



**Office for Standards
in Education**

National Academy for Gifted and Talented Youth: Summer schools 2003

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Contents

Introduction	4
Main findings	4
Recommendations	5
The pupils	5
Staffing	6
Planning and management	7
The quality of teaching and learning	8
Accommodation and resources	9
Pastoral care	9
Views of the summer schools	10

Introduction

1. The National Academy for Gifted and Talented Youth was established at the University of Warwick in February 2002. For the pilot year the Academy was set up to develop, implement, promote and support educational opportunities for gifted and talented children aged 11–16, but in time will cater for pupils from primary age to 19. The Academy provides a range of activities aimed at the top 5% of pupils in terms of their academic ability. These activities include Saturday schools, weekend schools, special lectures and events, online learning and summer schools.
2. The Academy's first summer school took place at the University of Warwick in 2002, with 100 pupils attending. For summer 2003 the Academy expanded provision and ran 25 programmes at five centres at Canterbury Christ Church University College and at the universities of Durham, Exeter, Warwick and York. Ten of the programmes were provided at the University of Warwick. Each summer school lasted three weeks.
3. Her Majesty's Inspectors (HMI) visited each summer school and inspected at least one of the programmes in depth and others more generally. They inspected the quality of the staffing, course planning and management, the teaching and the learning, and the suitability of the staffing, resources, accommodation and pastoral care. In most instances, HMI visited during the first week of the summer school and returned towards the end of the three-week period.

Main findings

- ❑ Young people who attended the summer schools felt they were highly successful. Most of the pupils made substantial progress over the three weeks and on several occasions HMI witnessed pupils making rapid gains in their understanding.
- ❑ The quality of learning was very good. Much of this was a response to the effective teaching which motivated pupils who were already keen to learn. Pupils, immersed in their learning, enjoyed the cut and thrust of vigorous debate and were determined to succeed when faced with a challenge. As well as making substantial gains in their knowledge and understanding, many pupils also gained in confidence and self-esteem. They co-operated well with one another and were generous in their praise of others' successes.
- ❑ The quality of teaching varied, but most was at least good and some was excellent. In the best sessions, expert tutors used their subject knowledge well and captured the interest of pupils with exciting and relevant work. They also made good use of visiting specialists and visits to places of interest. There were, however, several sessions where lectures were unremarkable.
- ❑ The pastoral care of pupils was very good, mainly because of the commitment of residential assistants and site managers. They provided a wide range of interesting social activities and maintained a good level of support for pupils throughout the three-week stay. Health and safety were given high priority at

each of the centres. Indiscipline was handled swiftly and proportionately. Living accommodation was generally good.

- ❑ The quality of assessment and reporting varied. Reports on pupils generally did not provide sufficient information on what they had learned or what they might tackle next when they returned to school.
- ❑ Recruitment to the summer schools was disappointingly low, with less than two thirds of the places available filled. Recruitment did not start as early as it should have done, but one of the main reasons for the low take-up was the lack of awareness of the Academy on the part of schools and parents. Although cost may have deterred some, funding was readily available for families on low incomes. Although three quarters of local education authorities (LEAs) were represented, pupils came from only 316 schools. A high proportion of the pupils were of minority ethnic heritage.

Recommendations

- ❑ The Academy should investigate further the reasons why numbers of pupils attending summer schools were lower than aimed for and take further steps to ensure that all gifted pupils know about and have access to the summer school programme.
- ❑ The Academy needs to ensure that all those appointed to teach on summer schools are effective in their approach to teaching the age-groups and types of pupils involved.
- ❑ Assessment and reporting need to be improved so that they contain adequate information about what pupils have learned and what they might tackle next.
- ❑ Opportunities should be provided to meet those involved at other centres to share information when planning courses and to review good practice.

The pupils

4. Just over 500 pupils aged 11–16 took part in the Academy summer schools in 2003. While this is a significant increase in numbers compared with the 100 pupils on the 2002 programme, it fell short of the 900 places that were planned. Some summer school staff felt that this was because recruitment had started late. However, it is more likely to be the result of the limited awareness of the Academy's work on the part of schools and parents, and the relatively low membership of the Academy at that time.

5. Pupils attended from across the country and came from 112 of the 153 LEAs in England. Four out of every ten pupils came from LEAs with Excellence in Cities programmes, which reflects the high profile given to the education for gifted pupils in these areas. Just over one third of the pupils came from just 12 LEAs, but mostly there were between five and ten pupils from each LEA.

6. In some cases the geographical proximity of the venue was important. For example, the largest group from any one LEA came from Warwickshire, most of whom attended programmes at the University of Warwick. Elsewhere, LEAs made limited use of local provision: for example, only a few pupils from Devon and Durham attended programmes at the Universities of Exeter and Durham respectively. However, not all the pupils attended the summer school nearest home: for example, some pupils from Newcastle travelled to Canterbury.

7. Although nearly three quarters of LEAs were represented, the pupils came from only 316 schools. Take-up was uneven; one sixth of the pupils came from only eight schools, and 22 of the pupils came from just one school. About one fifth of the pupils came from independent schools. Some LEAs were represented by only a few schools; for example, all eight pupils from Barking and Dagenham came from one school. A more typical pattern was exemplified by Southwark, where the nine pupils came from six schools.

8. Girls (51%) slightly outnumbered boys. However, there were marked gender imbalances on some programmes. For example, the advanced computing and society course at one centre had 16 boys and 1 girl, while elsewhere one of the biology courses had 14 girls and 3 boys.

9. Just over one third of the pupils came from minority ethnic groups. The largest numbers were of Indian and Chinese heritage, each with over 30 pupils, but there were few of Pakistani, Black African and Black Caribbean heritages.

10. Each summer school place cost £1,700 but, of this, £1,100 was met by the Department for Education and Skills. Maintained schools were asked to pay £270 towards the cost of each pupil and most did so. Parents were expected to contribute towards the balance but the Academy provided further funding, up to the full £330 for those on low incomes. This helped ensure that pupils attending came from a wide range of socio-economic backgrounds. Only those parents with children at independent schools were expected to pay £600 towards summer school costs.

Staffing

11. Most courses used a combination of university academic staff, teachers from local schools and teaching assistants to deliver academic sessions.

12. In almost all courses inspected by HMI, the course leader was a member of the university academic staff, often the chair or head of department. Other highly qualified university academic staff were involved in the teaching.

13. Almost all the courses inspected made good use of teachers from local schools, often those with a particular interest in teaching gifted and talented pupils. In almost all cases these were well-qualified and experienced teachers who took an active part in leading sections of the course.

14. Teaching assistants, who supported the work of the academic staff in lessons, were drawn from a range of backgrounds. In most cases, they were graduates or postgraduates from the host university department. At the University of Warwick, trainee

teachers, newly qualified teachers, graduates and postgraduates successfully acted as teaching assistants.

15. Some courses made good use of other staff, with particular expertise, to support the programmes. At Durham, a member of the Royal Shakespeare Company's theatre-in-education staff was able to add a valuable extra dimension to the teaching. At the University of Exeter, a key role was played by the summer school consultant, a former LEA adviser with expertise in teaching gifted and talented pupils. He was able to support less experienced staff in working with school pupils.

16. Strategies for recruiting summer school staff were generally successful, using existing networks such as LEA advisory services and university teacher education departments. At Exeter, the school liaison office played a key role in recruiting staff and building course teams.

17. Most courses used a good balance of staffing to deliver their programmes but there were several courses where too many staff were involved over the three-week period and the experience for pupils was therefore too disparate. The staffing was best where at least some of the academic staff were involved in teaching for the whole of the course as this provided a sense of continuity for pupils.

Planning and management

18. Overall, course planning was good. The best summer schools were carefully planned, with a clear rationale for each course, but detailed day-to-day plans were sufficiently flexible for tutors to be able to adjust sessions to respond better to meet students' needs. These well-planned programmes provided students with a good variety of activities, including visits and external speakers, practical challenges, reflection time, private study and a balance of structured and unstructured recreational time. Where there were sufficient numbers, courses were devised to suit specific age-ranges such as 11–13 and 14–16 to help reduce the wide ability range found in the 11–16 age group. Where the planning was good, there was an obvious sense of progression throughout the course.

19. The best-planned programmes built well on previous experience of running summer schools for pupils of this age. The part played by the site director was also important in establishing the ethos and in giving the programme a clear sense of direction. At Exeter, for example, the consultant spent a great deal of time planning individual sessions with the tutors running the classics course since they had little experience of teaching pupils of this age, and this resulted in a very successful course.

20. The best planning also had good arrangements for recruiting staff. The best programmes recruited staff with recent experience of working with pupils aged 11–16 and completed the recruitment in good time to allow staff opportunities to meet and plan their teaching.

21. Where planning was not as effective, the work expected of pupils was sometimes too challenging. Usually, it was not the content that pupils found daunting but the language used and the method of delivery adopted by tutors. These courses did not

have sufficient variety. Extensive use of lecturing proved too much for some younger pupils.

22. Induction arrangements were good. Summer school staff used written information and presentations to inform parents and pupils of the academic and pastoral arrangements. Many of the tutors set preparatory work. For example, those attending the English course at Durham were expected to complete pre-course reading and written exercises which helped prepare them well.

23. As might be expected in a programme with provision so geographically spread, there were occasional glitches in communication. There were some concerns about the support and guidance provided for satellite centres by the Academy. This was mostly regarding details of pastoral arrangements. Summer school staff were not always aware of the arrangements made for the University of Warwick's Centre for Educational Development and Research to evaluate the summer school programme. Staff would welcome opportunities to share good practice.

The quality of teaching and learning

24. The quality of teaching varied. Most of the teaching seen during the inspection was good and the best was excellent. There were also sessions where the teaching was unremarkable. There were elements of good teaching in most of the sessions observed by HMI, with pupils engrossed in the work and eager to make progress. However, there were also occasions when pupils were marking time.

25. Most of the tutors combined a high level of subject expertise with an application of pedagogy appropriate to the subject matter and to the age and ability of the pupils. In general, tutors used a broad range of teaching strategies so that they quickly captured the pupils' interest and then provided a wide variety of exciting follow-up activities to engage them further. Resources were usually good and used well. Most tutors set imaginative work which pupils found highly relevant. For example, on courses in English, and in philosophy and anthropology at Durham, tutors were well aware of the strengths and weaknesses of individual pupils and groups of pupils. They used their knowledge to good effect and made different demands on pupils depending on their individual levels of expertise.

26. Where the teaching was only average, it was usually because university teaching staff failed to engage sufficiently with pupils. Sessions were sometimes too long and, as mentioned above, on some courses there was too much lecturing using language that pupils could not follow. School teachers played a key role in assisting university staff and their influence had a strong bearing on the range and type of learning activities employed. The quality of teaching was often further enhanced by good support staff.

27. The quality of learning was very good on most of the courses inspected by HMI. Most of the pupils made substantial progress and there were several occasions when HMI saw evidence that pupils were making rapid gains in understanding. In most cases the quality of learning and the progress were directly related to good-quality teaching.

Pupils were highly motivated, keen to learn, eloquent in discussions and persistent when faced with a challenge. As well as making substantial gains in their learning, pupils also gained in confidence and self-esteem. They co-operated well with one another and were generous in their praise of others' successes.

28. The assessment of pupils varied. There were differences in the guidance given to tutors on what records they were expected to keep, and when and how they were to assess pupils. Tutors at York assessed pupils early in the course so they had a baseline against which to judge the progress they made during the three weeks. On most courses pupils were given useful oral feedback during sessions so that they knew how they were doing as the course progressed. Through this feedback tutors often suggested how pupils might improve their work, for example by exploring different approaches or with further research, so in this way they set pupils relevant targets.

29. Staff at each centre indicated that pupils would receive a report and a certificate of attendance. Typically these reports included sections summarising the course content, the pupil's achievements and the implications for future learning. Although only a limited sample was seen, few were of great value as the emphasis was often more on motivation and involvement than on what pupils had learned or what they might do next. At one centre, reports on one subject did not include details of the content of the course, and other comments were often general and not well linked to the individual. Reports for other subjects were more specific. Overall, pupils, parents and teachers in the pupils' mainstream schools needed better reports if they were to build successfully on summer school work.

Accommodation and resources

30. The quality of teaching accommodation was usually good but occasionally cramped and poorly resourced. At one centre, there were some shortcomings in the accommodation because of the late confirmation of the summer school booking. Where accommodation was poor, staff worked hard to overcome its limitations.

31. Resources were generally good and course leaders made effective use of visits to places of interest and visiting speakers who could provide fresh insights to pupils. Where course leaders were based at the university, pupils usually had good access to software, books, incidental materials, brochures, catalogues and other resources. For example, on a classics course pupils used the university's comprehensive set of Roman soldiers' armour and other costumes.

Pastoral care

32. The pastoral care of pupils was very good. Living accommodation was generally good, with each pupil having an individual study bedroom in university residences. Each centre employed a team of residential assistants led by a site manager. Typically each assistant provided round the clock support for a group of pupils of the same gender and similar age. Most were students attending the host university and were selected following application and interview. Residential assistants showed great commitment to their task. For example, one 14-year-old boy was caught smoking on several occasions.

His residential assistant, in conjunction with the site manager and the boy's parents, was able to resolve the issue in a sensible, mature and effective manner.

33. Pupils' behaviour was tracked through monitoring forms provided by the Academy. The summer school team at Exeter developed a more effective system of 'concern forms', which quickly identified problems, weaknesses in the organisation, pupils' anxieties and inadequacies in staffing or the teaching programme. These forms were regularly and sensitively used, especially by the residential assistants at the beginning of the summer school. There were very few examples of serious misbehaviour at any of the centres. The rare instances were dealt with well.

34. Teams of residential assistants organised a very good range of recreational activities for pupils. At Durham these were particularly well thought out. For example, evening activities were divided into 'chilled', such as origami; 'thinking', such as logical thinking workshops; or 'active', such as playing football. Other activities, such as sculpting, self-defence and hip-hop dancing, were included at the suggestion of the pupils. These activities gave pupils good opportunities to meet those from different courses, and helped broaden their experience and enriched their social interactions. At times, some pupils felt they were too closely constrained in their free time. At one centre, pupils felt they were tightly marshalled and did not have sufficient opportunity to relax unsupervised.

35. Close attention was given to health and safety issues at all centres. For example, at Exeter, residential assistants received basic training in first aid and fire prevention.

Views of the summer schools

36. The overwhelming majority of the pupils viewed their summer school experiences very positively. For example, towards the end of the course many of the pupils at Warwick said that they were sad to be returning home and those on the mathematics and computing courses at Exeter all gave very high scores when asked to grade their experiences.

37. These positive ratings were achieved despite that fact that many pupils initially felt daunted by the prospect of three weeks away from home. There was some homesickness, particularly among younger pupils, but this was quickly dispelled in the vast majority of cases. Among those who attended, there was strong support for courses of three weeks' duration. However, there was also support, especially among staff, for courses of only two weeks' duration. Limited evidence from HMI inspections of schools in the summer and autumn terms indicates that some pupils, particularly those from inner-city areas, did not apply because they felt the summer schools were too long. Others were unable to attend because of family holiday commitments.

38. Pupils particularly valued the differences in teaching approaches, compared with that which they were used to in school. They welcomed the opportunity of working with high-ability pupils from different areas of the country and making new friends. They found the content interesting and stimulating, especially the various visits which formed

part of the academic programme. They also enjoyed the wide range of social and extra-curricular activities and greatly valued the support provided by residential assistants who were prepared to go out of their way to help them.

39. There were also a few minor concerns. Some felt that the needs of their age group had not been taken fully into account in academic sessions or extra-curricular activities. Some of the younger pupils felt the courses could have been better if there had been less lecturing. Some of the older pupils felt that, given they were attending in their summer holidays, there could have been greater flexibility about bedtimes, and more opportunities to relax without close supervision.