

## Ability

Like **potential**, 'ability' is a slippery term, and an individual's ability is, in itself, impossible to measure. Attainment can be measured through various forms of testing, which provide evidence of a specific kind of ability, demonstrated under particular circumstances. These results are used by **schools** to project forward, and set **targets** for pupils, assuming that their 'ability' continues to develop smoothly.

Teachers themselves are well aware of the fact that the children they work with have a wide range of abilities. One of the problems they face is to ensure that their lessons are suitable for everyone, or, as the Ofsted framework puts it, '**work** is closely tailored to the full range of learners' needs, so that all can succeed'. Lesson plans are meant to show 'differentiation', which means varying the approaches, or the tasks set, so that these are suitable for all the children, from the highest to the lowest ability. Obviously, this is easier said than done. Larger schools often use **strategies** such as setting or **streaming** to try to limit the range of ability in a class. In a smaller school, this is impossible. For example, a single class in a small primary school might include children of different ages, as well as of widely differing ability.

Related terms are 'capability', which is as hard to pin down as ability, and also 'disability', which usually refers to a specific physical problem. Schools often use 'able' as a description, and may include a section in their lesson plans for 'MATs' – more able and talented pupils.

Tests have been devised which are meant to assess general ability, as the old IQ tests (**intelligence** quotient) were meant to do. The commercial 'Cognitive Abilities Test' (CATs) assess verbal, non-verbal and numerical reasoning. Whether these add anything to the results of national assessments is doubtful.