between the qualitative and quantitative data, and this interplay is also evident in the sections concerning themselves with identification and provision.

4.2 Demographic Information from Questionnaire

This section covers information from section A (school information) and section B (policy), both the category of 'other' being included in many of the questions to allow the respondents to indicate an alternative answer than to those provided.

Figure 4. 1 Professional Role in the School



The data above highlights the mix of different roles of staff with either responsibility towards the education or care of students. As this was a case study, it was important to capture as many different voices as possible, and it is gratifying to see that 100% of the management team responded (one principal, and three deputy/assistant principals) followed by over half (55%) of the SNA's, and 17% of the teaching staff, providing a full and rich palate of views about this cohort of students from multiple perspectives.

Continuing Professional Development (CPD)

Only 14% of respondents (n = 3) have had CPD in the area of providing for exceptionally able pupils, the highest level of qualification being that of higher degree (this respondent was an SNA) with the other two respondents being teachers, one having completed an online course, and the other having completed a one-day workshop while they were working in Scotland.

Designated Co-ordinator

There was some confusion within the school as to whether or not there was a designated person to coordinate provision for this cohort of students, with two thirds of respondents stating that there wasn't and the remainder stating that there was. Of the respondents that reported that there was a designated coordinator, nearly 90% of respondents nominated the special education

teacher as fulfilling that role, while the remaining respondents nominated the SENCO for this post.

Written School Policy

Just 10% of respondents (n = 2) indicated that the school had a policy that specifically addressed the needs of the exceptionally able. One respondent indicated that this was a stand-alone policy, while the other indicated that it was part of the special educational needs policy. As confirmed by the principal of the school, no such policy exists, with the bulk respondents being unsure (57%), with the remaining 33% categorically stating that there was no such policy. Furthermore, the two respondents that claimed that such a policy existed, failed to provide the definition of exceptionally able pupils included in this policy when asked.

4.3 Definition and Conceptualisation of Exceptionally Able Pupils

This section outlines responses to the first research question which was concerned with the respondent's definition and conceptualisation of exceptionally able pupils.

In relation to capturing how the respondents conceptualised this cohort of pupils, the experimental GAGNE-x1 opinionnaire was used. While Gagné's original attitude survey has become the researcher's instrument of choice since the 1980s (Gagné, 2018), he has acknowledged major psychometric weaknesses in it, and has offered the GAGNE-x1 as an instrument with both better effectiveness and efficiency.

Coupled with this new instrument, this researcher has modified the Net Promoter Score (NPS®) methodology and incorporated it into the survey results. The NPS® score is obtained by subtracting detractors (respondents who indicated a score of one or two on a Likert scale) from promoters (respondents who indicated a score of four or five on a Likert scale) and while they are predominantly used to measure the loyalty of customers to a company (Brown, 2020),

in this instance, they have been utilised to display the level and strength of sentiment to each particular question being asked.

4.4 Staff Definitions

As there is no official policy in the school regarding exceptionally able pupils, 17 of the respondents (80%) gave their own definitions. While some were very general such as "Students who greatly excel in their education" (R6) or "everyone has potential" (R15), the most common elements were:

- pupils who achieved a certain cut-off score in the CAT4 or IQ tests
- Abilities compared to peers: e.g. "constantly perform highest amongst their peers in class tests and/or state exams" (R4)
- Need for challenge: phrases like "They may be much more advanced than their peers, perhaps feeling slightly bored or unstimulated with the work in their age range" (R9) and "Students who are not academically challenged by the majority of their schoolwork" (R10), or "Students who are particularly talented/able in a specific area or a range of areas and need to be challenged more in class" (R17) were used.

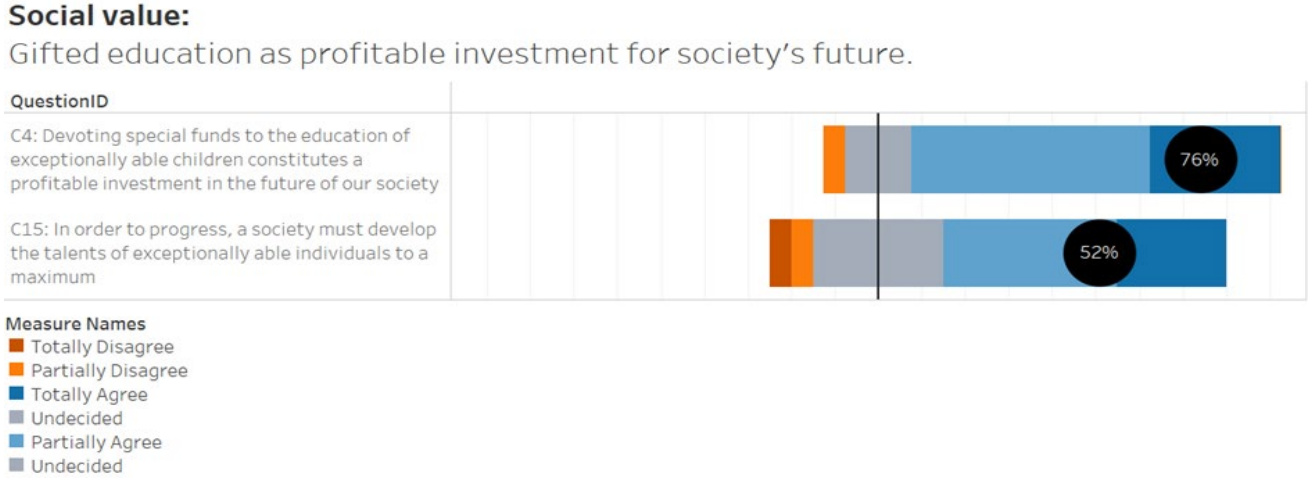
4.5 Conceptualisation

From the thousands of possible beliefs that are held about gifted education, Gagné's (2018) previous work in this area has produced nine distinct thematic groupings that this case study examined in great detail.

- **Social value**: Gifted education as profitable investment for society's future.
- **Objections of principle:** Elitism; unfair to other children; preparing a dominant class.
- **Rights of the gifted:** Same rights as other children vs. less priority than others.
- **Status of services:** Special services available (or not) in local schools.
- **(No) need for support:** Recognition (or not) of their special educational needs.

- **Problems, special needs:** Boredom; loss of motivation; laziness; dropping out.
- **Acceleration:** Arguments (mostly against) grade skipping.
- **Homogeneous grouping:** Positive/negative impacts of grouping.
- **Impact of interventions:** Increased motivation; lost friendships; egotistic.

Figure 4. 2 Social value: Gifted education as profitable investment for society's future.

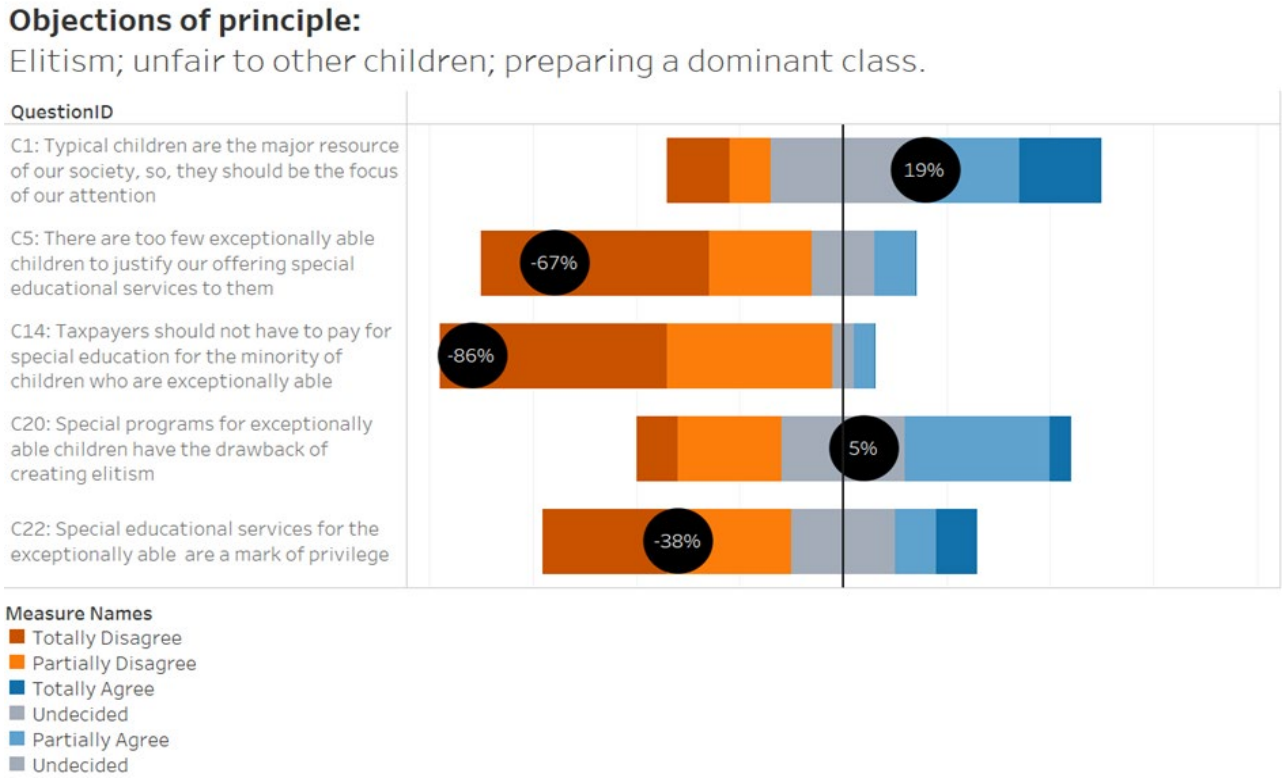


The chart above (Figure 4.2) highlights a generally positive attitude towards the societal value of gifted education. And with a net promoter score of 76%, respondents seem to be largely in favour of providing special funds for the education of exceptionally able children, however they were somewhat less convinced about the development of that cohort to their maximum potential.

Some respondents felt that a win-win scenario could be achieved by allowing this cohort of students the scope to assist some of the weaker students in the classroom "peer teaching on like supporting other learners is a good way of kind of using their skills and subject area as well, and they kind of have a sense of achievement over them, you know, helping the other learners in their classroom" (R9), one of the respondents felt they had a duty to ensure that the student's needs were catered to for the greater good "if they have this potential, it's an educators responsibility to make sure that they reach that, …… I think it's really important that we also support those that are exceptional that they can reach their full potential" (R2).

Alternatively, the fact that the only guidelines published by the Department of education for gifted student are still in draft form, and have never been updated has made them question how the educational system values the students “that draft like 2007 Jesus that's over 10 years ago, like you know so it's something that's not taken very seriously” (R21). However, that same respondent did highlight that there are other programs that can be used to supplement the mainstream educational programs that exceptionally able students can partake in and allows them to meaningfully contribute to society “with Gaisce for transition year which which helps get them involved in the Community, more and they can really you know, show their talents there, so there are, as well as platforms and opportunities for students in my school to show show, something that they might not be able to express as much in the mainstream class” (R21)

Figure 4. 3 Objections of principle: Elitism; unfair to other children; preparing a dominant class.

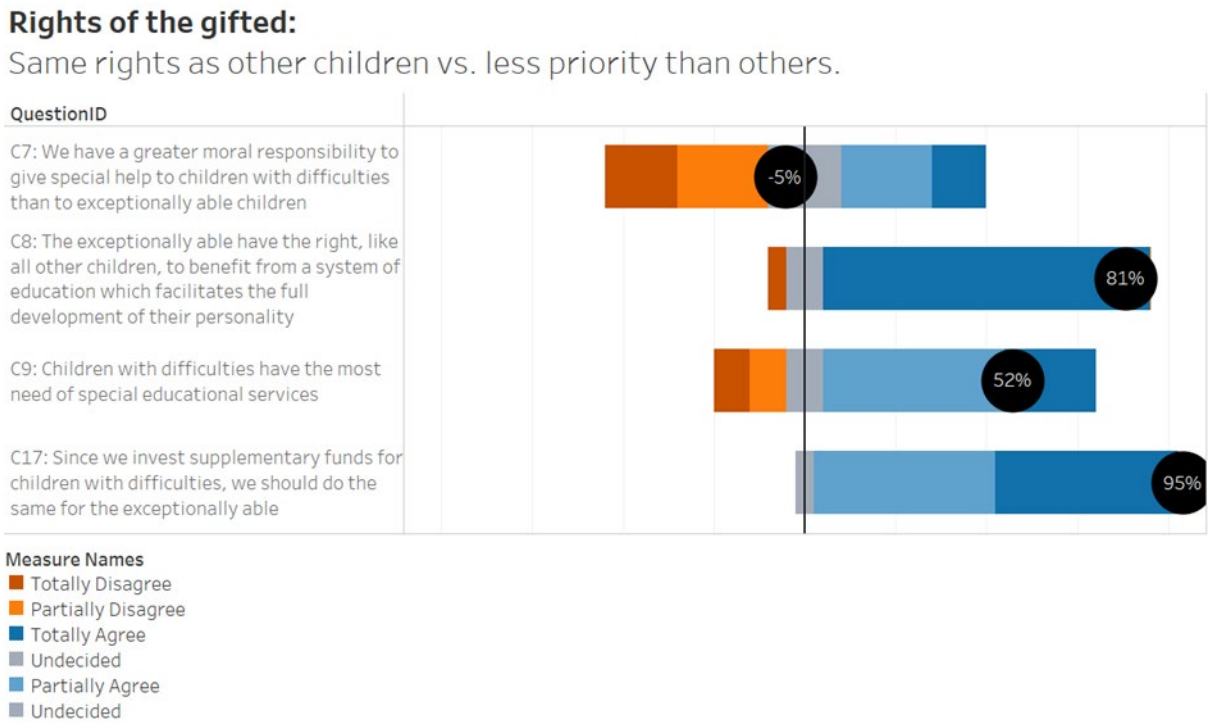


The contrast between the results of the qualitative and qualitative data about objections of principle to gifted education provision was insightful. While the survey results show that

there was a concern about the creation of an elite class within our educational system, it did not seem to be very strongly held view (NPS® 5% positive), whereas the interview results showed that there was considerable nuance around this position, ranging from differences of opinion based on whether the provision of education was funded by public or private sources

"Where you've got private education it's seen as acceptable, but in a public education system, I don't think it's seen as as acceptable as it, as because there were I'd say they're worried about how the perception of that would be amongst the stakeholders in education" (R1) or whether provision would be misconstrued as a status symbol "I don't know if Irish people can handle the mentality of of having the elite they they they they pit students against one another, as a result" (R1). Another respondent voiced concerns around the impact that this additional pressure will have on the mental health of students "They've got a lot of pressure put on them within the home, maybe because they're there you know they get pushed in all these directions to try and try to increase that talent that they've already got obviously" (R13)

Figure 4. 4 Rights of the gifted: Same rights as other children vs. less priority than others.



While in principle, most respondents have agreed that the exceptionally able have the same rights as all other children to learn in a system that meets their needs (NPS® 81%), and agree that if need be, additional resources should be made available to meet this requirement (NPS® 95%). They also moderately agree that students with difficulties have the most need for additional services (NPS® 52%), but were almost evenly split as to whether or not these students should be prioritised over students with exceptional ability (NPS® -5%).

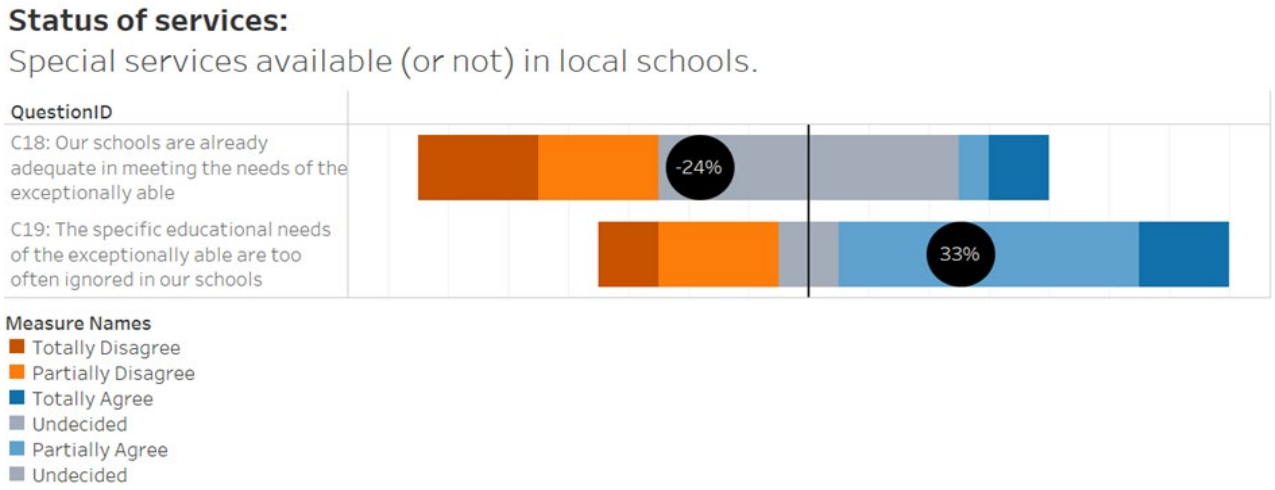
These views are reflective of the situation nationally in Ireland, while exceptionally able students are classified as students with special educational needs in the Education Act (1998), provision is not explicitly made for them in the Education for Persons with Special Educational Needs Act (2004) resulting in conflicting views as to their rights.

In what could only be classified as an Irish solution to an Irish problem, one respondent stated “What the recommendation from the from from any of the SENO's will be 10% of your learning support hours should be set aside for students with exceptional who were exceptionally able” (R1), but when queried as to whether or not this was an official policy, went on to say “it was said at a conference so it's not written down anywhere so it's not written down because they don't want it written down” (R1), but also said “I think we should we feel an obligation that we should do something” (R1) “(but) the reality is most schools are there to help students pass” and they again raised the Spector of elitism “I think that we're quite happy with the students who need SEN being identified and taken out and helped but we're not necessarily comfortable with you know the stratification of ELITE within our education system” (R1)

Other staff disagreed with this point of view, and felt that through differentiation and greater knowledge of the needs of exceptionally able students they could cater to the needs within existing structures “their teacher can alter their teaching style in order to fully cater for that student’s needs (with) just a little bit more awareness of what we can do as teachers” (R9). One even went so far as to state that being on the other extreme of cognitive ability did

constitute a special educational need “it's just the different end of I suppose that spectrum of learning, I mean it's it's, it is a need, and it needs to be nurtured just like we would nurture the other end” (R21)

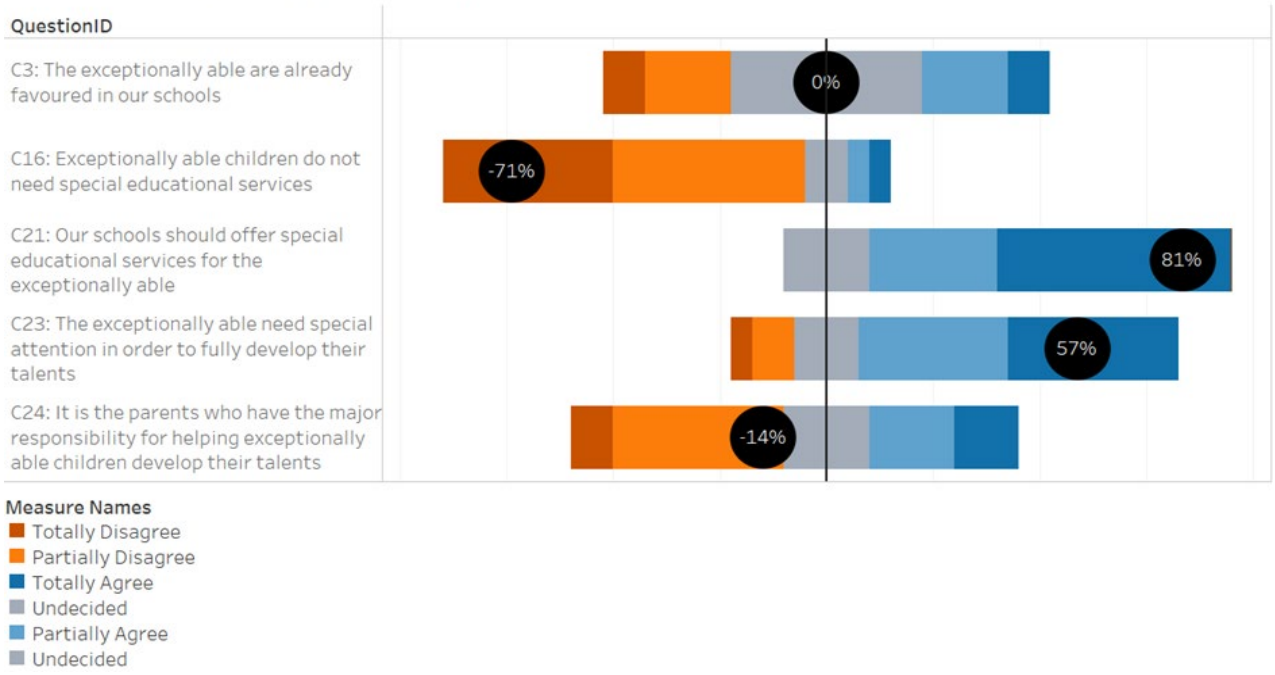
Figure 4. 5 Status of services: Special services available (or not) in local schools.



There was a very muted response in relation to the current status of services within this school, and while there was an acknowledgement that service provision for the students was less than ideal and that this was a cohort that had their needs ignored, understated fashion. View expressed was that the only purpose for identifying these exceptionally able students was to allow homogenous classes to be formed “I will be completely honest I say we only identify them from the point of view of of forming our classes and, beyond that, then we're only starting that journey” (R1) while others pointed to the fact that the school was an iPad school and that this technological advancement allowed for a degree of differentiation within the classroom that might not otherwise be possible “we are lucky to have the resources that we have whether it's iPads, laptops, or computer room” (R9) or “I did find the iPads were excellent for differentiated tasks and for having everyone involved” (R21) albeit this seems to be a happy happenstance rather than specifically driven towards catering for the needs of the exceptionally able.

Other factors given in mitigation for the lack of services were to do with how young the school was “it's quite young school, I think as it grows it's starting to get more areas that maybe people are building experience and and stuff like that” (R13), or how valued certain members of staff’s expertise in the provision of services for the exceptionally able based on their job role “You're quite restricted in actual fact I'd say as an SNA. And, you know, people don't always take your word for it as an SNA” (R13).

Figure 4. 6 (No) need for support: Recognition (or not) of their special educational needs.

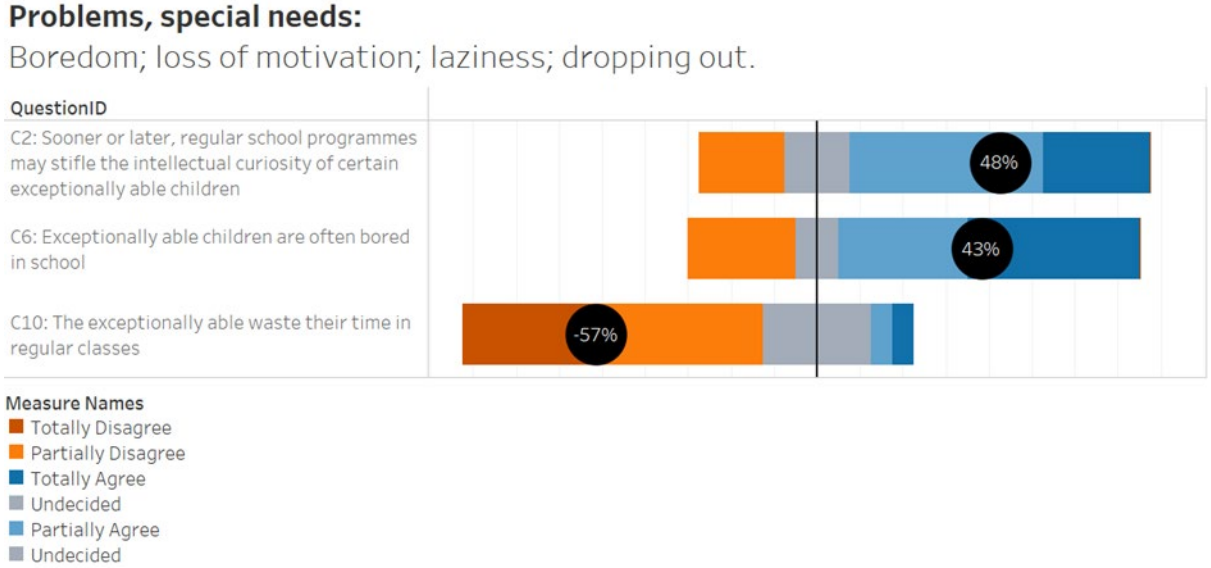


When asked question the exceptionally able are already favoured in our schools?, As many people agreed as disagreed with the statement resulting in a NPS® 0%, an unusual result given the strength of feeling expressed in three of the other questions in this section. While phrased negatively, most respondents agreed that exceptionally able children do need special educational services (NPS® -71%), and when phrased aspirational, most respondents felt that the school should offer those services (NPS® 81%), and that such services were required for the students to reach their full potential (NPS® 57%). The final question offered the respondents the opportunity to displace their professional responsibility to the students on to

the parents of the students, and it was heartening to see that a slight majority (NPS® -14%) did not feel that this was correct.

When covering this issue in the one-to-one interviews, one respondent took it upon themselves to express the viewpoint of that of another student i.e. a typically developing student “If I was a student I think well that fella it doesn't have to study too much” (R1), as a teacher “I suppose that my view of exceptionally able students will be that maybe they need less assistance” (R1) and from a macro level “I suppose that the gifted student will be seen as a student who doesn't require the extra support” (R1). This respondent also felt there a place for the corporate sector to provide support in this area “I think third parties are going to come up with solutions, and I think, and if you set up a program like I know that the program up in DCU is one type of program you know, the more that's run at the weekend” (R1).

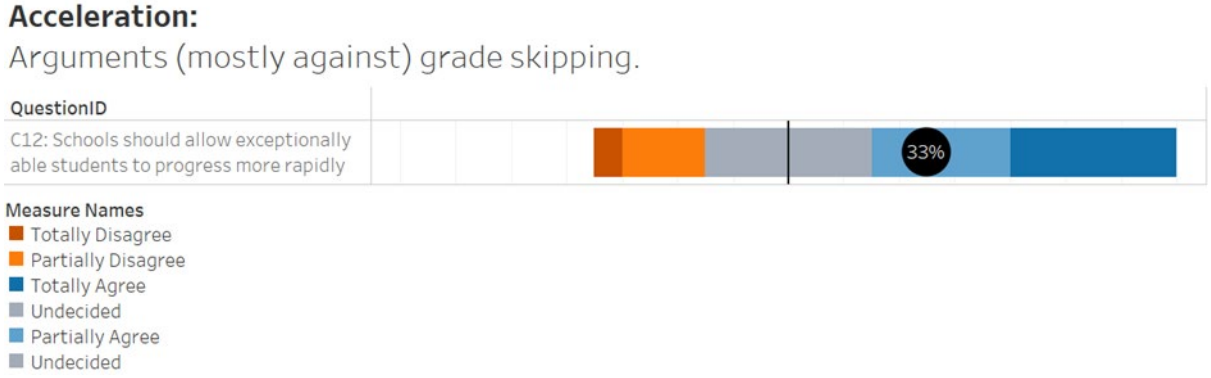
Figure 4. 7 Problems, special needs: Boredom; loss of motivation; laziness; dropping out.



While acknowledging that the exceptionally able student may be stifled in a regular school program (NPS® 48%) and that they are often bored (NPS® 43%), these respondents concurrently believe that the students are not wasting their time in a regular class! Given this confounding result, I looked to the interview feedback for clarity with limited success. That

students are both bored and not reaching their potential “the students out there who are who are not reaching their potential” (R1) was mentioned, others citing lack of identification as a barrier to provision “What can happen if they're not identified is that kind of boredom that might happen in their subject (R9), while others offered practical suggestions to help alleviate the potential for boredom in the classroom “should teachers have like a bank of like extra challenging work that they can give out to these students when they say the class work is completed, to keep them focused” (R2) and another ascribed the issue to the students listening too well “yeah pupils who listen usually they're a lot more mature than other students in the sense of they get down with the task, finished the task in a timeframe that other students are kind of looking at them thinking, what I'm only on question B their brain is on overdrive and they're getting bored you know” (R21).

Figure 4. 8 Acceleration: Arguments (mostly against) grade skipping.



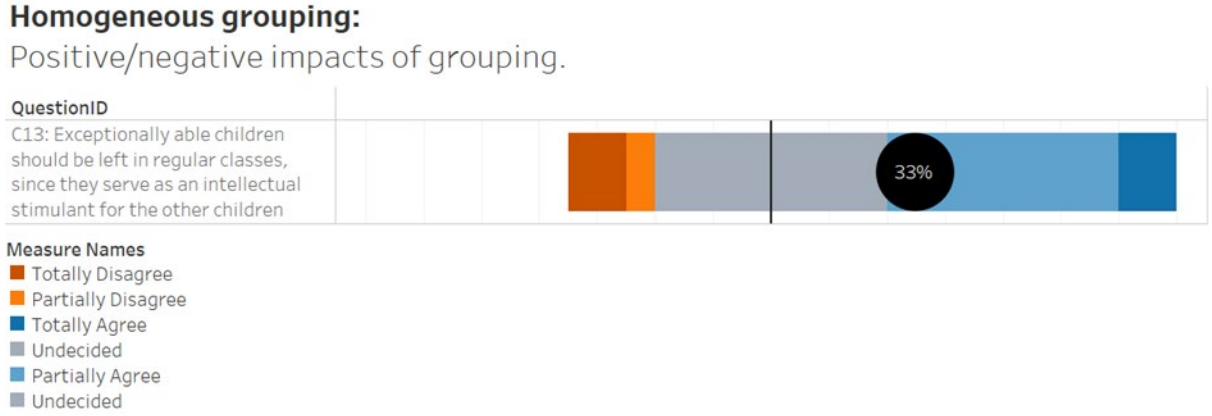
While the staff of this school may be mildly in favour of progressing gifted students more rapidly than is the norm (NPS® 33%), the Irish education system rarely offers acceleration options due to fear of students having adjustment difficulties when socialising with older students (McGrath, 2017).

This reality is borne out through the feedback from the staff themselves, whereas a number of staff had identified one exceptionally gifted student, at no stage was it indicated he

was being allowed to skip a grade, and the most the school was able to accommodate him was by allowing him to sit additional subjects.

Extension, rather than acceleration seems to be the limit of what is provided in the school “would have got the chance to do a lot of peer-teaching, so you would have went into first year groups and done some like group work with with them on, on his skill in particular to science and maths” (R2). Another respondent spoke of two gifted students in their music class extended the requirements of a project well beyond what they were expecting “Two students who were very exceptionally gifted in music and they went off made their own music video and came back and layered GarageBand® on their iPad and harmony and hadn't had synthesizers and you're looking at how you, you know to do dynamics and, and so I did try my best to and facilitate that” (R21).

Figure 4. 9 Homogeneous grouping: Positive/negative impacts of grouping.

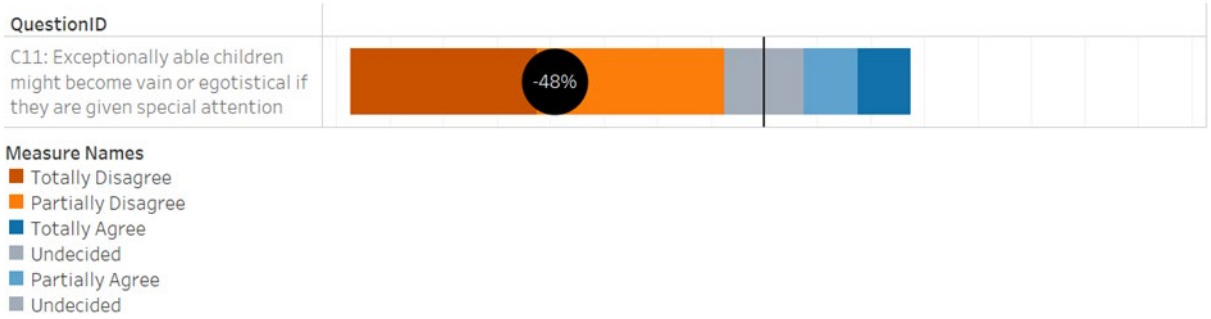


The view expressed in the survey that having gifted children in regular classrooms is of benefit to the other students (NPS® 33%) is reflected in many of the interviews that this researcher held “we will be setting up our classes, on the basis that we have mixed ability so it's it's important from that point of view, because there's a whole socialization around students it doesn't matter what their what their what their scores are that they should be in a mixed ability, because that will help everybody” (R1) or to the gifted students themselves “A good

way of kind of using their skills and subject area as well, and they kind of have a sense of achievement over them, you know, helping the other learners in their classroom" (R9), this researcher would share the concerns expressed by Robinson (Robinson, 1990) that this attitude has the potential to lead to the exploitation of the students:

"The tendency to view talented students as ancillary classroom helpers rather than children with individual needs, curiosity, and desires of their own devalues them. In so far as cooperative learning crystallizes this view of talented children, it becomes exploitation rather than cooperation" (p. 21)

Figure 4. 10 Impact of interventions: Increased motivation; lost friendships; egotistic.



To finish on a positive note in this section, it was heartening to see that there is no opposition in principle to the provision of interventions, one of the most inspiring comments I heard was in relation to the vocational aspect of teaching "At least, you want the students to be engaged, at best, you want them to be inspired" (R21) which shows that there is an underlying willingness to provide formalised interventions for the students given the right support.

4.6 Identification – Methods and Challenges

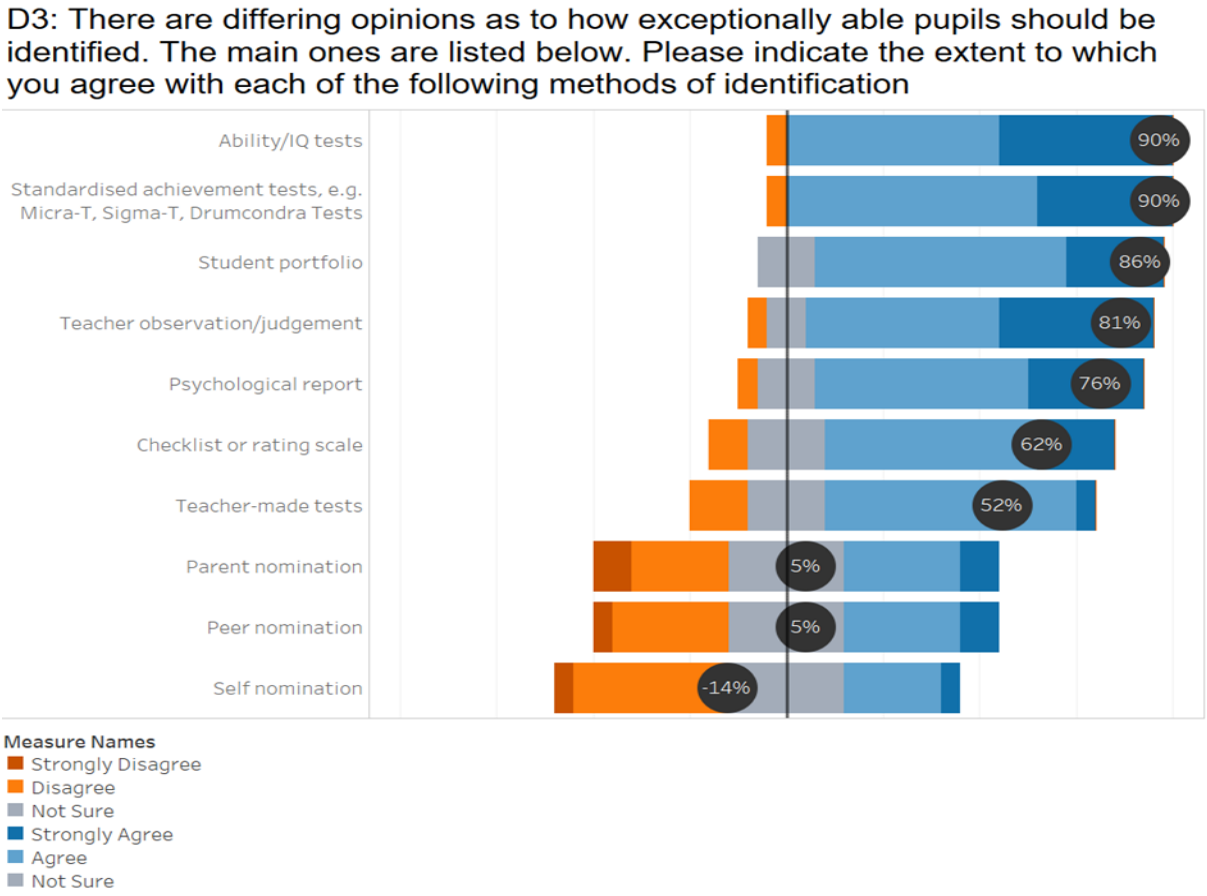
The second research question was in relation to the identification of exceptionally able pupils at the section outlines response to that question. Needless to say how the respondents defined and conceptualised exceptional ability had a major bearing on the identification of

exceptionally able pupils, and how they came to terms with these concepts informed the manner in which the identification process was implemented.

A small number of respondents were unsure if there is any need to identify exceptionally able pupils "you won't be doing it because there's nobody requiring you to do it and generally things don't happen in schools unless there is a requirement to do was from [points upwards]" (R1) or "I think the school provides what they need to feed that talent to a certain point, I don't know whether the schools should be actively going looking for them" (R13).

While many of the respondents (62%) were aware of exceptionally able students within the school, when it came to quantifying the exact number of such students there was little or no consensus, with estimates ranging from a single student to 4/5 students in the entire school. For context, if one was to utilise Gagné's differentiated model of gifted and talented (DMGT) (Gagné, 2004) that figure should be closer to a hundred students in a school of this size.

Figure 4. 11 Identification Methods



Question D3 of the questionnaire listed 10 methods that, according to the literature (Wallace, 2000), are used to identify exceptionally able pupils. Again utilising the net promoter score methodology this researcher was able to gauge the level of support for each method listed (see figure 4.11). As shown above the methods that received the highest levels of were ability/IQ tests (NPS® 90%), standardised achievement tests i.e. such as the CAT4 (NPS® 90%), followed closely by student portfolio (NPS® 86%) and teacher observation/judgement (NPS® 81%).

The methods that received low levels of agreement from the respondents were parent, peer, and self-nomination, with scores of 5%, 5%, and -14% NPS® respectively. In the one-to-one interviews, nobody mentioned self-nomination, peer nomination, or parent nomination as acceptable forms of identifying exceptionally able pupils. Interestingly, it appears steps are being taken to utilise project-based methodologies to track not just the relative performance of students but also track the performance against their expected potential "we're looking at hmm a piece of project software called Athena, and it's able to it's able to take all that information and it's it's telling you a student whether their performing according to their ability, above their ability or below their ability or or potential" (R1).

Test Scores

The results of standardised achievement tests are one of the main criteria on which teachers base their identification of exceptionally able pupils i.e. the CAT4 (Cognitive Abilities Test), as one respondent put it "you're spotted straightaway in the CAT4" (R2)

Teacher Observation

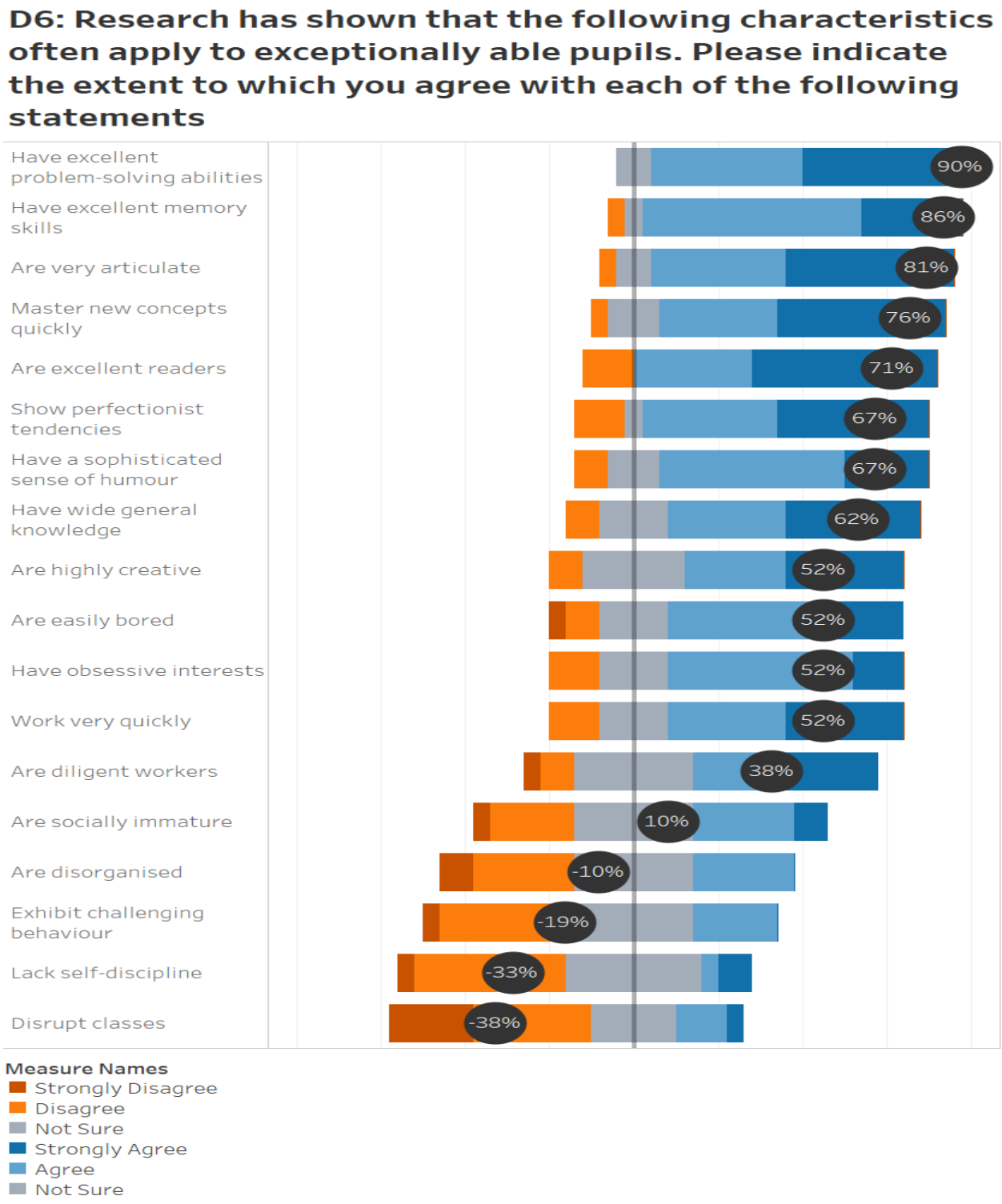
Many of the respondents in this study depend on their own judgement regarding a pupil's level of ability, with comments like "if the teacher has their eye the ball, they noticed that (they) stand out" (R13) or "I think the class teacher of that student should be able to identify them" (R9) as prime examples of this practice. Another respondent spoke about while there

was no official procedure in this area, they felt their existing community of practice allowed them to discuss particular students with each other as to identifying these exceptionally able students “It would always be on the agenda to identify the students that we've taught or maybe we haven't taught before so someone else would flag them for us and you know they'd say just to let you know this person will be in your class this year they're gifted in your subject area” (R9)

Characteristics of Exceptionally Able Pupils

Question D6 of the questionnaire listed 18 characteristics that, according to Manning (2006) are often applicable to gifted students. While most of the characteristics in this list could be regarded as being positive, some of them are certainly open to being interpreted as being negative traits. As can be seen from figure 4.12, the respondents are in strong agreement with most of the positive statements, and as for the negative statements, are only mildly in agreement, or the respondents disagree with the sentiments expressed.

Figure 4.12 Characteristics of Exceptionally Able Pupils



Analysis of the comments in the open question (D7) adds additional nuance such as "An observation I have made in the past is that exceptionally able students can have trouble forming meaningful friendships as they find it difficult to find relatable peers and may not be

interested in frivolous topics of conversations i.e. sports, fashion etc." (R4) or more succinctly as being "Socially awkward" (R13).

A final comment again raises the issue of mental health and how the label of exceptional ability and the associated pressure to reach their full potential can negatively impact them in their day-to-day lives "I have met a quite a few exceptionally able students over the last number of years and they have all shown different personality traits. I find in a few of them that they struggled with their mental health because they had been identified early on in their education as being exceptionally able they always had to carry that and felt it was hard to always have the expectation from teachers to be the best" (R19)

4.7 Provision

In relation to provision, the 'Exceptionally Able Students Draft Guidelines for Teachers' (NCCA, 2007) , while only ever issued in draft, and over 13 years old, would certainly still be a good place to start for any school serious about providing for this cohort of gifted students. Unsurprisingly, over 70% of the respondents had never used/heard of these guidelines and no respondent was able to state that the used guidelines on a regular basis. The respondents who had at least heard of the guidelines, only one of them felt that they were very useful.

Given this state of affairs it was surprising to see that many respondents still felt that the school's performance was very good (10%), good (50%) with only 20% indicating that they felt the school's performance was very poor/poor. The open-ended responses accompanying these results indicated that the respondents were judging the performance of the school relative to a number of issues such as: how young the school was "We are a developing school. The absence of trained teachers already has a huge impact and EA students are not prioritised which is much to our shame. Exceptionally able students are perceived as not needing anything extra"

(R1), lack of CPD “I feel that I have not had adequate training within my subject to address their needs. This is not necessarily a reflection of the work being done in school. And often there are a greater number of students who have been identified as needing learning support that the resources are not used for the exceptionally able students” (R19), while others stating (correctly) the provision for gifted students is not a priority in Irish schools “ I am not aware of any coherent strategy for catering for exceptionally able students. I suspect this is common to many schools” (R14)

Chapter 5 – Discussion

5.1 Overview

This concluding chapter takes an overarching view of the information discussed throughout this thesis, where key findings outline the ramifications of the respondent's beliefs and experiences as they relate to exceptionally able pupils. Needless to say, these beliefs can have a profound impact on educational provision for the pupils concerned.

The findings of the study show a willingness on the part of the respondents to cater to the needs of these students, but are hindered by an overarching policy that prioritises the needs of students with learning difficulties, while also being hampered by their own lack of knowledge and training as to how to either identify or provide appropriate provision for students of exceptional ability. As a precursor to identification, it has been made clear that school staff must have a clear idea of what constitutes an exceptionally able pupil and the various ways in which that exceptionality can express itself. Unfortunately, this is not easy when there is a lack of consensus around a definitive definition of this phenomenon, but a pragmatic approach would be that these are students that require differentiated instruction in all its alternative forms.

5.2 The Challenges of Identification

Formal identification can take place across a range of contexts and involve a number of different people. Unlike informal identification, however, formal identification is almost exclusively carried out by professionals (be they teachers, psychologists or assessment administrators). While different types of informal identification have different settings, each type has a distinct setting and maintaining (or standardising) this setting is key to the reliability of an assessment (Webb, 2012)

The greater formality and standardisation of these methods bring both advantages and disadvantages over informal identification. On the one hand, every student experiences the

same conditions and comes to the assessment on an equal footing. Scores on such assessments have a greater claim to objectivity than informal methods, which can be coloured by implicit and explicit biases, interpersonal relationships and other human factors.

On the other hand, translating a student into a single spot on the bell curve or even a collection of spots on multiple bell curves is an inherently reductive method, and can never capture all of the rich contextual factors which may indicate high ability or potential. It is important not to lose sight of what is not captured by these methods, and not to overestimate what they can tell us about students.

IQ tests are one of the most widely used formal identification methods, and have been widely used as a measure of intelligence for over a century. Many of them are now very sophisticated and can be used to give a general IQ score as well as a score for a number of other subcategories. The Wechsler Intelligence Scale for Children (WISC), for example, gives students a score on Verbal Comprehension Index, Visual Spatial Index, Fluid Reasoning Index, Working Memory Index, and Processing Speed Index. IQ tests like the WISC are comprehensive, and can isolate exactly what is being assessed more thoroughly than any other method of assessment (though still not completely). Unfortunately, they are also impractical as a generalised identification method as they require a considerable amount of one-to-one time (usually one to three hours) with a trained educational psychologist (Webb et al., 2005).

There are other assessments of academic potential that can be administered more quickly (and cheaply!) to groups, though these are not as precise or as comprehensive as an IQ test. An example of these is the Raven's Progressive Matrices assessment (the Matrices also have the advantage of being non-verbal so that they can be used without regard to the native language of the students being assessed). Many of these assessments also give their results as a standardised score within a defined range. A standardised score means that the scores are placed on a bell curve, with the average score set to 100 and a standard deviation of 15. Most

measures of potential have a range for students between 120-130 (Superior on the WISC-V, for example) and another for students over 130 (Very Superior on the WISC-V).

There are many pathways to identification for students, and ideally these pathways should seek to find all of the students appropriate for specific programmes. As a school this role will most likely be to put students forward for assessment rather than administer the assessment, meaning that a general understanding within the school of what various assessments actually assess is more important than an in-depth technical familiarity with any one assessment.

Statistically, a class of 25-30 students should have one or two students with ability in the top five percent. When you factor in domain specific ability, this number is likely to be higher again- a student with exceptional verbal ability might not be in the top five percent on general ability measures, and vice versa.

Unfortunately, any one identification measure will capture only some of these students. Informally identifying these students and putting them forward for formal identification is crucial, but your informal identification needs to be guided towards the formal identification that will follow (Dawson et al., 2007).

A student who is scoring highly while not seeming to engage in the class, on the other hand, could benefit from the added challenge of out-of-level testing and dedicated gifted programming. For students with high ability in only one domain, aptitude tests can measure this ability accurately and serve as a springboard for targeted instruction.

If the test under consideration is an achievement test rather than an aptitude test, then past achievement record should definitely be taken into consideration, though this should not be the only criterion. Students who are not usually motivated to apply themselves may be spurred on by the prospect of qualifying for a special programme or simply more interested in the more complex subject matter.

Indications that a child should be put forward for formal assessment can also come from the child's parents. Although the cliché that all parents think their children are gifted is often accurate, studies have shown that, in fact, parents are usually good judges of their children's ability level. Unless the information given to you by the parents wildly contradicts the schools' experience with the student, it is worth following up on.

Finally, students are often identified using their grades in school, especially on high-stakes or universally administered state examinations. This approach has the advantage of piggybacking onto an assessment that students must take anyway rather than imposing the various demands of an extra assessment upon them. Depending on the strength of the curriculum, an achievement-centred approach like this can also pick out students who are actively demonstrating applied competence within a domain rather than simply showing potential. For many students, an assessment like this is an opportunity to show a wider variety of their strengths, especially non-cognitive strengths like work ethic and strategic thinking. As with IQ tests though, it is vital that grades are understood as one measure among many of a student's ability and potential rather than the final word. For certain subgroups like twice exceptional students, underachieving students and linguistically, geographically and socioeconomically disadvantaged students, grades may paint a particularly limited picture of student potential (Webb et al., 2005).

5.3 Whole School Provision

Schools will often be providing challenging learning experiences for all pupils. However, gifted and talented pupils often require additional challenge to those of their age peers. A good starting point for schools who are considering how they meet the needs of the gifted and talented is to undertake an audit of existing activities (NCCA, 2007). Gathering this

information into a coherent framework will help schools to be clear about where challenge is offered and where challenge needs to be enhanced.

There is an extensive literature base related to leadership and this extends into leadership in education. The idea of "transformational leadership", first proposed by Leithwood et al., (1999), links to the idea that leaders can influence others and as such can achieve specific purposes. In a school context, this has been linked to the development of culture. This involves thinking about shared visions, values and a common sense of purpose. The principal will work with staff to collectively agree on the vision. To reach the vision, strategies will be put in place. This process will involve the school in thinking about the values upon which the strategies in use are based. The common values that relate to education and learning include:

- Fairness
- Equity
- Sustainability
- Social justice

In this process, leadership style becomes important. A "democratic" approach will lead to a solution-orientated approach in which "this is everybody's school". A focus on the collective means that it is less likely that a head teacher or principal will "dictate" what changes have to happen. This agency and ownership over change is more likely to lead to a deeper understanding of why and how changes need to be made. Teachers are also more likely to engage with the ideas. Ensuring that gifted and talented learners are an integral part of the vision is important if schools are going to support them in appropriate ways.

School principals can have a tremendous influence on how school staffs' time is scheduled and utilised to enable them to address the particular needs of gifted and talented students. When considering whole school provision for gifted and talented learners it is important that schools think about how their classrooms will serve all pupils.

Principals face a number of issues as they think about the leading of learning for gifted and talented students, such as:

- Limited resources
- Learning support
- Differing ideas about how gifted education should be included in the school programmes

5.4 Limited resources

While undoubtedly resources (human resources and material resources) are important, just as important is how schools and teachers use the resources, they have to support learning. Sometimes new resources are not required but a new way of using existing resources is. Principals should look at how teaching staff learn about new pedagogical practices. A systematic monitoring of the continuing lifelong professional learning opportunities that staff engage in will help principles to ensure that learning needs of all pupils is being considered, including the gifted and talented.

5.5 Learning support

If schools are actively thinking about inclusionary classrooms then principals need to think about how they allow that to happen. All staff need to work as teams to get the best for all pupils. So a principal needs to lead that as well. So a principal needs to take the lead in opening the door and creating a team. Allowing time for staff to meet and talk about how they support and challenge gifted and talented students will be important.

5.6 Ideas about gifted education's inclusion in school programmes

With no agreed definition of who the gifted and talented are, and no single way to identify gifted and talented pupils, the teachers' understanding of this area becomes key in the identification and provision process. Holding whole school meetings where ideas and views can be explored and challenged will help a school to identify what they believe about this group

of learners and will help them to begin to come to a shared understanding about provision and identification.

Schools will often be providing challenging learning experiences for students but sometimes these are not explicitly badged as “activities for gifted and talented pupils” and so schools may be unaware that they are providing this challenge. Gathering this information into a coherent framework will help schools to be clear about where challenge is offered and where challenge needs to be enhanced.

A “Basic Audit” should establish whether:

- all curriculum policies, contain statements concerning provision for gifted and talented pupils
- there are systems for recognising the wide range of abilities all pupils and of gifted and talented pupils and for monitoring their progress;
- there are procedures in place for involving parents in discussions and planning for pupils who are identified as being gifted and talented;
- as with all pupils, the work of gifted and talented pupils and their progress is discussed regularly at staff/department/Faculty meetings;
- the school handbook includes a statement on the school’s approach to gifted and talented pupils;
- there have been opportunities for staff to develop their understanding and skills in relation to teaching gifted and talented pupils;
- there are shared understandings across the school as to who the gifted and talented might be.

Strategies that are good for gifted and talented pupils are good strategies for all pupils. By thinking about meeting the needs of gifted and talented pupils, teachers can raise standards throughout the school.

To meet the needs of all pupils, the class teacher may need to:

- use a variety of forms of differentiation in their teaching;
- plan for the use of higher order learning/thinking skills in their teaching;
- set high expectations for the pupils;

In particular they may need to:

- set homework which is challenging for gifted and talented pupils;
- be aware of school policy and practice for gifted and talented pupils;
- consider early examination entry;
- group gifted and talented pupils together for specific subjects or activities;
- pace lessons to take account of the rapid progress of some gifted and talented pupils;
- monitor and record the progress of gifted and talented pupils;
- undertake lesson observations which monitor the progress and attainment of gifted and talented pupils;
- give time for gifted and talented pupils to extend or complete work if they need it;
- move gifted and talented pupils into another class for some or all work, if their needs cannot be met in their chronological age class;
- liaise with staff from other educational settings for advice and resources e.g. secondary school staff speak with university staff/experts in the field.

Schools who are innovative and interested in improving learning and teaching will want to monitor and track how strategies are working. There are a number of ways in which schools can approach this monitoring process. This can be achieved by adopting a quantitative approach to collecting factual data such as grades, questionnaires and school attendance data

or a more qualitative approach can be taken which focuses on exploring the experiences of teachers, pupils and parents through interviews, focus groups and diaries.

Evaluation is important if we are to take an evidence-based approach to our activities. If we don't understand not only IF something is working but also HOW and WHY something is working then it is difficult to identify and build on good practice.

In addition to gathering our own evidence based it is essential to engage in the wider evidence base as this can help us identify new ways of working and enhance our existing provision.

So, one way of examining our current practice might be to carry out a small-scale practitioner enquiry. Doing this allows you to develop your practice by analysing existing practice and identifying elements for change. It also gives you the opportunity to challenge your own unconscious biases. It is always useful to have our assumptions either confirmed or challenged appropriately. This can be done on a small and feasible scale as part of your day to day practice and is nothing to feel intimidated by.

John Dewey, the great American educator, talked about 'continuous reconstruction of experience' (Dewey, 1966, p. 80). He wanted educational experiences to be judged by the extent to which learners go on learning and engaging in continuous growth. This seems a good way for us to ensure we are supporting gifted and talented young learners in our classrooms.

Very strong arguments are made, each citing evidence to back them up, that one method of pupil organisation is better than another. However, it is hard to find a definitive body of evidence that can put the debate to rest because so much is dependent on context and the individuals involved.

5.7 Learning Structure

We will now consider some of common the ways to organise young people for learning bearing in mind that this might help us to understand the different ways of organising education

and pupils in order to increase challenge for those who need it but it does not help us to understand how to organise the curriculum itself in order to provide appropriate challenge.

5.8 Within stage or cross stage grouping

Within stage or cross stage grouping are two ways of organising young people. Within stage grouping refers to young people being organised for learning within their year group but according to ability. Cross stage grouping refers to young people being organised by ability and across year groups thus allowing younger children to work with older children, and vice versa, who are of the same ability.

5.9 Special, short term, pull-out programmes

Pull-out programmes might involve bringing together pupils of the same age and cognitive ability and/or interests to work on specialist materials and activities. Alternatively, it might mean that children of mixed ages, but similar cognitive ability and/or interests come together to work on specialist materials and activities. The nature of these programmes is that they are for fixed periods of time. They offer an opportunity for like-minded individuals to come together to investigate, share and explore topics of interest. Whichever approach is adopted a key feature is often engagement with the teacher that results in increased motivation and the learning of new knowledge.

5.10 Guest speakers

Gifted and talented young people are often very interested in particular topics. These include dinosaurs to bus timetables and everything in between. While information, facts and knowledge are widely available via the internet, actually speaking to someone or listening to someone speak who has the same passion, interest and knowledge as you can be hugely beneficial. Inviting people to speak with pupils can be great not only for the gifted and talented but for all students. Developing links with experts in Universities, business, interest groups etc.

will help schools to access experts. Frequently experts are only too happy to speak about their passion to enthusiastic learners – sometimes even for free!

5.11 Enrichment

Enrichment offers schools the opportunity to extend, expand and develop the curriculum and lessons. Topics can be looked at in more depth, from a different perspective or in more in depth and complex ways. This can be done within the classroom or sometimes schools build in special trips or organise events and focus weeks that can facilitate enrichment. Pupils might also work with experts or mentors or engage in their own research. Enrichment works well for all learners but with planning it can offer exciting learning opportunities for gifted and talented learners. Some schools have tried to address the finance issue by accessing support from the community, organising fund raising activities (organised by the young people themselves) and seeking sponsorship from business.

5.12 Acceleration

Acceleration means that pupils receive a much greater speed of teaching and instruction than other learners. Pupils might learn more in the same time period as the rest of the school population; they might work on a more advanced curriculum within the same time period as others in the school; or they might learn the same amount in a shorter time period and use the spare time for other activities. This approach comes in various guises: early admission to school; “grade skipping”; advanced placement; accelerated classes; partial acceleration in one or more subjects; and early entry to tertiary education. There are many who argue that this approach is the one that best meets the needs of gifted young people.

However, others disagree. The argument against acceleration for gifted and talented young people has often been that their social development would suffer. Negative effects on personal development have been used effectively as a strong argument against moving young people into classes with others who are far in advance in terms of psychological, biological,

social and emotional maturity. Of course, while not all young people react positively to being accelerated, not all young people react negatively to being accelerated either.

If acceleration is the form of organisation selected then stakeholders - parents, teachers, young people – need to have been involved at all stages of the decision-making process and they need to plan and prepare to ensure as smooth a transition as possible. Preparatory work will need to be done with the pupil that is moving. It is crucial that their voice is heard in this process.

5.13 Recommendations for Further Research

Research on exceptionally able pupils and the type of provision required to meet their educational needs is at an embryonic stage in Ireland, and the opportunities to follow on from this study are numerous, as are the different aspects that could be explored. Two fully address the dearth of research in this area a range of complimentary studies are required, including the following:

- To borrow a mantra from the disability community of "*nothing about us without us*" would be extremely apt in identifying and addressing how these exceptionally able pupils feel about how their educational needs are being/should be addressed.
- As codified in the text of article 42 of the constitution of Ireland of the primacy of the family as the natural educators of their children, the perspectives of parents should also be included in research.
- Research to identify what difference (if any) the impact of teachers who had had professional development in the area of exceptional ability versus those who had not is likely to identify relevant findings.

- The replication of this study on a larger scale, with a more representative sample of teachers and SNAs will allow for greater confidence in the generalisations that may be made.

5.14 Conclusion

This study contributes to the neglected field of study of exceptionally able pupils in Ireland. Utilising a mixed methods case study approach, it has delved into a small, but growing sector of nondenominational education provision. The results of this study paint a picture of school staff who are positively inclined towards this cohort of students, but who feel overwhelmed by their own lack of knowledge and formal structures to facilitate provision for them. While some provision is in place for the exceptionally able in the school, it appears to be on an ad hoc basis and subject to resource limitations. The aspirational bona fide's of the staff in the school are not in doubt, as cited by one of the respondents "at least, we need to engage them, at best, we should be inspiring them" shows us that on an individual level there is an appetite to accommodate the students, but for that to happen structures need to be put into place.

Starting with updated guidelines with a clear definition, coupled with professional training on both identifying and responding to exceptional able pupils needs to be implemented. Leadership at both national and local level is also required, as well as the gathering and sharing of best practices among schools, in order to significantly address the needs of exceptional able learners in Ireland.

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Appendix A: Questionnaire

EXCEPTIONALLY ABLE PUPILS IN AN EDUCATE TOGETHER/ETB SCHOOL

The aim of the study is to explore how the staff of an Educate Together/Educational Training Board School respond to the needs of exceptionally able pupils.
In 2007, the National Council for Curriculum and Assessment (NCCA) issued "Exceptionally Able Students: Draft Guidelines for Teachers" to all schools in Ireland. In those guidelines, the term "exceptionally able students" refers to pupils who require opportunities for enrichment and extension that go beyond those provided for the general cohort of students. In line with those guidelines, the term "exceptionally able pupils" will be used throughout this questionnaire.

Instructions for completing the questionnaire
It will take approximately 15 - 20 minutes to complete the questionnaire.

Your completion of the questionnaire confirms that you understand the purpose of the study and that you freely consent to participate in it.

*Required

I intend to run follow-up interviews (either individual or focus groups) with teachers/SNAs who are interested in this area. If you are willing to meet me at a time and place that suits you, please fill in your name and contact details here (Name, Email, and/or Phone Number)

I would like to thank you for your willingness to complete this questionnaire. All information will be treated with absolute confidentiality, and neither your name nor that of your school will be revealed in the research report or in any conference presentation or journal article arising out of the project.

SECTION A: SCHOOL INFORMATION

1/19

A1: What is your role(s) in the school? Select all options that apply *

Tick all that apply.

- [ ] Principal
- [ ] Assistant principal
- [ ] Programme co-ordinator
- [ ] Special educational needs co-ordinator
- [ ] Learning support/Resource teacher
- [ ] Subject teacher
- [ ] Special needs Assistant

Other: [ ] _____

SECTION B: POLICY

B1: Does your school have a written school policy that specifically addresses the needs of exceptionally able pupils? *

Mark only one oval.

- ◯ Yes
- ◯ No *Skip to question 8*
- ◯ Unsure *Skip to question 8*

SECTION B: POLICY

B2: If you answered Yes to the previous Question (B1), is this policy *

Mark only one oval.

- ◯ A stand-alone policy?
- ◯ Part of another policy?
- ◯ Other: _____

B3: If part of another policy, please indicate which one

Mark only one oval.

- ◯ Special Educational Needs Policy
- ◯ Learning Support Policy
- ◯ Other: _____

B4: Is there a definition of exceptionally able pupils included in your policy? *

Mark only one oval.

- ◯ Yes *Skip to question B5*
- ◯ No *Skip to question B6*

SECTION B: POLICY

B5: If you answered Yes to the previous Question (B4), please provide the definition that is in your policy:

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

Skip to question B7

SECTION B: POLICY

B6: If you do not have a school policy which provides a definition of exceptionally able pupils, please give your own brief definition here:

SECTION B: POLICY

B7: Does the school have a designated person to co-ordinate provision for exceptionally able pupils?

Mark only one oval.

- ◯ Yes *Skip to question B8*
- ◯ No *Skip to question B9*

SECTION B: POLICY

B8: If you answered Yes to the previous Question (B7), who fulfils that role? Select the option that applies

Mark only one oval.

- ◯ Principal
- ◯ Deputy principal
- ◯ Learning support/Resource teacher
- ◯ Subject teacher
- ◯ Other: _____

SECTION B: POLICY

B9: Are you aware of teachers (or other staff) in the school with expressed interest in exceptionally able pupils (for example, involved in initiatives for them)?

Mark only one oval.

- ◯ Yes
- ◯ No

B10: Have you had professional development in the area of providing for exceptionally able pupils?

Mark only one oval.

- ◯ Yes *Skip to question B11*
- ◯ No *Skip to question B12*

SECTION B: POLICY

B11: If you answered Yes to the previous Question (B10), please select the option(s) that apply

Tick all that apply.

- ☐ Special Education Support Service (SESS) course
- ☐ Grad Dip in Special Ed
- ☐ Higher degree
- ☐ Summer course
- ☐ Online course (e.g. ICEP course)
- Other: ☐ _____

SECTION B: POLICY

B12: How well-prepared do you feel, as a professional, to meet the special educational needs of exceptionally able pupils?

Mark only one oval.

	1	2	3	4	5	
Very Well	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	Not Very Well

Please comment on your answer to the previous question (B12):

SECTION C: OPINIONS ABOUT THE EXCEPTIONALLY ABLE AND THEIR EDUCATION

The following statements concern exceptionally able children and their education; they were taken from newspaper articles, books, and other sources. We would like to know the extent of your agreement or disagreement with each of them. There are no correct or incorrect answers. Please, feel free to express your personal opinion.

1. Use the scale below to give your opinion.
2. Mark each statement with the number which best represents your opinion.
3. Answer as spontaneously as possible.
4. Please answer all questions.
5. Use answer 3 as little as possible.

SCALE : 1 = totally disagree: 2 = partially disagree: 3 = undecided: 4 = partially agree: 5 = totally agree.

C1: Typical children are the major resource of our society, so, they should be the focus of our attention *

Mark only one oval.

	1	2	3	4	5	
totally disagree	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	totally agree

C2: Sooner or later, regular school programmes may stifle the intellectual curiosity of certain exceptionally able children *

Mark only one oval.

	1	2	3	4	5	
totally disagree	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	totally agree

C3: The exceptionally able are already favoured in our schools *

Mark only one oval.

	1	2	3	4	5	
totally disagree	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	totally agree

C4: Devoting special funds to the education of exceptionally able children constitutes a profitable investment in the future of our society *

Mark only one oval.

	1	2	3	4	5	
totally disagree	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	totally agree

C5: There are too few exceptionally able children to justify our offering special educational services to them *

Mark only one oval.

	1	2	3	4	5	
totally disagree	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	totally agree

C6: Exceptionally able children are often bored in school *

Mark only one oval.

	1	2	3	4	5	
totally disagree	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	totally agree

C7: We have a greater moral responsibility to give special help to children with difficulties than to exceptionally able children *

Mark only one oval.

	1	2	3	4	5	
totally disagree	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	totally agree

C8: The exceptionally able have the right, like all other children, to benefit from a system of education which facilitates the full development of their personality *

Mark only one oval.

	1	2	3	4	5	
totally disagree	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	totally agree

C9: Children with difficulties have the most need of special educational services *

Mark only one oval.

	1	2	3	4	5	
totally disagree	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	totally agree

C10: The exceptionally able waste their time in regular classes *

Mark only one oval.

	1	2	3	4	5	
totally disagree	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	totally agree

C11: Exceptionally able children might become vain or egotistical if they are given special attention *

Mark only one oval.

	1	2	3	4	5	
totally disagree	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	totally agree

C12: Schools should allow exceptionally able students to progress more rapidly *

Mark only one oval.

	1	2	3	4	5	
totally disagree	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	totally agree

C13: Exceptionally able children should be left in regular classes, since they serve as an intellectual stimulant for the other children *

Mark only one oval.

	1	2	3	4	5	
totally disagree	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	totally agree

C14: Taxpayers should not have to pay for special education for the minority of children who are exceptionally able *

Mark only one oval.

	1	2	3	4	5	
totally disagree	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	totally agree

C15: In order to progress, a society must develop the talents of exceptionally able individuals to a maximum *

Mark only one oval.

	1	2	3	4	5	
totally disagree	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	totally agree

C16: Exceptionally able children do not need special educational services *

Mark only one oval.

	1	2	3	4	5	
totally disagree	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	totally agree

C17: Since we invest supplementary funds for children with difficulties, we should do the same for the exceptionally able *

Mark only one oval.

	1	2	3	4	5	
totally disagree	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	totally agree

C18: Our schools are already adequate in meeting the needs of the exceptionally able *

Mark only one oval.

	1	2	3	4	5	
totally disagree	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	totally agree

C19: The specific educational needs of the exceptionally able are too often ignored in our schools *

Mark only one oval.

	1	2	3	4	5	
totally disagree	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	totally agree

C20: Special programs for exceptionally able children have the drawback of creating elitism *

Mark only one oval.

	1	2	3	4	5	
totally disagree	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	totally agree

C21: Our schools should offer special educational services for the exceptionally able *

Mark only one oval.

	1	2	3	4	5	
totally disagree	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	totally agree

C22: Special educational services for the exceptionally able are a mark of privilege *

Mark only one oval.

	1	2	3	4	5	
totally disagree	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	totally agree

C23: The exceptionally able need special attention in order to fully develop their talents *

Mark only one oval.

	1	2	3	4	5	
totally disagree	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	totally agree

C24: It is the parents who have the major responsibility for helping exceptionally able children develop their talents *

Mark only one oval.

	1	2	3	4	5	
totally disagree	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	totally agree

SECTION D: IDENTIFICATION

D1: Are there pupils in your school who have been identified as exceptionally able (either by teachers/SNAs or external personnel)? *

Mark only one oval.

- ◯ Yes
- ◯ No
- ◯ Unsure

D2: If you answered Yes to the previous Question (D1), do you know how many? (If you could provide exact numbers that would be most helpful)

D3: There are differing opinions as to how exceptionally able pupils should be identified. The main ones are listed below. Please indicate the extent to which you agree with each of the following methods of identification *

Mark only one oval per row.

	Strongly agree	Agree	Not sure	Disagree	Strongly disagree
Ability/IQ tests	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯
Psychological report	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯
Standardised achievement tests, e.g. Micra-T, Sigma-T, Drumcondra Tests	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯
Checklist or rating scale	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯
Teacher observation/judgement	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯
Teacher-made tests	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯
Student portfolio	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯
Parent nomination	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯
Peer nomination	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯
Self nomination	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯

D4: Do you consider identification of exceptionally able pupils is best carried out *

Mark only one oval.

- ◯ Within school by school staff
- ◯ Outside of school
- ◯ By a combination of both

D5: Who do you consider to be in the best position within your school to identify exceptionally able pupils? *

Mark only one oval.

- ◯ Principal
- ◯ Assistant principal
- ◯ Subject teacher
- ◯ Learning support/Resource teacher
- ◯ Special needs assistant
- ◯ Pupil
- ◯ Other: _____

D6: Research has shown that the following characteristics often apply to exceptionally able pupils. Please indicate the extent to which you agree with each of the following statements *

Mark only one oval per row.

	Strongly agree	Agree	Not sure	Disagree	Strongly disagree
Have wide general knowledge					
Show perfectionist tendencies					
Are very articulate					
Have obsessive interests					
Master new concepts quickly					
Are highly creative					
Lack self-discipline					
Have excellent memory skills					
Work very quickly					
Exhibit challenging behaviour					
Are easily bored					
Are excellent readers					
Are socially immature					
Have a sophisticated sense of humour					
Are disorganised					
Are diligent workers					
Disrupt classes					
Have excellent problem-solving abilities					

D7: Reflecting on the issue of identifying exceptionally able pupils, any additional comments you would like to make that you think might be relevant to this study would be most welcome

SECTION E: ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

E1: Do you consider that exceptionally able pupils have special educational needs? *

Mark only one oval.

- Yes *Skip to question E2*
- No *Skip to question E3*
- Unsure *Skip to question E3*

SECTION E: ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

E2: If you answered Yes to the previous Question (E1), what do you think their main learning needs are when compared to their peers? Select all options that apply *

Tick all that apply.

- [ ] Faster pace
- [ ] Greater breadth of information
- [ ] Acceptance and recognition of exceptional ability
- [ ] Complex, challenging and open-ended tasks
- [ ] Greater depth of content
- [ ] Study skills training
- [ ] Independent, self-paced learning
- [ ] Opportunities to use higher order thinking and problem-solving skills
- [ ] Improved self-esteem
- [ ] Opportunities to "think outside the box"
- [ ] Need to work occasionally with students of similar ability level
- [ ] Opportunities to analyse and synthesise information
- [ ] Social skills training
- [ ] Opportunities to display leadership skills
- [ ] Effective learning strategies

Other: ☐ _____

SECTION E: ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

E3: Do you consider that pupils with learning or other disabilities can also be exceptionally able?

Mark only one oval.

- ◯ Yes
- ◯ No
- ◯ Unsure

E4: Please give reasons for your answer to the previous Question (E3):

E5: Do you use the NCCA (2007) Exceptionally Able Students: Draft Guidelines for Teachers? Select the option that applies

Mark only one oval.

- ◯ I have never used/heard of the guidelines *Skip to question E7*
- ◯ I used the guidelines previously
- ◯ I use the guidelines on a regular basis
- ◯ Other: _____

SECTION E: ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

E6: If you have used the guidelines, please indicate how useful you find them on a scale of 1 to 5

Mark only one oval.

	1	2	3	4	5	
Very Useful	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	Not Useful at All

Please comment on your answer to the previous question (E6):

SECTION E: ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

E7: How would you rate your school's practice in addressing the needs of exceptionally able pupils?

Mark only one oval.

	1	2	3	4	5	
Very good	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	Very poor

Please give reasons for this rating:

E8: Thank you very much for completing the questionnaire. Reflecting on the exceptionally able pupils in your school, any additional comments you might like to make that would be relevant to this study would be most welcome.

I am very grateful to you for completing the questionnaire. Thank you again.

Appendix B: Main Cover Letter

Dear Teacher/Special needs assistant

I am currently studying for a Masters of Arts in Educational Practice (MAEP) in The National College of Ireland, Mayor Street Lower, IFSC, Dublin. Prior to this, I worked as a further education teacher in both Laois & Kildare and, more recently, as an associate on the philanthropy team of a large international SaaS (software as a service) company, where I get to support disadvantaged students and young adults. As part of the research for my thesis, I am carrying out a survey of how your school is catering for exceptionally able pupils. These pupils are mentioned in the Education Act (1998) under the category of students with special educational needs.

I would be most grateful if you would assist me by completing the attached questionnaire. It will take approximately 15 - 20 minutes to complete. You can complete this questionnaire online at the link provided here

Every effort will be made to ensure that your identity and that of your school are protected, and the confidentiality of the information provided by you will be protected in line with data protection regulations. Data collected will be analysed for the MAEP project and also for journal articles and conference presentations. However, the name of any participating school or teacher will not be revealed in those reports. By completing this questionnaire, I understand that you agree to the data being used as outlined here.

I intend to run follow-up interviews (either individual or focus groups) with teachers/SNAs who express an interest in this area and are willing to meet me. The interviews will take place at a time and location that suit the teachers. If you would be interested in meeting me, there is space on the front of the questionnaire to fill in your name and contact details.

I would like to emphasise that your participation in this study is entirely voluntary (although I would like to stress how much I hope you will take part). There will be no risks to you or your school from involvement in this study. Rather, my hope is to give you the opportunity to voice your views on how we might best respond to the needs of exceptionally able pupils.

If you would like to discuss any issues relating to the questionnaire, you may contact me by telephone on 087-7191859 or email me at x17131855@student.ncirl.ie

Your co-operation in this research is greatly appreciated and highly valued.

Yours sincerely,

Appendix C: One-to-One Interview Schedule

Focus Group/One-on-One Interview Schedule

The researcher will begin by welcoming the participant(s) and thanking them for coming.

He will introduce himself and gave a brief overview of the study and its goals. He will then present the main findings from the questionnaires and gave the participant(s) a presentation of these.

The conventions (ground rules) of focus group participation will then be outlined:

- Confidentiality and anonymity;
- Recording of the Zoom session with participant' permission;
- One person to speak at a time (because of recording and transcribing difficulties);
- Importance of every person's experiences and views – researcher here to learn from participants.
- The participants were asked to complete a brief consent form to be sent after the session

As a warm-up exercise, participants will be encouraged to briefly introduce themselves and their role in the school, and asked to put their name up on their Zoom profile so everyone's name will be known.

Opening question:

- How did you feel about completing the questionnaire?

Introductory question:

- Are there any particular issues around exceptional ability you'd like to discuss here today?

Transition questions:

- What comes to mind when you hear the phrase exceptionally able student/learner?
- When referring to these students, what would your preferred term be, and why?

Key questions:

1. Definition /conceptualisation of exceptional ability

- How would you describe an exceptionally able learner? Who are these students?

- What do you think of exceptionally able pupils being categorised as “students with special educational needs”?
- In your opinion, what are their special needs?

2. Identification

- In your opinion, how necessary is it to identify these pupils?
- Why do you think that?
- How should they be identified?
- Who should identify them?
- What about the wider school? Is identification of exceptionally able learners something everyone does? Is it a whole-school practice?

- (If yes) Tell us about that
- (If No) What are the difficulties around identifying these pupils?
- Do you see a need for a school policy in this area? What should be in this policy?

3. Provision

- Do you think the school has a role in supporting exceptionally able pupils?
- What provision, if any, does your school make for these pupils?
- What methods of support work well?
- Why do you think these work well?
- How does the school evaluate the effectiveness of that support?
- What hinders provision for these pupils?
- How can these difficulties be overcome?

Ending questions:

All-things-considered question:

- Of all the aspects we discussed, which do you think is most important?

Summary question, following short summary of the main points of the discussion:

- How well does that capture our discussion?

Final question, following very brief outline of purpose of study:

- Have we missed anything? Is there anything we should have discussed but didn't?

Appendix D: Consent Form

Consent Form

I have received information about the study in the title and I understand what is involved.

I give my consent to participate in a focus group which will be conducted by the researcher, *Colm McNamee*. I also consent to having the session audio/visually-recorded and I understand that my name or that of my school will not be used in any reporting/presentations arising from the research.

Signed ……

Date ……