# Merrick checklist

Checklist to identify high-ability (based on Merrick, 2004)

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| Characteristic | Positive behaviours | Negative behaviours |
| Highly curious | * Asks lots of questions * Inquisitive * Remembers details | * Asks inappropriate questions * Poor group participant * Easily diverted from task |
| Abstract thinker | * Makes generalisations * Tests out ideas | * Questions others * Questions authority |
| Flexible thinker | * Employs a variety of strategies to work something out | * Manipulates people and situations by using a variety of strategies |
| Clever use of humour | * Enjoys ‘adult’ humour * Gets teachers’ jokes | * Uses humour at the expense of others |
| Superior vocabulary | * Heightened involvement in discussions * Enjoys adult-like discussions | * May be bossy or overbearing when working with others |
| Advance reading | * Reads widely * Advanced vocabulary and comprehension | * Reads constantly * Neglects peer interaction and work to read |
| Retention of knowledge; fast learner | * Moves beyond core content and skills quickly * Detailed recall of facts | * Rushes work, then disrupts others * Monopolises class discussions |
| Long attention span | * Concentrates and focuses on an area of interest for a long period of time | * Easily distracted unless the task is an area of passion or interest |
| Independent | * Self-directed * Focused on task in research of study | * Reduced involvement in discussion or group work * Uncooperative in a group |
| High level of responsibility and commitment | * Sets attainable goals * Learns to accept own limitations * Tolerant of peers in a group | * Self-critical * Perfectionist when completing tasks * Sets unrealistic expectations for other group members |
| Strong feelings and opinions | * Listens to others * Shows concern and interest * Considers others’ points of view * Aware of others’ feelings | * Speaks out and lacks tact * Over-reacts to others; comments and reactions * confrontational |
| Strong sense of justice | * empathises with those less fortunate * wants to ‘save the world’ * stands up for other children who they think have been poorly treated | * argues the rules in games * frustration when others don’t play exactly by the rules * asks older children or adults to solve issues seen as ‘unfair’ |
| Original and creative | * comes up with ideas ‘out of the box’ * sees problems as a whole * connects thoughts and feelings | * unaccepting of status quo * absent-minded or daydreamer * asks unrelated questions * disorganised |
| High energy level | * wide variety of interests * organises time well * high level of individualised learning | * often difficult to live with * may appear hyperactive * easily bored so seeks out new things to explore |
| Immersion learner | * wants to know everything about a topic * becomes an expert on a topic by reading widely and talking to people | * focuses on topics of interest to them, at the expense of classroom work * shows off knowledge to prove others wrong |

Scoring the checklist:

How many positive behaviours are being displayed?

How many negative behaviours are being displayed?

Have you observed behaviours in more than 5 different behaviour boxes?

Which type of behaviour are observing more? Positive or Negative?

## EXEMPLAR

Merrick and Targett (2004) provide the following exemplar of the Merrick (2004) checklist. They begin by providing a scenario:

*Mrs McCarthy would describe 12 year-old William as a dreamer, rather average and not particularly interested in much that goes on in the classroom. He floats through class and seems to be miles away, lost in his thoughts most of the time. He usually performs poorly on his written work and misses instructions, needing these to be given again and again. However, on weekends, William belongs to the Geologists Society, which is run by Mr Cameron, a geology teacher from the local high school.*

*William loves nothing more than spending his weekends digging for fossils and classifying rocks. He has quite a collection even though he is at least 20 years younger than most other members of the Society. The adults in the group refer to him as ‘Professor William’ and when they unearth a new find, ask for his opinion. They describe his level of knowledge as that of an expert. He dreams of becoming an archaeologist or anthropologist (he is yet to decide!) and has made some significant finds. William rushes through his homework in order to get on to more interesting things. He sees school as a waste of time and ‘saves himself’ for his research. He has a documented journal of his fossicking adventures and records in great detail what he has discovered each trip. He also enjoys emailing the adults in his fossicking group, asking questions and planning future trips.*

*Mrs McCarthy and Mr Cameron would have very different views of William. However, a checklist of behaviours employed after seeing William engaged in his passion area of geology and ancient civilisations would elicit a very different profile from his daily class work. Therefore, it is crucial when using teacher nomination that you give students the opportunity to engage in an area of advanced and complex content. You can then look for demonstrated behaviours that indicate gifted characteristics. Students need to engage in challenging and complex activities in order to demonstrate advanced thinking and complex reasoning. For example, curiosity may only be evident when there is something to be curious about. Use of sophisticated humour may only manifest itself when children are given the opportunity to be ‘cleverly’ funny.*

Merrick and Targett (2004) then provide an example of Merrick’s checklist completed for William from the perspective of Mrs McCarthy:

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
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Scoring the checklist:

How many positive behaviours are being displayed? 1

How many negative behaviours are being displayed? 11

Have you observed behaviours in more than 5 different behaviour boxes? YES

Which type of behaviour are observing more? Positive or Negative? NEGATIVE

**Conclusions:**

William is displaying a majority of negative behaviours and should be evaluated further using other identification mechanisms. This example hopefully illustrates how important it is to consider underachievement in your identification protocols.