

Seeing beyond statistics: Examining the potential for disjuncture between legislation, policy and practice in meeting the needs of highly able Scottish students

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Abstract: The question of how best to identify and provide for gifted students has a long and contentious history internationally. In contrast to other countries where there are specialist programmes and in some cases specialist teachers for gifted pupils, Scotland has chosen to adopt an inclusive approach to provision for these students and has created a legislative and curricular framework that in theory provides a strong structure for meeting their educational and developmental needs. While there are significant benefits to this approach, care must be taken to ensure that within the space between intention and practice the needs of these learners have been explicitly identified, considered and met. Each year the Scottish Government conducts a census to collect data from all publicly funded schools in Scotland. In accordance with Scottish legislation as part of this process it gathers data pertaining to pupils identified as requiring additional support for their learning, including highly able pupils. However there are anomalies within this data, for example, there are unusual and unexplained discrepancies between the proportions of pupils identified as being highly able in different geographical contexts. The purpose of the present study was therefore to examine the potential causes for these anomalies and to assess the implications for the identification of, and provision for, highly able pupils in Scotland. Thirteen structured telephone interviews were conducted with Local Education Authority personnel across Scotland. These interviews aimed to get behind the statistics and examine how highly able pupils are identified, and provided for, in practice. Several interesting issues emerged from the interviews that may begin to help to explain the anomalies and to help us better understand everyday practice. The results, while encouraging, suggest that there is a need for teachers, educational psychologists, schools and authorities to ensure that the needs of this group of learners are explicitly considered.

Keywords: Scottish Schools Census Data, gifted, education, inclusion

Pogled onkraj statistike: razlogi za razhajanje med zakonodajo, politiko in prakso v zadovoljevanju potreb visoko sposobnih škotskih učencev

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Povzetek: Razprava o tem, kako najbolje prepoznavati nadarjene učence ter z njimi delati, ima v mednarodnem prostoru dolgo in bogato zgodovino. V nasprotju z državami, v katerih izvajajo posebne programe in imajo tudi posebne učitelje za nadarjene učence, se je Škotska odločila za inkluzivni pristop do obravnave nadarjenih učencev; razvila je zakonski in kurikularni okvir, ki izhaja iz teoretskih spoznanj o izobraževalnih in razvojnih potrebah visoko sposobnih učencev. Kljub splošnim prednostim tega pristopa pa je treba pozornost nameniti temu, da so potrebe teh učencev dejansko prepoznane, obravnavane in uresničene. Škotska vlada zato vsako leto zbere podatke javnih šol. Ti podatki se v skladu z škotsko zakonodajo nanašajo na učence z dodatnimi potrebami, vključno z visoko sposobnimi učenci. Vendar se v teh podatkih pojavljajo določene nepravilnosti, kot na primer nenavadna in nepojasnjena razhajanja v odstotku visoko sposobnih učencev iz različnih geografskih kontekstov. Zato je namen pričujoče študije preučiti potencialne razloge teh nepravilnosti in oceniti smernice za prepoznavanje in delo z visoko sposobnimi škotskimi učenci. Izvedenih je bilo trinajst strukturiranih telefonskih intervjujev s predstavniki lokalnih izobraževalnih oblasti na Škotskem. Cilj teh intervjujev je bil pridobiti natančnejši kvalitativen vpogled v postopke prepoznavanja in dela z visoko sposobnimi učenci v praksi. Iz intervjujev izhaja več zanimivih izsledkov, pomembnih za pojasnitev nepravilnosti in v pomoč pri boljšem razumevanju vsakodnevne prakse. Rezultati so spodbudni, a tudi opozarjajo, da morajo učitelji, pedagoški psihologi, šole in izobraževalne oblasti zagotoviti, da bodo potrebe te skupine učencev dejansko obravnavane.

Ključne besede: popis škotskih šol, nadarjeni, izobraževanje, inkluzija

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Identifying and Supporting Gifted Pupils

There is no consistent, agreed approach nationally or internationally to identifying and providing for gifted and talented pupils, the very definition of giftedness itself is a social construction sensitive to time, context, culture and gender differences (Freeman, 2013). The complexities inherent in defining and subsequently identifying giftedness mean that ensuring the needs of these young people are adequately addressed is challenging. Historically identification systems sought to discover pupils through tests such as SAT tests or IQ tests, all of which have their roots in a uni-dimensional view of intelligence (Brody & Stanley, 2005). The categorisations of giftedness often employed based on these tests, such as profoundly gifted or exceptionally gifted, are ones that Tomlinson (2008, p. 60) likens to ‘nineteenth-century debates over gradations of mental retardation’ with similar questions about validity and efficacy. With such potential limitations a broader view of giftedness has been the quest of many who argue that psychological and educational rhetoric have progressed considerably from these early beginnings and consequently the uni-dimensional view of giftedness is out dated (Borland, 2005; Claxton & Meadows, 2009; Subotnik, 2003; Van Tassel-Baska, 2005). In response theorists now proffer a number of multi-dimensional models of giftedness (cf. Sternberg & Davidson, 2005). An example of this is the work by Renzulli (2005) and his three-ring model of giftedness in which he argues that above average ability, task commitment and creativity need to be considered in the identification process. These multidimensional models have meant that the assessments, identification methods, interventions and pedagogy employed by educators and educational psychologists are grounded in a much broader conceptualisation of giftedness than just high IQ (Resing, Lauchlan, & Elliott, 2013). But still within this approach lie concerns about the potential negative impact of labelling and that, in contrast to its intention, the very act of labelling ability may lead teachers to ‘fixed ability’ thinking in which pupils could be responded to differently even when they manifest the same learning behaviours (Drummond & Yarker, 2013). As a solution to this Borland (2005) advocates that consideration should be given to gifted pedagogy rather than to identifying gifted children as this will result in appropriate learning experiences for pupils. This fits within the broader perspectives of inclusive education proposed by Florian and Kershner (2009, p. 173) who argue that a defining feature should be the “acceptance of differences between students as ordinary aspects of human development”. Such a view, if adopted, would mean schools would start to provide for all abilities with an understanding that these abilities may change over time rather than seeking to select and provide for those deemed to be different at particular moments in time.

Scottish Schools’ Context

Scotland is one of the four nations of the UK but it has its own government, and education is a devolved matter. As such Scotland has its own legislation and policy documentation separate and distinct from England and the rest of the UK. Local government in Scotland is organised through 32 unitary authorities. State schools are owned and operated by these unitary authorities (“Scotland’s Education System,” n.d.) and policy and legislation developed at national (Scottish) Government level is implemented at a local education authority level.

Recently Scotland has been implementing a new curriculum framework, Curriculum for Excellence (Scottish Government, 2006b). This framework seeks to “achieve a transformation in education in Scotland by providing a coherent, more flexible and enriched curriculum from 3 to 18 years” (Education Scotland, n.d. a, para. 1). Within this framework it is acknowledged that some children and young people may require different or additional support to what is normally provided in Scottish schools. As a complement to this the document, Building the Curriculum 3 (Scottish Government, 2006b), helpfully provides a framework to support teachers in planning a curriculum that meets the needs of all children and young people from 3 to 18 years. This has the potential to offer, amongst other things, personalisation, enjoyment and depth of learning (Scottish Government, 2006a). In theory this curricular approach is very well suited to the needs of highly able pupils (Sutherland, 2011a). While no one term is ideal, throughout the remainder of this paper the term “highly able” rather than gifted will be used, as this is the current terminology adopted within the Scottish education system (Scottish Network for Able Pupils, 2009). These curricular and policy developments are underpinned by legislative advances including, The Education (Additional Support for Learning) (Scotland) Act 2004, that came into force in 2005 and was amended in 2009. This Act places a duty on local education authorities to “provide additional support where needed to enable any child or young person to benefit from education” (Education Scotland, n.d. b, para. 1). This forward thinking Act enshrined in law in Scotland, for the first time, the needs of highly able pupils. All staff members in Scottish schools are expected to support learners in a way that takes account of wellbeing, inclusion, equity and fairness (Education Scotland, n.d. c). This has become known as Universal Support and should be available for every Scottish pupil. At the heart of this approach is personal learning planning which aims to ensure pupils are offered appropriate and planned learning experiences that take account of individual needs and abilities. However within the framework it is acknowledged that some children and young people may require support for their learning that is in addition to this Universal Support. In Scotland this is known as Targeted Support. Targeted Support may be offered for short periods of time, e.g. through a period of

bereavement, or it may be required throughout a young person's time at school e.g. a life-long learning disability (Education Scotland, n.d. d).

The new act ushered in a reconceptualisation of special educational needs. This resulted in a philosophical change in understanding about who would now be identified as requiring targeted support. This new definition broadened to include children who may be working, or capable of working, in advance of their chronological peers. It is important to note that children and young people may also present with multiple exceptionalities e.g. dyslexia with high ability (Montgomery, 2003). It can be particularly challenging to correctly identify the additional support needs of children with multiple exceptionalities as the intertwined layers of requirements can be difficult to untangle and prioritise.

The Scottish Schools Census

There is a legislative requirement for the Scottish Government to collect and publish data annually in relation to pupils with additional support needs (Section 23 of the Education (Additional Support for Learning) (Scotland) Act 2009). This pertains to the number of pupils recognized as requiring additional support in their learning and in the Scottish context this includes the needs of "highly able" pupils. Data is gathered about the additional need or disability, the nature of the need, the reasons support is required and the gender and school stage of those identified. This information is collated as part of a wider annual census of Scottish schools that takes place in September each year and is submitted to the Government. The data collection is wide ranging and gathers information from publicly funded primary, secondary and special schools relating to for example: the size of the school, urban/rural classification, pupil ethnicity, pupils receiving Gaelic medium education, and schools and pupils by school denomination.

Amongst these broader issues, specific data is also gathered about categories of need. Scotland, as with all other countries, has children and young people who are capable of high achievement in one or more areas and separate data is collected on this category. However as discussed earlier identifying these students and fully meeting their needs can prove a complex and challenging task for parents and school staff alike. These challenges have lead to a number of interesting anomalies in the data. Table 1 shows the number of students identified as being highly able between 2009 and 2013 in Scottish primary and secondary schools.

Since 2006, all reasons for additional support have been collected, rather than just a pupil's main additional support need. This has led to a general increase in the reported incidence of each additional support need. In 2010 changes were again made in how the information on additional support needs was collected. Information on reasons for support and the nature of support required was collected separately for each type of additional support

need and this gave rise to a further increase in the reported figures across *all* categories of additional support. For example, in 2009 5.4% of students on the primary school roll and 5.8% of students on the secondary school roll were recorded as having an additional support need and in 2013 these number had increased to 18.4% and 19.1% respectively.

As can be seen from Table 1 this pattern remains consistent when we look specifically at the numbers of highly able pupils reported, there is a clear increase in the overall numbers reported across the four years. The increase for this specific category is quite considerable, in 2009 only around 250 pupils were identified as highly able across the whole of Scotland and just five years later this figure was almost 10 times larger which would suggest that the needs of this group of learners are becoming more clearly recognized. However the increase is not consistent across authorities.

In 2009, 202 of the 269 highly able pupils identified as needing additional support were all reported in one authority with the remaining 31 authorities reporting minimal (<15) to nil returns. In contrast in 2013, all thirty-two authorities reported having highly able pupils who required additional support (although in two authorities the numbers were still less than five). The numbers reported within particular authorities also increased substantially across this timeframe. For example, Aberdeenshire reported 15 pupils (all in primary) in 2009 and 235 pupils (across primary and secondary) in 2013. These figures would suggest, at least from a recording perspective, that there is an increased awareness about this group of learners in most authorities. However for some authorities these changes in reporting systems resulted in no significant alteration in the numbers reported for example, Argyle and Bute reported less than five highly able pupils identified as having additional support needs in each of the years between 2009 and 2013. Between authority variations were also significant within the same year in 2013, 409 highly able pupils were recorded in Glasgow but only 21 in East Renfrewshire. While some of these differences might be explained by the differences in size of authority, there are also possibly other interesting differences here relating to the different socio-economic profiles between the authorities. East Renfrewshire includes primarily affluent areas and the schools are very popular and are rated as some of the best in Scotland. Glasgow City authority includes a very wide and diverse range of socio-economic contexts including some of the poorest areas of Scotland. The variation in the number of highly able pupils cannot be explained by the different sizes of the authorities alone and given the common curriculum framework and legislation the differences continue to be surprising. It would however be interesting to investigate how the different socio-economic profiles in each authority might be linked to different approaches to identification and provision.

Interestingly different patterns of reporting also emerge when the data is broken down between primary

Table 1. Total pupil roll, total number of pupils identified as having an additional support need and number of pupils identified as highly able in Scottish primary and secondary schools by Local Education Authority 2009–2013

Local Education Authority	2009				2010				2011				2012				2013			
	More Able Primary	More Able Secondary	Total No ASN	Total Pupil Roll	More Able Primary	More Able Secondary	Total No ASN	Total Pupil Roll	More Able Primary	More Able Secondary	Total No ASN	Total Pupil Roll	More Able Primary	More Able Secondary	Total No ASN	Total Pupil Roll	More Able Primary	More Able Secondary	Total No ASN	Total Pupil Roll
Aberdeen City	5	*	1130	21,558	8	5	1,569	21,406	8	6	1,866	21,365	8	*	2,229	21,452	*	*	2,549	21,665
Aberdeenshire	15	*	2741	34,304	23	14	5,147	34,224	143	40	9,391	33,990	153	68	9833	34,062	172	63	10,332	34,428
Angus	*	*	972	15,510	*	-	1,030	15,318	21	-	1,318	15,237	21	*	1,461	15,127	16	14	1,488	15,065
Argyll & Bute	*	*	800	11,503	*	*	1,346	11,287	*	*	1,724	11,075	*	*	1,704	10,758	*	-	1,801	10,675
Clackmannanshire	-	-	370	6,733	-	-	640	6,689	*	-	704	6,561	*	-	1,185	6,602	7	*	1,574	6,638
Dumfries & Galloway	*	-	1148	19,775	*	-	1,733	19,571	6	-	2,449	19,333	8	*	3,924	19,138	16	*	4,396	18,931
Dundee City	*	*	1249	17,409	11	*	1,553	17,407	18	-	1,854	17,316	16	-	2,041	17,362	7	5	2,132	17,553
East Ayrshire	*	*	512	16,434	31	5	2,191	16,237	36	5	2,470	16,128	52	10	2,729	16,065	53	14	2,893	16,002
East Dunbartonshire	*	-	342	16,083	17	-	849	15,974	22	9	1,358	15,847	65	*	1,998	15,935	85	-	2,794	16,056
East Lothian	*	-	279	13,200	31	*	1,951	13,267	27	*	2,359	13,301	31	6	2,656	13,466	29	15	2,953	13,658
East Renfrewshire	*	-	515	16,249	5	5	1,212	16,269	13	9	1,625	16,195	27	7	2,526	16,148	14	7	2,459	16,226
Edinburgh City	11	*	1059	44,258	21	*	1,888	44,282	80	28	6,701	44,433	125	52	7,849	45,049	154	56	8,699	45,961
Eilean Siar	6	-	338	3,674	19	106	885	3,608	21	111	972	3,550	34	99	1,018	3,501	26	99	966	3,434
Falkirk	6	-	1290	20,517	5	*	1,613	20,534	*	*	1,724	20,733	7	5	2,172	20,877	*	5	2,701	21,084
Fife	*	*	2440	47,769	55	7	5,113	47,597	158	8	6,593	47,732	155	7	6,480	47,848	72	7	6,765	48,215
Glasgow City	66	136	9126	65,290	73	102	9,307	64,898	138	120	12,672	64,671	207	393	19,687	64,808	192	217	19,594	65,238
Highland	*	*	1304	31,699	14	*	3,248	31,312	46	*	5,517	31,071	80	8	6,556	30,911	63	18	7,120	30,910
Inverclyde	-	-	391	10,654	*	15	1,251	10,462	7	15	1,350	10,330	20	39	1,827	10,186	36	35	2,017	10,092
Midlothian	-	*	467	11,688	*	*	759	11,640	*	*	836	11,638	*	*	1,339	11,812	8	*	1,739	11,830
Moray	*	-	800	12,331	*	*	1,244	12,156	5	*	1,426	11,899	5	9	1,731	11,961	9	16	2,384	12,009
North Ayrshire	-	-	587	18,737	38	*	1,643	18,623	54	*	2,523	18,489	81	30	3,144	18,385	37	31	3,800	18,277
North Lanarkshire	9	*	1694	48,752	15	*	2,093	48,650	10	*	2,436	48,751	14	7	2,611	48,845	6	6	2,740	48,830
Orkney Islands	-	-	145	2,767	-	*	173	2,742	5	8	257	2,667	8	6	504	2,666	7	7	577	2,643
Perth & Kinross	*	-	1117	17,524	21	7	3,492	17,445	42	8	4,138	17,368	47	17	4,533	17,529	57	17	5,036	17,578
Renfrewshire	10	-	849	23,791	9	5	1,054	23,694	10	7	1,349	23,485	16	6	1,467	23,333	57	9	2,880	23,339
Scottish Borders	-	-	523	15,137	*	6	1,019	14,882	*	6	1,191	14,825	*	5	1,757	14,717	15	*	2,521	14,572
Shetland Islands	*	*	237	3,342	5	*	631	3,303	15	*	803	3,293	18	6	737	3,228	14	8	678	3,237
South Ayrshire	*	-	885	14,632	18	*	2,610	14,451	29	8	3,444	14,299	45	12	3,777	14,201	20	*	2,872	14,163
South Lanarkshire	5	*	1946	43,307	6	*	2,231	43,249	8	*	2,604	43,084	13	*	2,963	43,171	40	*	5,963	43,171
Stirling	*	*	653	12,521	*	-	891	12,458	5	10	1,304	12,422	6	12	1,621	12,350	31	10	2,806	12,245
West Dunbartonshire	-	-	423	12,555	10	11	1,007	12,421	224	77	4,165	12,293	211	80	4,273	12,312	166	120	4,390	12,371
West Lothian	*	-	1172	25,707	*	*	1,414	25,771	16	*	2,427	25,801	11	6	2,648	26,105	10	*	2,919	26,144

Note. The statistical data refers to the term more able, we are using this interchangeably with the more recently employed term highly able. Numbers less than five are generally deemed to be disclosive and hence not published. Where figures have been removed they are replaced by *. Other figures in the table may also be removed to stop a disclosive figure from being calculated from the total. (Scottish Government, 2013).

and secondary schools. In the main, across authorities there was a higher instance of reporting by primary schools of highly able pupils than secondary schools. There were notable exceptions such as the Eilean Siar (The Western Isles) where in 2010 they reported 19 primary pupils and 106 secondary pupils and this pattern remains consistent up to 2013. These within and between authority variations are interesting and raise questions about what might potentially be the factors influencing these diverse responses. It seems unlikely that the varying numbers reported between primary and secondary within the same authority can be explained by pupils all becoming more or less highly able with age so perhaps instead it reflects differences in identification or reporting practices between the educational sectors or the impact of differing educational experiences. The aim of this research was to try and explore some of these questions.

What must be remembered is that the numbers reported each year in the census reflect pupils who have been deemed to require some form of 'additional' support. Increasingly through our work in the Scottish Network for Able Pupils (SNAP) with schools, authorities and with Scottish teachers, staff anecdotally report that the personalization integral within the Scottish Curriculum for Excellence helps address the needs of pupils who are highly able implicitly without requiring 'additional' forms of support. This could mean that highly able pupils who have been identified in schools, but who are perceived to be having their needs met by Curriculum for Excellence and therefore not requiring 'additional' support, will not be included in the numbers above. Consequently the numbers above probably reflect an under representation of the actual number of highly able pupils in Scotland. This evidence of increased awareness is encouraging but there are still some questions to be answered. The aim of this research was therefore to 'get behind' the statistics and discover how Education Authorities, schools, teachers and educational psychologists in Scotland identify and provide appropriate learning experiences for their highly able children and young people.

Methodology

The research utilised a structured telephone interview method. A series of ten questions were devised using the requirements of the Additional Support for Learning 2004/2009 Act and the data headings within the census to frame the questions (see Appendix). All 32 Education Authorities in Scotland were invited to participate with thirteen agreeing and taking part in telephone interviews. The questions were sent in advance of the interview to the education authority representative participating in the research, all of whom had some aspect of responsibility for additional support within the Authority. They were assured of anonymity and no authorities are named as part of the analysis of the interviews. The interviews lasted

for approximately 30-40 minutes. Interviews were then transcribed and answers were collated and analysed using thematic analysis. The proceeding results sections outlines some of the key issues to emerge in these discussions in answer to the questions posed.

Results

Definitions count

The census in asking authorities to report the number of highly able pupils with additional support needs in their schools assumes a shared understanding of 'highly ability'. As a starting point in this research we wanted to test this assumption. We wanted to investigate if authorities had developed any broad definitions to guide schools, teachers and educational psychologists as they plan and prepare for highly able pupils and so the first question in the telephone interviews asked authority personnel if they had an agreed definition of highly able pupils within their authority. Eight of the 13 education authorities indicated that no specific definition of high ability was used across the authority. However it should be noted that it was acknowledged by authority staff that although an authority might not be using a specific definition, at a more local level, schools may well have developed a working definition without their knowledge.

One authority reported that they were about to develop a definition and another stated that their authority utilized the definition provided in the SNAP guidance document (i.e. pupils who are working or have the potential to work ahead of their age peers, this includes pupils who are highly able across the curriculum as well as those who are highly able in one or more particular areas). Two authorities had developed and were using their own definition (i.e. child or young person with exceptional ability compared to their peer group). And the final authority was utilizing a definition from SOEID (1993) (i.e. a child or young person working significantly ahead of their peers in one or more curricular areas). Of the eight authorities who indicated that they had no specific definition, four qualified their reply by saying that they would follow the national view and linked the national view to the recent Additional Support for Learning legislation. Although it should be noted no specific definition of high ability is actually contained within this legislation.

There was agreement across all 13 authorities that while the lack of an agreed definition in the literature caused some uncertainty it also offered a good degree of flexibility in considering the needs of this group within the Additional Support Needs (ASN) framework. While an agreed definition is not a mandatory starting point for addressing the needs of highly able pupils (Smith, 2005) it can none-the-less be helpful for schools to have some kind of working definition.

Assessment and Support

The Education (Additional Support for Learning) (Scotland) Act 2009 states that parents can request an assessment to be undertaken. Authority personnel were asked in the interviews about how many requests had been made in relation to highly able children and young people in their authority and what the outcome to any request had been. Once again there was variation in the responses. Three authorities reported having received parental requests. One responded that they did not have a precise number of the requests made as they did not keep such data. The other two had one and two requests made respectively. The remaining seven authorities were not aware of any specific requests that had been made.

Generally, although not exclusively, the interviewees reported that the role of addressing the needs of highly able pupils was split between educational psychologists and school based/related posts. Psychologists were primarily involved in the assessment processes and other staff members were primarily involved in provision. One authority said it was unlikely that an Educational Psychologist would be involved in assessment. Another authority said parents could, and indeed two parents had, approached an educational psychologist asking for support for their highly able child. In relation to the role of additional support needs coordinators it became clear that there were a range of titles and positions across authorities and schools although all had responsibility for supporting learning, including the learning of highly able pupils. Titles included for example; Additional Support Needs Coordinator, Principal Teachers of Additional Support (in schools), Support for Learning staff (in school), Inclusion Development Manager, Subject advisors and Pupil Support Coordinator.

The approach to able pupils in many authorities was the same as for any other child deemed to require additional support. The Government initiative 'Getting It Right for Every Child' was mentioned specifically by one authority as an overarching framework for provision for highly able children. Review meetings, Individual Educational Plans, the offering of advice, extended curriculum, whole child development, additional strategies and regular additional support meetings were all mentioned in relation to strategies for assessment and provision for highly able pupils. Three authorities spoke about assessments being individual and appropriate to the case and consequently no one "test" was utilized and no one outcome was anticipated. Authorities considered schools to be at the forefront of assessment with seven reporting that schools would be involved *in the process*. One authority reported that schools worked collaboratively with parents to address needs. Another authority was keen that schools use the existing rich assessment data already available as part of normal practice and only use additional information from individual tests in situations where there was doubt or complexity.

Authorities were asked about specific guidance they provided relating to highly able pupils. In addition they were asked how parents and schools might access this

guidance if it were available. All stakeholders indicated that any guidance (whether generic or specific) was available to download from authority websites. Seven authorities indicated that they did not provide specific guidance on highly able pupils with four indicating that these pupils' needs would be considered under the general guidance for supporting pupils. One authority said that individual schools may have developed specific guidance but this had not been done at authority level. Another authority was updating their support manual and a framework for supporting highly able pupils would be included in this. One authority had provided examples of practice from the Code of Practice to schools and this had included an example of a highly able pupil. Three authorities had issued the SNAP Guidance for Addressing the Needs of Highly Able Pupils to all schools. Two authorities had further developed their own specific guidelines using the SNAP guidance as a basis and in conjunction with their SNAP authority tutors. One authority had launched the SNAP Guidance materials at an authority wide event and they regularly emailed school staff with information about highly able pupils and flagged up at in-service events where information could be accessed. Educational psychologists in one authority had produced generic parental leaflets about supporting children at home, which although not explicitly about highly able pupils would be relevant none-the-less.

Calculating the Census Submission

Authority personnel were asked to comment on the data that was gathered for their authority in the 2009 and 2010 school census relating to highly able pupils. All 13 authorities reported that schools would have nominated children to be included in the census and therefore it was likely that teaching staff and/or additional support for learning staff would have been involved. One authority reported using SNAP Associate tutors in the census procedure alongside school staff. In one authority normal practice was to adopt a team approach incorporating consultation with the class teacher, Additional Support Needs coordinator, Additional Support teacher and the parent/s. Head teachers and support for learning staff were involved in identification procedures in one authority and one authority was unclear as to who would have gathered the data as it was done at school level.

There were some differences in opinion over how a pupil with multiple exceptionalities would be included in the figures for highly able pupils. Previously when the census form focused on one primary additional support need this often meant high ability was not reported. Four authorities said during this period these children would not be recorded as highly able as this was not usually considered to be the primary learning need. Three authorities said these children would have been recorded twice, once for each learning category, and pointed out that this could have lead to "double counting" of pupils and a failure to acknowledge the co-existence of learning needs. In response to these concerns the census form was adapted in recent years to address this limitation and

this change may explain some of the overall increase in numbers of highly able pupils with additional support needs identified.

Authority personnel indicated that highly able children and young people may well have an Individual Education Plan (IEP) and the procedure for this would be the same as for any other pupil with an additional support need. One authority stated that they felt that flexibility and personalization embedded within Curriculum for Excellence facilitated the implicit development of an individualised curriculum for the pupil and so school based plans had the potential to meet the needs of highly able pupils. Another authority indicated that they were looking at additional needs in a much more interactive way rather than at specific categories per se. In one authority the 'Getting It Right for Every Child' document had been used to generate pupil learning plans and this would allow for an enhanced resource for highly able pupils. Interestingly one authority considered IEPs inappropriate for highly able pupils as an IEP breaks learning down into small steps and their perception was that this approach was not conducive to high ability however within this authority a highly able pupil might alternatively have an individualised learning plan. Here the distinction is between formalized additional support (i.e. IEPs) that would be recorded on the census and more informal inclusive pedagogical approaches embedded in school practice which may not be identified as 'additional support' but none the less may well be meeting the needs of highly able pupils.

Discussion

The main purposes of the Scottish School Census Statistics are to inform the Scottish Government about educational issues across the country and to monitor the overall system as well as individual policies and local level performance. The data is also used by publicly funded bodies and by the wider public to identify and support the educational needs of young people in Scotland. It is acknowledged that each year the census provides information on "a moment in time". None-the-less, the data gives some insight into important issues in education and in relation to highly able pupils it provides a snapshot of experiences across Scotland. By collating the census data across several years we can also begin to see different patterns of change and stability, inconsistencies and anomalies. It allows assessment of both within, and between, authority differences and raises the question as to whether you more likely to receive additional support if you are highly able in one authority or another? However, from the discussions above we know that the picture is much more complex than this. The census appeared to allow for ambiguity on how to complete it and as such different authorities used different approaches. The reliability of the figures becomes difficult to ascertain when the form may have been completed in a variety of

ways. Even when there is a supposedly more systematic approach to identifying this cohort such as the Register in England the gathering of accurate data remains fraught with difficulty (Radnor, Koshy, & Taylor, 2007).

In Scotland, no explicit guidance about highly able pupils has been issued by the Government since 1993 (Scottish Office Education and Industry Department, 1993). Reference is made in the Code of Practice to the guidance available from The Scottish Network for Able Pupils (2009) but this is non-statutory and not all schools in Scotland will have accessed or adopted this. In practice this means that it is unclear what criteria schools are using to identify highly able pupils for the Scottish schools' census. This raises questions about the process of the data collection for the census, about the validity and reliability of the data available and subsequently whether this data can appropriately inform policy and practice. The findings from the telephone interviews suggest that effectively collecting information about highly able pupils in Scotland can be problematic due to the wide ranging conceptualizations of who this group of learners are, and what learning behaviours they might be demonstrating or have the potential to demonstrate. An apparent lack of a clear definition does raise questions as to how pupils were identified in the schools for submission in the census and about the consistency of reporting. This may go some way to explain the wide variation in numbers between and within authorities.

Questions also remain as to how Scottish schools conceptualized high ability and whether this was in uni or multi-dimensional terms. Underpinning this are questions about teachers' attitudes and beliefs about high ability and how these attitudes and beliefs may impact upon identification and provision (Geake & Gross, 2008; Sutherland, 2011b). In providing for these differences there is evidence within the literature connecting personal beliefs about intelligence to teachers' practice in the classroom (Bégin & Gagne, 1994a, 1994b; Gross, 1997). Geake and Gross (2008) and Sutherland (2011b) examined the attitudes of teachers and early years educators respectively towards highly able children and concluded that their views and beliefs impacted upon provision often negatively. These fundamental questions are important when considered alongside the work of, for example, Gardner (1983) and Sternberg (2005, 2009) who argue that where traditional IQ based views persist there is a greater likelihood that some highly able learners will be overlooked. However on a more positive note Milik and Boylan (2013) demonstrate how these attitudes can change in their account of one teacher's readiness to act on her deeply held views of learning and to change her mind and practice:

I believe a lot more strongly now that the way adults talk to children and direct children and the tasks they give them can have a big influence on children's ideas about what they can and cannot do. We have to be careful we don't put a ceiling on their ideas about what they can do (p. 164).

From this example it is clear that one way to address this potentially negative impact is through continuing professional development opportunities with teachers and educators. With little international agreement as to how we define high ability or how to best to provide for these pupils, it would be misleading to imply within any professional development course that there is one simple solution to addressing highly able pupils learning needs, but a clear starting point would be to allow teachers and educators the opportunity to reflect on their own beliefs about ability.

The Education Authorities who participated in the interviews were using current legislation and policy guidance as a means of addressing the needs of highly able pupils. Given the complexity and uncertainty around definitions and characteristics of highly able pupils a holistic approach that considers the whole child and their needs is important, particularly when a pupil may display multiple exceptionalities. It is important to avoid false prioritisation of the perceived deficit and instead there is a need to actively create a multiple approach to multiple exceptionalities to ensure one 'need' is not more dominant than the other. Considering the issue of the identification of gifted pupils in the USA McClain and Pfeiffer (2012, p. 75) note that pupils with co-morbidity were an "underserved group that requires flexible identification procedures". They note that in spite of recognition that this issue exists in the USA no State authorities had actively taken steps to develop policies or guidance on the identification of individuals with multiple exceptionalities.

Some Scottish Education Authorities were moving away from a label driven approach to support to focusing instead on learning and support itself. This approach correlates well with the move towards a more multi-dimensional model advocated within the literature on gifted education (Borland, 2005; Pfeiffer, 2003; VanTassel-Baska, Feng, & Evans, 2007). However, reconciling the legislative need to gather data about pupils with additional support needs with a more holistic view of support will be challenging. Undoubtedly the Scottish legislative framework offers the facility to provide flexibility and personalisation for learners. However the danger is in the assumption that this is inherent within it and that this therefore negates the need for additional consideration of these pupils. The mere existence of a framework is unlikely to be sufficient to ensure needs are met, as we already know authorities are inconsistent in their approach and practices. Careful consideration has to be given as to how these frameworks influence the interpretation, articulation and execution of practice if schools are to meet the needs of highly able pupils. Authorities and schools were in possession of a range of information about pupils who require additional support and it was felt that if this was combined with information from the census data a truer picture might emerge of the support required of all highly able pupils. Findings from this study suggest that authorities are considering a contemporary understanding of high ability (Cramond, 2004; Stephens, 2008; Stephens & Karnes, 2000) and this reflects the developmental approach towards additional support as embraced within Scottish policy and

legislation. Using existing legislation and policy guidance as a basic framework with specific consideration given to this group of learners will support schools as they seek to meet the diverse range of needs in schools.

Conclusions

Key to appropriate provision for this group of learners is the interrelationship between the education authority, the school, the educational psychologist and the teacher and their individual and shared understandings of the learning needs of highly able pupils (Sutherland, 2011a). When the interfaces between legislation, policy and practice are strong and clear then it is likely that appropriate learning opportunities will be offered. In the case of Scotland the picture is encouraging as there appears to be an emerging consensus between these three interrelated strands in relation to additional support for learning and bringing policy into practice. The move away from a needs based education to a rights based education (Sutherland & Stack, 2014; Head, 2011; Head & Pirrie, 2007) underpins policy and offers new opportunities to reconceptualise gifted learners.

A limitation to the current study was that the focus of the work was at Education Authority level. While this yielded a general overview it did not collect data relating to school or teacher based identification procedures. It is therefore not possible to say to what extent schools and teachers shared the views presented by the Education Authority and in line with the McClain and Pfeiffer (2012) study it was not possible to conclude if educational practices at school level reflected an Authority's policy and procedures.

While at the legislative and policy level the results from this study were encouraging, it suggests there is a need for the Scottish Government, Education Authorities, educational psychologists, schools and teachers to explicitly consider and share their understandings of the needs of this group of learners. The potential for Scotland to achieve this aim is encouraging as the language of collaboration is firmly embedded in recent Scottish policy documents (McCulloch, 2011) and thus there is fertile ground for opening a dialogue between the different stakeholders. For example, following a wide-ranging review of Scottish teacher education, Donaldson (2011, p.85) sets out a bold agenda for the development of the teaching profession in which he recommends that "teacher education should be seen as and should operate as a continuum, spanning a career and requiring much better alignment across and much closer working amongst schools, authorities, universities and national organisations." The National Framework for Inclusion (Scottish Government, 2012) also links closely to the newly developed standards for teachers and supports schools as they think through the practicalities of inclusive practice and pedagogy for all learners including the highly able. These practical examples of a joined up approach alongside legislation such as *Getting it Right for Every Child* (Scottish Government, 2006) would seem, on paper at least, to offer an overarching framework and

sets of guidelines for supporting the development of all learners. However in order to ensure *that children and young people with additional support needs benefit fully from school education directed to the development of their personality, talents and mental and physical abilities* (Education (Additional Support for Learning) (Scotland) Act 2004/2009) it is crucial that highly able learners are considered to be part of the educational milieu. In Scotland, the policy/practice landscape offers opportunities for this to happen but careful attention is required to ensure that highly able pupils do not slip between the cracks.

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Appendix

Telephone Interview Questions

1. Does the Education Authority have an agreed definition of more able/highly able? If yes, what is it?
2. The ASL Act states that parents can request an assessment to be undertaken. Have any requests for the assessment of more able/highly able been made? If yes, how many? What has been the outcome of the assessment?
3. What role do Additional Support Needs coordinators/Educational Psychologists have in assessment of and provision for more able/highly able in the authority?
4. Does the Education Authority have specific guidance on how to identify and provide for more able/highly able? How do schools/parents access this information? (e.g. leaflet, website etc).
5. In the census return your Education Authority reported that you had (insert numbers) more able/highly able children. How were these children identified and by whom?
6. Have any children been identified as having multiple exceptionalities i.e. they more able/highly able and autistic/looked after etc? No. If yes, how many? If yes, are these children recorded twice in the census or elsewhere i.e. in two or more categories?
7. Are there children within the Education Authority who have an Individual Education Plans/Co-ordinated Support Plans because they are deemed to be more able/highly able?
8. The census identifies three main ways of supporting children with Additional Support Needs. Are any of these employed for highly able children? If yes, which ones?
 - All the time in mainstream
 - Some time spent in mainstream class
 - No time in mainstream classes
 - Other
 Give details
9. Does the Education Authority offer specific learning opportunities outside of school for more able/highly able pupils? If yes, please expand your answer and give details.
10. Does the Education Authority run specific courses for nursery/primary/secondary staff on meeting the needs of more able/highly able? If yes, please expand your answers and give details of content, provider etc.