

# Turning potential into reality at Masada College

**MASADA COLLEGE**  
TRACY ESSERS

“For us, it’s about making students feel comfortable with who they are and what they do well at and finding similar, like-minded people to share that experience with,” says Danielle Blumberg, the head of Masada’s new High Potential Learners Programme, the head of Academic Care K-6, and a Year Five teacher. “These students have a genuine love of learning and desire to know more. They also need the school curriculum delivered in a different way. Now we’re giving them the tools to get it,” she says.

With a certificate and passion for gifted education, Masada College knew that Blumberg, who ran a gifted programme previously before joining Masada last year, was the right person to facilitate the High Potential Learners Programme, which officially began this year. “Currently, the programme is aimed at students with strengths in English and Maths. Last year, our Year Four and Five classes went through two High Potential Learners (HPL) testing programmes, with teacher and parent nominations adding extra layers of information about the students. There are very strict criteria and the process is completely data based, allowing very little room for error,” she says.

“We have also recently begun training our class teachers to look out for students that show signs of needing to join the High Potential Learners Programme,” she says. Interestingly, unlike the stereotypical characteristics we may



think of with regard to High Potential Learners, these signs can, in reality, include:

- An unusually well-developed memory
- Bored or disruptive behaviour
- Ability to pick up a concept without repetition needed
- Curiosity and dissatisfaction with answers provided
- High emotional intensity
- A preference for older friends or different concepts of friendship

“Currently, our HPL classes are offered to Year Five and Six, whereby students are grouped together and taught at a more complex level. There are also HPL groupings offered in Science, Art and HSIE which are taught within the Year Five and Year Six classes to further extend

the content. Our students love the challenge of learning at a quicker pace and it’s a great way to channel their competitive natures in the classroom, which allows for less competition on the playground. Doing geometry that’s not usually learnt until Year Nine gives students the opportunity to see trajectory of their learning, and the level of discussion between the years never ceases to amaze me.

What is important to note is that these classes are not about grades or marks. It’s about giving students a place that they feel comfortable both socially and academically, instead of always feeling left out or different. Some of our students are what we call “2e” or twice exceptional, meaning they have a gifted ability in one area but may have a learning difficulty

somewhere else. For example, some students shine at verbal communication but battle to write well. Our classes give these students differentiating tasks to support skills apart from their strengths.”

“So far, we have about 17 students in our HPL maths class and 16 in the English class. We plan to take the program into the next stage with our Years Seven and Eight in the future. Ultimately, our aim is to have HPL programmes across all the years, and we are working on getting mini certificates of gifted education for all junior school teachers, including Hebrew and Jewish Studies. That way, we will continue to have teachers who understand the needs and offer the right opportunities to the broad range of students here at Masada College.