

**Submission  
No 5**

## **INQUIRY INTO THE EDUCATION OF GIFTED AND TALENTED STUDENTS**

**Organisation:** Belmont High School

**Date Received:** 9 May 2011

## Response to the Parliamentary Inquiry into the Education of Gifted and Talented Students.

### *Programs currently provided to gifted and talented students.*

Belmont HS, Geelong VIC is accredited to provide a Select Entry Accelerated Learning Program (SEALP).

The Program is in its 10<sup>th</sup> year and follows the guidelines specified by DEECD.

Belmont HS enrolls 200 students at year 7 each year of which one class of 25 or 26 students are SEALP students.

Enrichment programs are offered to high achievers and talented students such as: National Youth Science Forum, Siemen's Science Program, Adventure in Citizenship, Science and Engineering Challenge, Music Camps.

Belmont HS has and will continue to facilitate individual acceleration programs to profoundly gifted students. Eg. A student completed secondary schooling in 4 years, graduating as Dux of the school. Another Grade 2 student commenced Mathematics studies at the school in Yr 8 and completed VCE Maths Methods I & 2 while enrolled in Grade 5 at a neighbouring primary school.

### *Experiences and issues surrounding these programs*

#### Benefits to students:

Grouping of like minded students enables stimulating and challenging environment. Comments such as – I was in composite classes at Primary school and only learnt something every second year; my child worked alone or as a tutor to other students at Primary school – in the SEAL class he has been taught.

Students complete core subjects together for 3 years and attend 2 camps as a SEAL class. They develop close friendships within the group which are maintained through their later years studies despite their different subject choices.

Students complete a compacted curriculum in Yrs 7 – 9 and have the option of:-

- Completing secondary school in 5 years – about ¼ of our students
- Completing a 3 year VCE. Some students complete a broad range of VCE subjects, up to 9 Yr 12 subjects. Others have taken time to study LOTE overseas for a semester. Some students have studied 1<sup>st</sup> year university subjects through MUPHAS and Monash.

#### Benefits to the school:

The high achievement of SEALP students in VCE has enhanced our status within Geelong and the number of applicants to the SEALP and mainstream increases each year.

The school is able to enrol high achieving students from the Geelong area but who reside outside our local area.

Although SEALP students are selected on the basis of their academic achievement, many SEALP students are very talented in music, sport, public speaking or creative arts. The high participation of SEALP students in these activities has enhanced school performance in these areas.

### *Issues*

As the school has maximum enrolment in year 7 – 10, there is little flexibility.

If a student accepts a place in the SEALP, but has academic or social problems, it may not be possible to relocate a student to a mainstream class. Swaps between mainstream and the SEALP class become increasingly difficult with time because the SEAL students learn at a faster rate and are completing a compacted curriculum.

Each year the SEALP class must be filled to 25 students but some of the high achieving students offered places decline to accept private school positions. As a consequence students of lower academic ability are required to fill the class. Although these students are generally hard working students they may find it difficult to keep up with the pace in the SEAL class. Likewise at the end of Yr 8 and 9 SEALP students may leave to accept private school scholarships. Again it is necessary to backfill the classes which is difficult from mainstream.

Ideally the school would be able to resource a SEALP class of less than 25 students should the need arise.

### *Mechanisms to improve the capacity of teachers to identify and adequately respond to gifted and talented students.*

Gifted and talented students require and expect their teachers to be passionate and expert in their subject areas. SEALP classes are staffed by teachers who are qualified and/or experienced to teach to VCE level – which enables gifted students to be further extended or accelerated in their area of special interest.

Professional Learning – The SEALP coordinator or SEALP teacher attend the 4 SEAL Professional Learning days per year provided by DEECD. The information is reported to staff at team meetings.

SEALP staff are encouraged to attend professional learning provided by VAGTC and Barwon South Western Region. Staff are required to share this information at staff meetings or informally with team members.

Professional learning opportunities are constrained by the cost of activities provided by external agents and CRT coverage and the demands on meeting time at school. Re the latter, SEALP staff have scheduled meeting time just once per term and attendance may not be strong because there are a number of part time staff and staff with other roles within the school.

*Broader issues for school communities*

Gifted students are a group of students with special needs and should not be expected to fend for themselves. Like low achieving or physically disabled students they should be resourced appropriately so that they can achieve their potential.

Middle Years integrated approaches often limit or frustrate gifted students because they dislike 'marking time', and dislike group work where their standards and rate of progress may be compromised. School resourcing needs to be such that gifted students can work together for at least some of their time at school.

Many state schools have noted the benefits of SEALP programs on their neighbouring school and local community – and established their own similar programs (enhancement or accelerated studies). Where schools are close geographically, this may have the effect of diluting academic level of the SEALP class where it is necessary to fill the class to 25 students.

Attrition to private schools is an issue - students obtaining scholarships or being 'head-hunted' at grade 6, 8 and 9.

The recent establishment of two further select entry schools has not affected our enrolment. However, it does accentuate the inequitable access of rural students to gifted programs. Susan Cory High School, Werribee is approximately 40 mins from Geelong but not located with convenient public transport access from Geelong and no dedicated buses are provided to this school

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