

Educator Observation Checklist

Recognising High Potential and Gifted Learners in the Classroom

This checklist is designed to support teachers in observing and reflecting on a broad range of student behaviours and traits that may indicate high potential or giftedness. It aims to move beyond academic test scores and help educators consider the whole learner, intellectually, emotionally, socially, and creatively.

✔ Tick the boxes where applicable. Use it as a conversation tool, not a diagnostic measure.

📝 Use the notes section to collect evidence, questions, or patterns over time.

1. Cognitive and Intellectual Indicators

- Learns new concepts quickly with minimal repetition
- Demonstrates insight or abstract thinking uncommon for their age
- Asks deep, often philosophical questions or challenges assumptions
- Makes complex connections across subjects or topics
- Shows a strong memory or capacity for mental organisation
- Demonstrates metacognitive skills (reflects on their own thinking or learning processes)

Notes:

2. Creative and Divergent Thinking

- Generates unusual ideas or approaches when problem-solving
- Enjoys open-ended or exploratory tasks more than structured ones
- Incorporates humour, metaphor, or novelty in their work
- Takes intellectual or artistic risks in their learning
- Struggles with rigid formats but thrives in choice-driven activities
- May resist conformity in favour of originality

Notes:

3. Emotional and Social Characteristics

- Displays heightened sensitivity to injustice or ethical issues
- May react strongly to feedback, perceived failure, or peer dynamics
- Shows empathy and emotional maturity beyond their age
- Forms intense connections to topics or people
- Engages deeply in class discussions, often bringing a unique perspective
- May take on leadership roles or influence peer thinking

Notes:

4. Behavioural Patterns and Classroom Engagement

- Can appear disengaged or “zoned out” during repetitive or low-rigor tasks
- Challenges rules, systems, or authority in a thoughtful (not just defiant) way
- Becomes frustrated when their pace of learning is slowed
- Finishes work early and seeks extension; if they are interested
- Avoids tasks that feel pointless, especially if the challenge level is too low
- May display asynchronous development; mature reasoning, but variability

Notes:

5. Learning Preferences and Academic Signs

- Excels in one domain but may struggle in another (e.g. strong verbal ability but weak written output)
- Responds better to discussion, demonstration, or hands-on experiences than to written tasks
- Demonstrates passion and depth in areas of personal interest
- Can explain or teach concepts to peers with clarity
- May be inconsistent, producing exceptional work in some situations and underperforming in others
- Often needs fewer repetitions and shows signs of boredom with standard pacing

Notes:

6. Twice-Exceptionality and Neurodiversity Indicators

- Shows advanced ability in one area but significant challenges in others (e.g. attention, organisation, handwriting, processing)
- May mask their giftedness by acting out, withdrawing, or performing to fit peer expectations
- May have a formal diagnosis (e.g. ADHD, ASD, dyslexia) but display advanced abilities when engaged
- Behaviours may be misunderstood as noncompliance, distraction, or immaturity
- Benefits from alternative modes of expression (e.g. oral, visual, movement-based tasks)

Notes:

7. Identity, Expression, and Self-Awareness

- Demonstrates strong self-awareness or emotional insight for their age
- Explores identity in nuanced ways, including gender identity or cultural expression, which may relate to emotional or social giftedness
- Seeks meaning and purpose in learning, not just outcomes
- May struggle with peer relationships due to intensity, sensitivity, or differing interests
- Requires support to manage self-expectations or perfectionism

Notes:

Educator Reflection Prompts

- What behaviours might be misunderstood if viewed only through a disciplinary lens?
- In what settings does this student shine, and why?
- How does the student respond to challenge, complexity, or autonomy?
- Are there patterns of disengagement that align with under-challenge?
- Has this student ever been referred or considered for enrichment, even if they don't "fit the mold"?

Next Steps for Teachers

- Begin documenting patterns and collecting work samples across contexts
- Use differentiation strategies to increase challenge and engagement
- Involve colleagues (learning support, enrichment teams, year coordinators) to widen perspectives
- Engage with the student and their family, ask about passions, behaviours at home, or past experiences
- Consider flexible grouping, enrichment tasks, or interest-based projects
- If 2e traits are present, collaborate on a dual-support approach that nurtures both strengths and challenges

Remember:

Giftedness and high potential are not defined by perfect behaviour or high grades. They are often expressed through complexity, contradiction, and creativity. Your role as an educator is not to diagnose, but to notice. To create conditions where brilliance, in all its forms, has room to be seen.

Potential thrives where curiosity is met with belief.