

CORRECTED VERSION

EDUCATION AND TRAINING COMMITTEE

Inquiry into the education of gifted and talented students

Melbourne — 25 July 2011

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Mr F. Sal, President, Victorian Association of State Secondary Principals.

The CHAIR — I would like to welcome Frank Sal, president of the Victorian Association of State Secondary Principals. This is the Education and Training Committee's inquiry into the education of gifted and talented students. All evidence today will be protected by parliamentary privilege, just as members of Parliament are entitled to the same privilege. However, any comments you make outside the hearing may not be afforded such privilege. Hansard is recording today's hearing, and you will be provided with a proof version of what you have said. If there are any errors, you will have the opportunity to correct them.

We have 45 minutes during which we will allow you the opportunity to make some opening comments. We have your submission in which a lot of things have already been covered. If in your initial contribution you could ideally give us a quick summary, it will also provide you with an opportunity to mention things that you may not have already covered. We will have a number of questions for you, and that is what we really want to spend the most amount of time covering off, so over to you. We will then follow that with some questions.

Mr SAL — I have put together a few notes just to elaborate on some of our submission, so I will go through this at the moment. If you want to interrupt me as I am going through this, please do so if you want to ask any questions about the sorts of things I am saying.

I will start off with something that is needed in any conversation we have like this in policy development regarding gifted and talented students. The inquiry needs to define what it means by gifted and talented students and what that actually means. In my experience as a principal at three different schools over the last 17 years — I only just relinquished my school at the end of last year — I have seen numerous very talented students in that time in all manner of areas of performance but I have not come across huge numbers of truly gifted students, in my opinion. To me a truly gifted student is one who has exceptional talents. They are able to perform at a level that is way beyond their years or way beyond what many of us would ever be able to perform at.

However, I think there is enormous pressure at the moment exerted by parents to have their children enrolled in selective programs for gifted students. One might imagine that we are raising a whole generation of highly talented students and very highly gifted students, but of course that is not the case. In regard to the number of talented students, we have the normal distribution of students that we have had forever, but the number of talented students will depend on where we draw the line on that normal distribution curve to say, 'The ones on the right are the talented students'. Amongst those there are a whole range of truly gifted students.

My most recent exposure — to give you an example of what I would regard as a gifted student — was at my last school. This person in late primary school won *Australia's Brainiest Kid*, or something like that, and then in secondary school was part of a select group of students accepted for the Australian and international mathematics olympiads. He represented Australia at the olympiad. He won gold at the olympiad. In effect he is possibly the top mathematics student in Australia. He is a student who was offered numerous scholarships by independent schools, he was accepted to all the selective schools but he was very keen to stay in his local secondary school. He thrived in that environment, and of course he was dux because he was hugely talented and gifted not just in the mathematics area but in other areas as well.

From a VASSP perspective, we have a very strong and very clear position that we strongly support extension activities for gifted and talented students but that should not occur through the creation of more select entry schools that are dependent on the permanent removal of students from the neighbourhood schools, particularly where there is an academic component to that selection. As such, any discussion regarding gifted and talented programs is invariably interlinked and influenced by perceptions associated by select entry and discriminatory entry processes associated with student enrolment.

Much of our thinking is also driven by the Melbourne Declaration on Educational Goals for Young Australians of 2008. The goals are, firstly, that Australian schooling promotes equity and excellence, and, secondly, that all young Australians become successful learners, confident and creative individuals, and active and informed citizens. The implementation of those and all the points associated with that really talk about providing all students with access to high-quality education free from discrimination, promoting a culture of excellence in all schools, supporting them and providing challenges. I could go on, but I am hoping that you will have looked at that to help inform your discussions regarding gifted and talented students.

From our perspective, gifted and talented programs, particularly around academic ability, that are based on the establishment of stand-alone select entry schools are generally not supported, and we are concerned for the

outcomes of all students and for the future wellbeing and education of our society. We are keen to ensure that we have a nation of flexible and well-rounded students, not a situation where we have an us-and-them society and an advantage/disadvantage society.

Supporting our perspective is a lot of international literature and Australian evidence that clearly demonstrates that the outcomes of all schools are driven by their enrolment profiles. Removing high-performing students, who more often than not are the gifted and talented students, decreases performance across the board without there being substantial empirical evidence of having a significant impact on the improvement in outcomes for the gifted and talented.

PISA results — PISA being the Program for International Student Assessment — tend to also reinforce this. Over the last few years, at a time when we have had significant growth in select entry schools, including movement to private schools and select entry government schools, while Australia continues to be relatively high performing there has been a lengthening in the tail in terms of outcomes at the bottom end and the top students have not improved against the countries we are generally compared with. In essence we are allowing our students in lower socioeconomic areas to languish or even get worse in their performance while our gifted and better-off students have not shown any appreciable improvement.

This outcome seems incongruent, given the significant growth in select entry schooling by way of growth in select entry independent schools and public schools. Given that this is occurring, we might anticipate that Australia's performance at all levels would improve substantially, but that is obviously not the case. Most comparative countries have steered away from the level of selectivity and the removing of highly able students from their local schools, and they have lifted outcomes. I hope this inquiry takes the time to look at the international research in relation to this and the international outcomes in comparable systems before making recommendations that might lead to even greater selectivity and segregation.

I started by saying that VASSP has a very clear position that strongly supports the provision of extension activities for gifted and talented students. I think there are a range of opportunities that could and should be pursued to ensure that gifted and talented students are extended and catered for without creating permanent, isolated class groupings of these students and without significantly changing the demographic profiles of local schools. These approaches would go a significant way to creating greater equity of access to extension activities and programs for students in financially challenging circumstances — and we have a significant number of those — for those who are not near dedicated facilities in the metropolitan area and for those in regional, rural and remote areas. More research obviously needs to go into that.

Moving on to some of our challenges and opportunities, we need a policy that clearly outlines some parameters as to what gifted and talented education might entail and what areas of performance we might be looking at, because that is very uneven at this point in time. Clearly any discussion of gifted and talented education must look at the whole range of performance, not just academic performance. Once there are clear parameters around what we mean by 'gifted and talented' and which areas of performance we are looking at, we believe that the identification of students will be fairly readily achieved by nearly any school.

Just as provision for our less capable needs to be lifted, provision for our gifted and talented needs to be lifted significantly as well. This certainly requires the level of funding for public education to be lifted significantly and requires a commitment by both major political parties to the centrality and the importance of education to our students, our community and our future. We cannot remain the lowest funded state, and we cannot look to expanding support for our students in a climate of budget cuts to public education.

Central to appropriately catering for gifted and talented students in the selection, training, professional learning and ongoing development of our teachers. Gifted and talented teaching is one end of the spectrum associated with appropriate personalised learning. All teachers need to be skilled in this, as it must be their practice, and to ensure that this happens as a matter of course we need to have teachers who have entered teacher training as capable students, who are put through rigorous and well-supported training courses, who attain high-level qualifications to support their teaching practice and who are remunerated appropriately so that these people apply for teaching roles.

Associated with this is a need for schools across the state to develop flexible practices in relation to student groupings, timetabling and teaching practices. For instance, the practice of changing student groupings at a

particular year level to better cater for the levels of ability that change according to the subject area being undertaken is already in use in some areas. This could go a long way towards meeting various student needs, given that the school has a normal distribution of students. The system needs to look at providing and coordinating a greater range of opportunities for schools and students from all areas to access gifted and talented programs rather than relying on ad hoc planning at a range of selective schools.

We already have some facilities that students can attend, or will be able to attend shortly, such as the Gene Tech Access Centre, University High School; the Victorian Space Science Education Centre, Strathmore; and Quantum Victoria, Macleod West. They are all centres where students from various schools around the state can go and spend time — a week or two — to have extension activities in the areas they are working on. We have a range of schools where timetabling is allowing students to work in different groupings so that they are with like students for particular areas and are provided with more extension activities within those classes. Early access to VCE by some students at year 10 is just one example of that.

The creation and expansion of separate settings to build capabilities and interests could certainly be a model. We already have residential schools in various areas. I have mentioned the gene tech centre and those other three. There are three alpine schools where we have students going for leadership courses and the like. Students spend one term there; I think it is something like five or six students per school at a time who go to the alpine schools for various activities. The Residential Outdoor Schools Association camps is another model that could be used for a whole range of specialist activities in music, science, mathematics and the arts et cetera — whatever you can think of in regard to schooling and education.

Virtual online classroom access needs to be expanded. That was very much an — I would not say a virtual online classroom — activity even back in the 1990s. There was a lot of that sort of work going on in some of the country areas, but a lot of that has not been followed through and used. That could be another way of looking at very much expanding access to gifted and talented programs across the board.

Online programs via video screening and podcasts can be put into place. Some schools are already doing a lot of that. Ballarat Secondary College has a lot of that sort of work going on. Universities certainly operate that way already, and in much of the practical work, even in places like the maths-science schools, a lot of the work they do is done on the basis of virtual work within the laboratories rather than using real Bunsen burners and those sorts of things.

I think there needs to be a lot more encouragement given to schools to participate in extension activities, and that could possibly be facilitated by linking a component of school funding to ensure that students are directed into extension activities — even things like an Open Minds Forum, the Australian Mathematical Olympiad, the International Mathematical Olympiad and various other competitions. We also need to look at building more business-education partnerships. Just recently I was in Sydney for the UBS finance program. They also have a leadership program, with 50 or 60 government school kids involved at a time. They are very high performing kids selected from around the state.

There are a whole range of activities that need to be looked at. From our perspective we are very keen to ensure that all students have the best possible outcomes, but we do not believe that is achieved by isolating kids and withdrawing kids from their local communities. I do not believe, and VASSP does not believe, that is the best way for those gifted and talented students. It is certainly not the best way for the local community and for the future of our society.

The CHAIR — Thank you, Frank. You mentioned a number of examples of schools that are doing different programs. Does the association have a comprehensive list? Or is there something you could present to the committee — not now but at a later time?

Mr SAL — We can hunt up some of that information, but if you also ask the department, you should be able to get a fair bit of that.

The CHAIR — We have asked the department.

Mr SAL — You have? Can we have first use of it?

The CHAIR — In terms of terminology, you mentioned a few thoughts, which is great. You have answered a number of the questions we had, so that is why I let you continue on, and I think that was quite useful. You would be aware that some of the terminology that is used and the exceptions associated with ‘gifted’ and ‘talented’ tend to have negative connotations. We have had a number of suggestions to use different terminology, including ‘children of high intellectual potential’ and ‘high-ability students’, to get away from that stigma. Do you think this is a problem? What terminology do you think we should be using for this group that we know as ‘gifted and talented’?

Mr SAL — Regardless of what terminology we use, depending on the locale we are in and what community we are in there is always some sort of stigma that gets attached to it, whether you are a poor performer, a very good performer or this or that. Kids are kids, and they will possibly create some stigma about it. But I think the term ‘gifted and talented’ has become a very all-encompassing, broad area, and possibly narrowing it down into what your terms say are the ‘highly academically able’ or the other one we had may be more appropriate, just to create a sense of change and some different direction. Again, it really depends on the location you are in, what sort of aura different schools have been able to create around that sort of terminology and how those sorts of things are recognised within the school.

Ms TIERNEY — I want to talk about the role teachers play and the role you think they should play in identifying giftedness in their students but also what educational support or resources teachers need to help them to identify giftedness. For example, would a toolkit, as has been developed in the New South Wales case, be of any use to us?

Mr SAL — New South Wales has gone a fair way down this track, with lots of gifted-and-talented-type things around. I do not necessarily think that is required, once we have defined what we mean by giftedness and what areas we are talking about. Are we talking about academic giftedness? Are we talking about music? Are we talking about maths, science or sport? Once decisions are made as to what we are talking about, the level of achievement of students is fairly readily recognisable within a school over a couple of years in terms of where student performance is at.

In terms of your question about what help teachers require, was it about what help they require in terms of recognising it? Or was it about what help they require in terms of actually catering for it?

Ms TIERNEY — Both.

Mr SAL — I think the recognition basically comes from just that little bit of experience over one or two years in a school and that recognition of how kids are performing. There is an awful lot of data within schools now in terms of where students are at and how they are performing in various areas. In terms of what teachers require in secondary schools generally, I will not distinguish between government schools, independent schools and Catholic schools. I think secondary school teachers still have a significant mindset about teaching content rather than about teaching students. A lot of work has been done over the last couple of years in relation to that in trying to have teachers really focus on teaching students and thinking about their needs.

I believe many schools are heading down the track of establishing structures within their schools to allow that to happen much more easily by teaming teachers around groups of students, which then allows them to refocus on the various groups of students within that level or that group and to make sure they are catering for those students at their point of need rather than saying, as they would have done for most of us, ‘Here is the content; put that out there whether the kids can cope with it or not — it does not matter. They have not passed or they are bored because they are way beyond it, and it does not matter — they have to know it anyway’. I think we need to move beyond that, and we are moving beyond that. However, a lot more work has to go into it in terms of raising the ability of teachers to do that and improving the structures and organisational processes within schools to ensure that they are focusing on kids and kids’ needs and students and students’ needs.

Ms TIERNEY — Does your organisation support individual educational plans or learning plans?

Mr SAL — Personalised learning is basically that. I think that in any school if we are really coping well with kids, we will tend to have a normal distribution of students — that is, at one end we will have students who are not coping and are one, two or three years behind whatever that year level is, then there will be kids who are one, two or three years ahead. I would say that all those students should basically end up being on some form of individual learning plan to make sure they are being well catered for, and ideally all students should. I think the

reality in secondary schools in particular, with the sorts of time pressures there and the like, is that the notion of every student being on an individual learning plan may be a hard ask, but it really depends on what sort of resources are put into education and how schools are organised.

Ms TIERNEY — Given your support for the extension model, would you see the need for individual learning plans for gifted and talented children?

Mr SAL — Yes, I think that would be a natural extension.

Ms TIERNEY — And what other support — —

Mr SAL — Sorry, just to expand on that a little bit, if we are talking about personalised learning and really catering to individual kids — and the gifted students are three years ahead — I do not believe that any school or any teacher on their own can really cater for those kids without having a good sit down to look at where those kids are, where they are performing, what sort of work needs to be put into them and what sort of support needs to be put into them to keep them interested and keep them focusing on the future. Individual learning plans would be the ideal way to go with that.

Mr CRISP — Frank, you talked a lot about believing that talented or gifted students should remain in their school environment. I am going to ask you now to comment on the merits of the SEAL program. Do you believe that is a good model for educating gifted students? What would you recommend if we were going to do something differently? Would you improve SEAL, or would you do something else with SEAL?

Mr SAL — Ideally I would not want a SEAL program as such in the school. I think schools need to do a lot more work, as I mentioned when I was talking about grouping kids for various things. Kids who are put into a SEAL program are with that one group of kids for every subject they do. They will be with that group of kids for phys ed, and they will be with that group of students for art. Why does that need to happen? I think it is much better if they move around and are with that group of students when they are doing math because they are all fantastic math students, but they might not be that great at some other things. They need to mix with a whole range of different students. I think that isolates the students to a large extent.

At the same time I think a lot of the learning practices that are put into place within SEAL are very useful practices where the schools actually do the work properly with those students. They are very useful practices, and they are the sort of practices that need to be picked up across the board in terms of catering for students. That should be much more personalised in catering for those students, because even within SEAL classes they will not all be at the same level of performance or achievement, and they all need to be catered for as well.

The CHAIR — I am going to move on to exchange programs.

Mr ELASMAR — Frank, your submission suggests that specialist facilities and programs for gifted students could be made more acceptable through exchange programs, enabling rural students to attend metropolitan schools. How would such programs work, what benefits would they provide and how should students be selected to participate in exchange programs?

Mr SAL — I think our preference would certainly be for more of the schools like the gene tech centre and the school at Strathmore and the like, which are very specialised facilities that students can come down to, stay with a school or in other accommodation and then attend those centres where they work with very highly skilled teachers and also quite often university people as well in particular academic areas. That would probably be our preference, together with the residential-type programs that I was mentioning.

There are already schools that are exchanging students, but I do not believe that for the state as a whole that would be the direction we would be going or that that would be our answer to gifted and talented programs. It is another feather in the arrow, I suppose, to create instances where schools are exchanging students to look at the sorts of practices at schools in regard to particular areas of expertise that they might be looking at.

Ms MILLER — Many submissions argue that a statewide gifted education policy is needed; however, your submission states that guidelines are needed instead. Why do you think a policy is not required, and what kind of guidelines are needed?

Mr SAL — I need to think about that one a bit more.

Ms MILLER — Do you want me to repeat the question?

Mr SAL — No, I get the question, but I have not actually thought about that in that detail. I think guidelines are much more practical in regard to schools looking at how and what they are doing within their schools to cater for individual students. A policy is like a statement saying, ‘This is what we believe in’ — that is the way I see it — ‘and this is what should happen across the state’. It is very nice to have policies like that in place, but all that then has to be broken down into guidelines to say, ‘We need to have every school catering for the cross-section of students within its community. What does that involve? It involves these sorts of things in regard to how you do your teaching, how you do your planning and how you do your structuring’. All these sorts of things, I think, are much more practical than a policy statement that is overarching. I think you probably need to have something there that says, ‘We are into the education of all students’, but that is not particularly helpful within the school environment. That is the way I see it, without going into it in detail.

Ms MILLER — You talked about the guidelines, but what policy is not required as part of that?

Mr SAL — I do not know where we are going with that. A policy statement basically outlines the generality of what we are trying to achieve. I do not see that there is a problem with having policy statements. They are saying that we need to cater for all students, but that really needs to be broken down into guidelines that say, ‘This is the way you are going to go about doing that. This is what we need to be doing in this state, and as an individual school this is what you should be doing’.

The CHAIR — Just digging a bit further there in terms of the department’s role, what do you see the department’s role as being in providing for gifted and talented students, as opposed to what you think the school’s role should be in developing programs and looking at certain sorts of things it could be doing in administering its own programs? Where do you see the sort of balance between the prescriptive nature of the department versus the school’s own initiatives in the school’s own work?

Mr SAL — We are at an interesting time in regard to all of that, with the change in government, the change in direction in regard to autonomy and the role that the department should be playing in all this, so it is a difficult scenario. Six months ago if you had asked me that question, there would probably be a very different answer to what I might have now.

I think from the strategy section of the department there needs to be a fair bit of work done in regard to where we want to go with what we mean by ‘gifted and talented’ and what the essences are of catering for all students — not just gifted and talented students. That is basically strategy. There has been an awful lot of work done over the last decade in regard to what good teaching and learning practice looks like. Again, by the strategy section of the department or the section that is being put in place now over the coming few months, I think there need to be pointers back to that and pointers to what schools really need to be looking at in regard to their structures and practices to ensure that they are catering for the cross-section of students within their schools.

Ms TIERNEY — In your submission you talked about the stigma that is attached to students when they are identified as being gifted, which can mean that some students are reluctant to participate in gifted programs. What can be done to improve these attitudes and create a culture that celebrates success in schools?

Mr SAL — I think that if schools operate on the basis of saying to students, ‘We are going to be moving you around in different groupings to ensure that you get the best possible education that you can, and in these subjects — the humanities subjects or the Englishes — you are going to be with this group of kids, then we are going to be changing you because we want high achievement in all levels’, then that notion of academic performance, because that is what we are talking about there again, becomes more acceptable across the board.

When I say there is stigma in that submission that is not in all schools, but it is in a lot of schools. We have gone a long way away from having a normal distribution of kids in a lot of our schools, and that has created the issue where we have a few high-performing kids in that school and they stand out like anything. I think we all know the notion of standing out too much in one way or another as a 15, 16 or 17-year-old, and even in Australian society it is not necessarily the best way to be. I think it does not help us in all sorts of ways. I think if you make that normalising of performance within the school and say, ‘We have high-performing kids, and we are going to be moving them around in groups to ensure that all of those kids are getting the best possible education’, then that notion of recognition of performance in school becomes the norm in all schools. Some schools do it very

well, both in the government system and in the independent system, and a lot of schools still do not do it very well. They quite often do not do it very well because they do not have that real cross-section of kids.

Ms TIERNEY — We have also had a lot of submissions to this inquiry that had suggested that some in the teaching profession, including leaders within schools, have a negative attitude towards gifted students and gifted students' needs. Would you agree that those attitudes exist?

Mr SAL — I do not think I have ever come across that. What I have come across is negative attitudes towards the notion of kids being pulled out and put into this school over here because they are special and therefore this school should lose their 8 or 10 kids. My last school was Doncaster. Every year I would lose my 12 students to MacRob and Melbourne High, for instance — apart from some of the others. Those kids did not get any better results than they would have with me, but the aura of and the community perceptions wrapped around the selectivity makes a huge difference.

Yes, there would be teachers and principals who are certainly very negative about a whole range of these programs but certainly not about the gifted kids. I had wonderfully talented students at my school, but they were in that normal distribution of kids. But I had an unusually gifted kid. He got awards; he was probably up at every assembly and was well recognised by the students. No, I would not say principals and teachers are negative in any way, shape or form towards gifted students, because we all want to have them in our schools, but many are very negative about that notion that they should be withdrawn and put into special settings because my school cannot cater for them and my school will not educate them to the extent they should be educated. They are very negative about that sort of concept.

The CHAIR — Just on that, Frank, how can you categorically say that taking those students out and putting them into, say, MacRob, will not see them get better scores than if they were to stay with you?

Mr SAL — That was probably a bit of a sweeping statement, but at the same time, say this maths guy gets his 99.9 or whatever else; a whole range of students get those scores, students who were either friends of those who have gone out or kids who were nowhere near the same level of performance at the time. We have that whole cross-section of kids, and they get the same results. The reality is that if you take teachers from most schools and swap them into other schools, they will still get the results. It is the kids that drive a lot of the results in terms of the cross-section that you have.

Probably my story around that — should I tell my story? My previous school was in Noble Park, Carwatha College P-12. It is a very low socioeconomic area. There are 60 to 70 nationalities within the school. It would not be regarded as the academic school in the area by any means. A number of my teachers had kids there who got their mid-90 scores without any trouble, but I had parents asking me, 'What are the results like in your school; are they highly academic results?'. My response always was it will partly depend on who your kid sits with in my school as to whether they will get good results or not.

My other response was my own two children — we lived in Glen Waverley — went to Glen Waverley Secondary College, a renowned government school. I said I could guarantee you that if I take my teachers and put them into Glen Waverley, they will get the same, if not better, results. I have total confidence in that. I have been the principal at three very different schools: Myrtleford Secondary College, Carwatha College in Noble Park and Doncaster Secondary College, and I have got a lot of confidence in what I am saying.

Mr CRISP — I want to extend a little, because you have been very strong on keeping those students within the schools, and build around some of the thoughts about meeting their emotional needs, their needs for peer support and their needs for counselling. What I think you are saying is that they are better met there than at a specialist school, but I would like you to really refine that notion.

Mr SAL — I suppose I can extend on that by saying that once they leave the confines of that selective school and move on to university and into society they are never, ever again in a circumstance where they are cloistered with a group of kids or a group of adults who have been selected on a particular basis. They are working with a normal cross-section of society and people. I believe the reality is that they gain a lot out of that, and by staying within their local schools I think they gain an awful lot in regard to how they operate in society and how they relate to people. I think that is central to a lot of what we are saying.

Mr CRISP — What role do schools play in providing support to a gifted child?

Mr SAL — That is what I have been on about. I think most of the time schools have to play a huge part in that, just as they need to play a huge part in supporting that student who is three years behind the year 8 level and just as they need to support the students in the middle. But it goes beyond that, because we have got kids at both ends; we have got the ones who are way behind, and we have got the kids who are way ahead. I believe they may need individual learning plans and to have a specific focus on helping extend those, because if we rely just very simply on saying, ‘This kid’s really good; we’ll just do the normal year 8 work’, the kids are going to be bored. But the same thing can be said of the SEAL field program as well, although they might have a higher level of work. This guy here would have been bored in any SEAL program because he would have been way ahead of the SEAL program in terms of where he was at. We needed to provide additional work and additional planning around him with the various teachers to ensure that the student was kept engaged, interested and growing all the time. So, yes, there is a huge role.

Mr ELASMAR — Many Victorian parents have told the committee that they receive very little support or guidance in nurturing and supporting their gifted child. What role can schools play in providing support, information and resources to parents?

Mr SAL — I do not think it is necessarily done very well across the board in terms of schools. I think a lot more work needs to go into that, but also a political decision, financial and resourcing decision needs to be made by government. It needs to ask: is education really important, and what do we need to put in to ensure that all schools, whether they are government schools, private schools, independent schools, Catholic schools or whatever, put adequate time into catering for individual needs? I do not think the answer is to say we have got one little group of people here — it might be a bigger group; it depends where you draw your line on the normal distribution as to whether you regard people as talented — we will put them over here into a special setting where they will get catered for, and all the other students, the other 60, 70, 80 or 90 per cent, will get an also-ran education. I think it is a much bigger issue than that.

We need to ask: what do we really need to be doing in schools to make sure that we are catering for students, what are the expectations of principals and of schools and what resourcing is needed to ensure that they have the time to actually put into planning those individual learning plans and the like?

Ms MILLER — Your submission outlines some limitations of school collaboration with business, industry and community partners. Despite these limitations, do you think there are overall benefits to be gained from the cross-sector collaboration? If so, what would be the best opportunities that business, industry or community partners could provide for gifted and talented students?

Mr SAL — If I had the full answer to that, I would get a highly paid job in here, I think! I think there is a lot of value to be gained out of business-community-school relationships in all sorts of ways. It does not necessarily have to be just from the gifted perspective. Again I will use an example from my last school. In year 9 we had a program where every Wednesday the students chose either ‘my school’, ‘my city’ ‘my community’ ‘my camp’ or whatever. They were with the one teacher the whole day, and they worked out in the community and worked in the city. It was a real way of engaging students at the year 9 level. In year 8 and year 9 they tend to lose a little bit of concentration a lot of the time. We need to really engage them and get them to see what is happening in the community and the society. We need to bring people in to work with them and to engage them.

A lot of those sorts of programs can be put into place and are really valuable in terms of students really looking at where they want to head to and gaining from community members about what is important in education and what is important in their futures. The creation of those sorts of linkages is really, I think, fairly difficult at this point in time. I do not believe the department had much of a plan in place and really only started talking about it in the last two or three years in a significant way, and there is still a long way to go there. Again it is one of those things. I mentioned the UBS before, where through VASSP we help select 50 or so students from around Victoria who attend leadership courses with UBS at Sydney University and then finance courses in different things.

Unless you have large organisations like that that are willing to come on board readily, it makes it fairly difficult to set up those linkages in lots of circumstances. But I think it is one of the ways to go, because you can imagine having linkages with the CSIRO or with Melbourne University and the like and having students attending those institutions or organisations — they can be selected in a whole range of different ways — and the sort of impetus that would get in terms of expanding their thoughts about what their futures might be and where they

could go. It is really important. But there is a lot of work that needs to go into that, and there is no ready template to say, 'This is the way it could work' — or not that I know of.

The CHAIR — Frank, thank you very much. We have come to the end of our time, unless committee members have something that we have not covered. Is there anything that you want to add that you think has not been covered already? We have your submission and your great contribution today. We will give you an opportunity now, if there is anything, but do not feel you have to.

Mr SAL — It is just to reiterate that there are a few gifted kids, and by gifted I mean gifted way out there. I think there is a whole range of talented kids, but, again, you can debate until the cows come home where you draw the line on talent. I believe we need to be looking at the future of our society and at what we want for our kids generally across the board. I do not think that is served by withdrawing kids from their local areas, plonking them somewhere else and saying, 'Because you are good at maths we will put you over here and you are going to be in this school'. It rips out all these kids from other areas, and in the end the sort of stuff that we have seen does not tend to indicate that these students end up with a much higher TER or ATAR or whatever in terms of academic measurement, if that is still going to be there in a few years time.

We are really concerned that we cater for that cross-section of students, including the very highly gifted and very talented students. It needs to occur at the local level with a whole range of supports out there — for example, residential camps and those sorts of things. It is a little bit like the businessman I mentioned before; going to something like that gives students a sense of 'where to' and what is possible, and that is really important.

The CHAIR — Frank, thank you very much for your contribution today, your submission and the work that you are doing.

Witness withdrew.