

# BRIGHT BUT BORED

Schools need better pathways for talented kids

## SIGNS YOUR CHILD MAY BE INTELLECTUALLY GIFTED

1. Advanced language and/or mathematical skills.
2. Excellent analogical reasoning, able to apply knowledge to completely new scenarios.
3. Learning quickly without repetition and exceptional memory.
4. Due to different expectations of friendships than their same-age peers and a need for more structured and rule-based play, young gifted children tend to gravitate towards older children to fulfil their social needs.
5. Empathising strongly with the feelings of others and hence tending to react strongly to injustice.
6. An advanced sense of humour, moving beyond visual humour far earlier than their same-age peers.



High achievers: Melville Primary School students James Carroll, 10, and Caitlin O'Neill, 6 with principal Betty McNeill and learning support co-ordinator Jane Nolan. Picture: Justin Benson-Cooper

### JOSH ZIMMERMAN

SOME of the State's best and brightest students are bored and disengaged because schools are failing to identify and foster their talents early enough, according to an Edith Cowan University education expert.

Research fellow Eileen Slater said schools should be looking out for the characteristics of gifted children from the first day they walk into a classroom, or they risked failing to help them reach their full potential.

"Much of the debate around our education system is focused on how we best provide for students who are struggling," she said.

"But little attention is paid to students who perform or have the potential to perform better than their peers."

About 10 per cent of school children are intellectually gifted, but in WA there is no formal identification process until Primary Extension and Challenge Program (PEAC) testing in Year 4.

"Most public primary schools don't offer anything for gifted students until PEAC starts in Year 5," Dr Slater said.

"Even then, PEAC is only two to three hours per week

which is, one, too late and, two, not what I would call a therapeutic dose of exposure to like-minded children.

"There needs to be a lot more on offer a lot earlier."

Dr Slater said gifted students quickly "switched off" when not challenged and were often mistakenly viewed as disruptive or troublemakers by teachers.

She pointed to Melville Primary as one of few primary schools in the public or private sector proactively identifying and catering to its brightest students.

Teachers at the school from kindergarten onwards are drilled on the characteristics of exceptionally bright students and how they might manifest in both a positive and negative way.

For instance, a child with higher orders of intellectual curiosity may have a tendency to resist direction and ask embarrassing questions, while an advanced problem-solver can be manipulative and domineering towards their peers.

The school has become particularly adept at identifying so-called "twice-exceptional" students — those who are intellectually gifted but also have a learning impediment like dyslexia

or ADHD that can mask their ability — and now regularly attracts children from private schools and outside its catchment.

Learning support co-ordinator Jane Nolan is tasked with running the school's identification and engagement programs for gifted kids.

"Often parents will cry tears of relief when they are having an interview with us about their child because for the first time they feel understood," she said.

Once identified, Melville Primary employs a range of strategies to cater for its gifted students, including clustering groups of them in mixed-ability classrooms, subject extension and even year skipping where necessary.

Dr Slater said she was developing a new screening process to start in Year 1 and had been looking for schools to implement it, including questionnaires for parents and teachers as well as achievement testing.

"We are currently in the recruitment process looking for schools willing to come on board to make sure the screening process is a valid and reliable measures of giftedness," she said.