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# Networking site for smart pupils a big hit

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A social networking site, described as a “thinking teenager’s Facebook”, that aims to prepare bright pupils for top universities, has attracted more than 2,500 members.

The site, called IGGY (the International Gateway for Gifted Youth), has been devised by academics at Warwick University. It challenges the nation’s brightest 13- to 18-year-olds with a series of questions and puzzles aimed at stretching their intelligence, as well as offering them the chance to network with each other.

Membership is open to any pupil recommended by their teacher on the grounds of impressing them with their proven ability or potential.

Dr Adam Boddison, academic director of the project, said: “The real test is whether the pupil has the potential to perform in the top 5% of their peers. You have to be recommended by a teacher or

an academic expert who says you can make it.

“It includes those who are already highly performing and a second group who don’t always perform in school, and who may not be challenged sufficiently in school.”

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Once accepted, they can take part in a number of games and quizzes, such as following an expedition by Arctic explorer Mark Wood and predicting how his body will be affected by his travels.

In another quiz, students are asked to discuss the connection between cats and maths, including the scientific theory behind how a cat flap works.

The site has also just launched its own young writers’ prize and is asking its members to contribute a short story of no more than 2,500

words for a cash prize of £2,000 and the chance to see themselves in print in *Litro* magazine.

Additionally, the site poses debate questions, such as: “Is it a problem that the average age of members of the House of Lords is 69?”

Membership is open to pupils in the UK and abroad, although 75% of those who have already signed up are from the British Isles. It costs £120 to join but there are subsidies available for disadvantaged pupils.

So far the site has been used by students in South Africa, Hong Kong, Singapore and Australia, as well as the UK. “One of the delights is that students can go on to it without their teacher knowing what they are doing,” said Dr Boddison. “They can learn by themselves and for themselves.”

The site is a tacit acceptance of the new ways pupils want to learn. Earlier this month, Wikipedia founder Jimmy Wales predicted the boring university lecture will be the first casualty in a major move toward online learning in higher education.