



Education and Training Committee

Inquiry into the education of gifted and talented students

ORDERED TO BE PRINTED

June 2012

by Authority
Victorian Government Printer

Parliamentary paper
No.108 Session 2010–2012

Parliament of Victoria

Education and Training Committee

Inquiry into the education of gifted and talented students

This report is also available at www.parliament.vic.gov.au/etc

Printed on 100% recycled paper

ISBN 978-0-9871154-0-9

ISBN 978-0-9871154-1-6 Electronic

Contents

Contents	iii
List of figures and tables	xiii
List of case studies.....	xiiiv
Committee membership	xvii
Functions of the Committee	xix
Terms of reference.....	xix
Chair’s foreword	xxi
Executive summary	xxiii
List of recommendations	xxix
Glossary.....	xxxvii
Chapter 1: Introduction	1
1.1 An introduction to gifted and talented students	3
1.1.1 What are giftedness and talent?	3
Defining giftedness and talent	3
How does a gift become a talent?	3
1.1.2 What do gifted students look like?	4
Characteristics of gifted students	4
Domains and levels of giftedness	5
Underachieving gifted students.....	6
1.1.3 How many gifted students are there in Victoria?	6
1.2 The context for this Inquiry.....	7
1.2.1 The policy context.....	7
State policy.....	7
National policy.....	7
1.2.2 How do Victorian students compare?	8
1.2.3 Gifted education in a competitive marketplace	9
1.2.4 What other work has been done in this area?	10
1.3 The scope of this Inquiry	11
1.4 The Inquiry process.....	12
1.5 Outline of this report.....	13
Chapter 2: An introduction to giftedness and gifted education in Victoria.....	15
2.1 Concepts of giftedness and talent.....	16
2.1.1 Gagné’s Differentiated Model of Giftedness and Talent	16
2.1.2 Tannenbaum’s Star Model.....	17

2.1.3	Renzulli's Three-Ring Conception	19
2.1.4	Columbus Group definition	20
2.1.5	Other models of giftedness and talent	20
2.2	Victoria's curriculum frameworks and pathways	20
2.2.1	Victorian Early Years Learning and Development Framework	21
2.2.2	Victorian Essential Learning Standards	21
2.2.3	Senior secondary certificates	22
	Victorian Certificate of Education	22
	Victorian Certificate of Applied Learning	22
	Vocational Education and Training	23
2.3	Current programs and provisions for gifted and talented students in Victoria	23
2.3.1	Early childhood education	24
2.3.2	Primary school education	25
2.3.3	Secondary school education	26
	Selective entry schools	27
	Select Entry Accelerated Learning Program	27
	Specialist schools	28
	Other secondary school programs and provisions	29
2.3.4	Gifted education in independent and Catholic schools	30
2.3.5	Distance education	31
2.3.6	Competitions	32
	Tournament of Minds	32
	Australian Mathematics Competition and Maths and Informatics Olympiads	32
	Australian Science Olympiads and Rio Tinto Big Science Challenge	33
2.3.7	Private programs	33
2.3.8	University-run programs	34
2.3.9	School specialisation	35
2.3.10	International Baccalaureate	35
2.3.11	Home schooling	36
	Chapter 3: A framework for educating gifted students in Victoria	37
3.1	A foundation for gifted education in Victoria—Terminology and definitions	38
3.1.1	What should gifted and talented children be called?	38
3.1.2	How should gifted and talented students be defined?	40
3.2	Are special gifted programs and provisions needed?	42
3.2.1	The special educational needs of gifted students	42
	How gifted students learn	42
	Benefits of links with like minds	43

3.2.2	Equity of access to education	44
3.2.3	The impact of not catering for gifted students.....	45
	Impact on students.....	45
	Impact on the public education system	49
	Impact on society	50
3.2.4	The need for gifted programs and provisions—The Committee’s view	51
3.3	Are current programs and provisions meeting the needs of gifted students in Victoria?	51
3.3.1	Do gifted students currently have equitable access education in Victoria? .	53
3.3.2	The scope of current programs and provisions.....	55
3.3.3	The quality of current programs and provisions.....	56
3.3.4	What are the outcomes of current programs and provisions?	58
3.3.5	Are current programs and provisions meeting the needs of gifted students in Victoria?—The Committee’s view	59
3.4	How are the educational needs of gifted students best met?	61
3.4.1	Separate programs and schools?	61
3.4.2	The role of mainstream schools.....	62
3.4.3	How are the educational needs of gifted students best met?—The Committee’s view.....	63
3.5	A new policy framework for gifted education.....	63
3.5.1	What is the current policy framework?.....	63
3.5.2	A state policy?	64
	Does Victoria need a new policy framework?	64
	What should be in a policy statement?	65
	A Victorian gifted education policy?—The Committee’s view	67
3.5.3	School policies.....	68
3.5.4	A national policy?.....	71
3.6	Coordinating gifted education in Victoria.....	72
	Chapter 4: Identifying gifted students	75
4.1	Why identification is important	76
4.2	Current approaches to identification	76
4.2.1	What tools are used to identify giftedness?	76
4.2.2	How are gifted students currently identified?.....	77
	Identification by parents	77
	Identification by early childhood professionals.....	78
	Identification at school.....	79
4.3	Are current identification practices adequate?	81
4.4	Improving the identification of gifted students	83

4.4.1	Which tools should be used to identify giftedness?	85
	Achievement testing.....	85
	Formal psychological assessments	86
	Observation.....	87
	A broad-ranging approach to identification	88
	Which tools should be used to identify giftedness?— The Committee’s view	89
4.4.2	When should gifted students be identified?	89
4.4.3	Enhancing the capacity of identifiers	93
	Enhancing the capacity of early childhood professionals to identify giftedness.....	93
	Enhancing the capacity of teachers to identify giftedness.....	94
	Enhancing the capacity of parents to identify giftedness	96
	Practical support for identifiers	98
4.4.4	What role should schools play in identification?	98
4.5	Increasing identification of gifted students from backgrounds of educational disadvantage.....	99
4.5.1	Why are some students less likely to be identified as gifted?.....	99
	Low expectations of achievement	99
	Impact of tools commonly used to identify giftedness	101
	Hidden giftedness	102
4.5.2	Increasing identification of gifted students from backgrounds of educational disadvantage—The Committee’s view	105
4.6	What happens after a student is identified as gifted?	106
Chapter 5: Strategies for educating gifted students: What works?.....		109
5.1	Approaches to educating gifted students	110
5.1.1	Personalised learning	110
	Why personalised learning is important	110
	Individual learning plans.....	112
5.1.2	Foundation approaches to gifted education.....	114
	Curriculum differentiation	114
	Acceleration	116
	Ability grouping.....	118
	Extension and enrichment.....	120
5.1.3	New strategies for educating gifted and talented students	121
	Utilising technology	122
	Links between schools	127
	Opportunities to collaborate with community, business and industry partners	129

	The role of music and languages other than English	132
5.2	Improving the evidence base	133
5.3	Ensuring equitable access to gifted education opportunities	135
5.3.1	Barriers to access	135
	Cost.....	135
	Geographic location	136
	Overcoming barriers to access—The Committee’s view.....	139
5.3.2	Increasing access for gifted Indigenous students.....	140
	Current Victorian Government initiatives.....	140
	The Aspiration Initiative	141
	Koorie Academy of Excellence	142
	Increasing access for gifted Indigenous students—The Committee’s view	143
5.3.3	Increasing access for twice exceptional students.....	144
Chapter 6: Improving early childhood and primary school education for gifted students		147
6.1	Early childhood education	148
6.1.1	How are gifted children currently catered for in early childhood education?	148
6.1.2	Improving early childhood education for gifted children.....	149
6.2	Early entry to primary school.....	150
6.2.1	When is early entry available?	150
6.2.2	Early entry to primary school—Benefits and issues.....	151
6.2.3	Improving processes for early entry to primary school	152
6.3	Gifted education in primary schools	155
6.3.1	How are gifted children currently catered for in primary schools?	155
6.3.2	Improving gifted education in Victorian primary schools.....	156
	Improving gifted education in mainstream classrooms	157
	A SEAL-type program for primary schools?.....	158
	Selective entry primary schools?	159
	The role of private programs	159
	Improving gifted education in primary schools—The Committee’s view	160
6.4	Finding out about secondary school options.....	162
Chapter 7: Improving gifted education programs in secondary schools.....		165
7.1	School-level programs	166
7.2	Selective entry schools	168
7.2.1	Selective entry schools: An overview	168
7.2.2	Benefits of selective entry schools.....	169

	Benefits for students	169
	Benefits for the wider community	171
7.2.3	Issues with selective entry schools	171
	Demand for places	171
	Location of schools	172
	Accessibility to students from backgrounds of educational disadvantage	172
	Awareness of selective entry schools	173
	Year 9 commencement	173
	Competition between schools	174
	Enhancing selective entry schools—The Committee’s view	174
7.3	The Select Entry Accelerated Learning (SEAL) Program	175
7.3.1	The SEAL Program: An overview	175
7.3.2	Benefits of SEAL Programs	176
	Benefits for students	177
	Benefits for the entire school	178
	Benefits for teachers	179
7.3.3	Issues with the SEAL Program	179
	The SEAL Program model	179
	Program variability	181
	Demand for places	182
	Location of SEAL schools	182
	Accessibility to students from backgrounds of educational disadvantage	183
	Awareness of the SEAL Program	183
	Movement of students between SEAL and mainstream classes	184
	Enhancing the SEAL Program—The Committee’s view	184
7.4	Specialist schools	185
7.4.1	Specialist schools: An overview	185
7.4.2	Accessibility to students from backgrounds of educational disadvantage .	187
7.4.3	Benefits of specialist schools	188
	Benefits for students	188
	Benefits to the wider community	190
7.4.4	Issues with specialist schools	191
	Location and demand	191
	Awareness of specialist schools	191
	Enhancing specialist schools—The Committee’s view	192

7.5	Improving access to and awareness of selective entry, SEAL and specialist schools	192
7.5.1	Improving access for students from backgrounds of educational disadvantage	193
7.5.2	Improving awareness of students from backgrounds of educational disadvantage	193
7.5.3	Opportunities for outreach	194
7.6	Supporting gifted student athletes in Victorian secondary schools	195
7.7	Early entry to university	198
	Chapter 8: Teacher education and training	201
8.1	Why teacher education matters	202
8.1.1	Teachers' skills	202
8.1.2	Teachers' attitudes	203
8.2	What makes a good teacher of gifted students?	205
8.2.1	Teachers' characteristics	205
8.2.2	Teachers' knowledge	206
8.3	Education and training for early childhood educators	206
8.4	Pre-service teacher training	208
8.4.1	Current pre-service teacher training	208
8.4.2	Is current pre-service teacher training adequate?	210
8.4.3	Improving pre-service teacher training	211
	Should gifted education be compulsory for pre-service teachers?.....	211
	Providing opportunities to work with gifted students on teaching placements.....	213
8.5	Teacher professional learning.....	214
8.5.1	Current professional learning requirements.....	215
8.5.2	What professional learning activities are currently available?	215
	Professional learning in schools.....	216
8.5.3	Is current teacher professional learning adequate?.....	217
8.5.4	Improving teacher professional learning.....	219
	Mandatory or targeted professional learning?.....	219
	What type of professional learning opportunities do teachers need?	220
	Encouraging and supporting teachers to access professional learning activities	221
	Improving teacher professional learning—The Committee's view	222
8.5.5	Postgraduate learning opportunities	223
8.5.6	Providing opportunities for teachers to gain experience with gifted students	225
8.6	Professional learning for school leaders	226

Chapter 9: Supporting teachers and schools	229
9.1 What support is currently available for teachers and schools?	230
9.2 Networks of teachers and schools	231
9.2.1 Networks within schools	231
9.2.2 Networks between schools	231
9.3 Access to expert advice and support	234
9.3.1 In-school specialists.....	234
9.3.2 Access to external expert advice	236
9.4 Access to information, research and other resources	237
9.5 Supporting schools with teacher recruitment	239
Chapter 10: Supporting gifted students and their families.....	241
10.1 Supporting gifted students	242
10.1.1 Why do gifted students need social and emotional support?.....	242
10.1.2 Enhancing support for gifted students	245
Information about giftedness	245
Counselling and other practical support.....	245
Opportunities to connect with other gifted students	246
Enhancing support for gifted students—The Committee’s view.....	248
10.2 Supporting the parents and carers of gifted children	249
10.2.1 What is it like to parent a gifted child?	249
10.2.2 What support is currently available for parents?.....	251
10.2.3 Enhancing support for the parents and carers of gifted students	253
Access to information	253
Access to advice	255
Partnerships between parents and schools	255
Opportunities to connect with other parents.....	256
Access to dispute resolution and advocacy	257
Enhancing support for the parents and carers of gifted students—The Committee’s view	257
10.3 Overcoming negative attitudes to giftedness	259
10.3.1 Common negative beliefs and attitudes about giftedness	260
10.3.2 Promoting positive attitudes to giftedness	261
Creating school cultures that value high performance in all areas.....	261
Embedding gifted education as part of the usual business of schools...	262
Community education	263
Promoting positive attitudes to giftedness—The Committee’s view.....	263
Chapter 11: Conclusion.....	265
Appendices.....	267

Appendix A: List of submissions 267

Appendix B: List of witnesses 273

Appendix C: List of site visits and events attended..... 285

Bibliography 287

List of figures and tables

Figure 1: Characteristics of gifted students.....	4
Figure 2: Levels and prevalence of giftedness	5
Figure 3: Proportion of students achieving at the highest levels in reading literacy in PISA 2009.....	9
Figure 4: Gagné’s Differentiated Model of Giftedness and Talent	17
Figure 5: Tannenbaum’s Star Model.....	18
Figure 6: Renzulli’s Three-Ring Conception of Giftedness	19
Figure 7: SEAL schools in Victoria.....	28
Figure 8: Key features of G.A.T.E.WAYS and WiseOnes programs	33
Figure 9: Camelot Rise Primary School’s gifted and talented students policy.....	70
Figure 10: Common approaches to identifying giftedness	77
Figure 11: Key types of acceleration.....	116
Figure 12: Key Australian online gifted education programs	125
Figure 13: Victorian government school students aged less than 5 years at 30 April	151
Figure 14: Gifted education opportunities at Camelot Rise Primary School	155
Figure 15: Gifted students’ experiences at Victorian primary schools	157
Figure 16: Gifted education programs for primary school students in New South Wales and Western Australia	159
Figure 17: Key information about Victoria’s selective entry schools	168
Figure 18: Mechanisms to promote fair and equitable access to selective entry schools...	169
Figure 19: Social and emotional benefits of participating in the SEAL Program.....	178
Figure 20: Experiences accessing Victoria’s specialist schools	192

List of case studies

Case study 1: 'We felt that they had placed her in the "too hard basket"'	52
Case study 2: 'My son is confident that he will attend Melbourne University and study medicine'	84
Case study 3: '[O]ur daughter was hungry to learn'	91
Case study 4: '[B]eing amongst a cohort of like minded children working at an accelerated pace has changed his life completely'	104
Case study 5: '[M]y teacher at school never made me do anything I didn't already know' .	121
Case study 6: 'I find school boring'	133
Case study 7: 'This was a stressful and upsetting process'	154
Case study 8: 'I hope my story may help to illustrate the impact of the current lack of resources for these children'	162
Case study 9: '[A]cceptance and placement with like-abled children made all the difference'	164
Case study 10: 'Nathan's primary education was a roller coaster'	186
Case study 11: '[S]chool is very stressful for a gifted child'	244

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Functions of the Committee

The functions of the Education and Training Committee are set out in section 9 of the of the *Parliamentary Committees Act 2003* (Vic). That section states:

The functions of the Education and Training Committee are, if so required or permitted under this Act, to inquire into, consider and report to the Parliament on any proposal, matter or thing concerned with education or training.

Terms of reference

The following reference was made by the Legislative Assembly on 10 February 2011:

To the Education and Training Committee — for inquiry consideration and report no later than 31 January 2012 on the education of gifted and talented students and the Committee is asked to consider:

- (a) the effectiveness of current policies and programs for gifted and talented students, with particular consideration of, but not limited to:
 - (i) identification of gifted and talented students;
 - (ii) equity of access to quality educational choices for gifted and talented students and their families; and
 - (iii) impact on the learning, development and wellbeing of gifted and talented students;
- (b) the scope, coverage and effectiveness of current policies and programs for students from both metropolitan and regional school communities, school leaders, teachers and parents and carers to support gifted and talented students;
- (c) opportunities and strategies for enhancing support for gifted and talented students, their parents and carers, teachers and school leaders; and
- (d) opportunities for improved educational offerings for gifted and talented students through collaboration across all school sectors and with community, business and industry.

The reporting date was extended to 30 June 2012 by resolution of the Legislative Assembly on 7 December 2011.

Chair's foreword

On 10 February 2011, the Education and Training Committee received a reference from the Victorian Parliament to conduct an inquiry into the education of gifted and talented students in Victoria.

This report maps out future directions for the education of Victoria's gifted and talented students.

There are up to 85 000 gifted students in the Victorian schools. At present these kids are neglected by a system that largely assumes that all students learn at the same rate and in the same way.

The evidence presented to this Inquiry paints a highly unsatisfactory picture of students whose significant potential to excel is often not even identified let alone nurtured. These students are frequently frustrated and disengaged. And rightfully so: they are being let down by the education system. These neglected students represent our state's future visionaries and innovators. We owe it to our society as well as to ourselves to give these students the most challenging and stimulating education possible.

This report provides a vision through which these problems can be addressed. It proposes a coordinated approach to gifted education which recognises and develops the gifts of every student. Key recommendations include a state-wide gifted education policy, the use of technology to provide extended learning opportunities for gifted students, increased education, training and support for teachers, and greatly enhanced support for gifted students and their families.

The Committee's fundamental approach in this report is that gifted education must be provided by every teacher in every classroom in every school in Victoria. This is the only way to ensure that all gifted students are appropriately provided for whatever their background and wherever they live and go to school.

On behalf of the members of the Education and Training Committee, I thank the many individuals and organisations — students, parents, teachers, voluntary organisations, academics and others — who took the time to contribute their views and experience to this Inquiry. In particular, the Committee would like to thank the schools who generously hosted the Committee's visits. I would also like to acknowledge the significant contribution made by the parents of gifted children, both through submissions to the Inquiry, and through their participation in the Parents' Forum hosted by the Committee.

I sincerely thank my fellow Committee members, Ms Gayle Tierney MLC, Mr Peter Crisp MP, Mr Nazih Elasmr MLC and Ms Elizabeth Miller MP who worked tirelessly during the 15 months of this Inquiry. In particular, I acknowledge the hard work of the Committee's Deputy Chair, Ms Tierney, whose considered and collaborative approach has been an asset throughout the course of the Inquiry.

I would like to thank the members of the Committee's Secretariat, Ms Kerryn Riseley, Ms Anita Madden and Ms Natalie Tyler. I also acknowledge the role of Ms Maria Scott whose research laid the ground work for this report.

I believe that if Victoria is to continue to be a global leader in creativity and innovation, it is essential that we give our best and brightest young people the finest education we can. I am confident that the implementation of the recommendations in this report will ensure that all gifted students in Victoria are given every opportunity to stretch their wings and soar.

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'DS', with a stylized flourish.

David Southwick MP
Chair

Executive summary

There is a vast diversity of student ability within Victoria's education system. This report provides a framework for enhancing the education and support for one group within that wide spectrum: gifted and talented students.

In the absence of any agreed definitions of giftedness and talent, in this report the Committee adopts the model of leading gifted education expert Professor Francoys Gagné. Under that model, giftedness refers to a natural ability in one or more areas, while talent refers to outstanding performance in an area or areas. Gifts are transformed into talents through a complex developmental process. Of particular relevance to this Inquiry, a student's educational environment is one of the key factors influencing the transformation of gifts into talents.

It is impossible to paint a single picture of a gifted student. Gifted students come from all walks of life. They may be gifted in domains as varied as languages and leadership. A student may be gifted in a single area, or across a variety of domains. Some gifted students may have another exceptionality such as a learning disability or an autism spectrum disorder.

The learning needs of gifted students may differ dramatically from those of other students. Many gifted students benefit from faster paced learning, independent study, more complex content, and opportunities to use high order thinking and problem-solving skills.

This report demonstrates that failure to provide appropriately for gifted students in the school environment can have severe and devastating consequences. Under-stimulated gifted students may be bored and frustrated at school. They may exhibit behavioural problems or even disengage from education entirely. A concerning number of gifted students dumb themselves down to fit in at school, while those who don't may experience social isolation or even bullying.

Gifted students are our prospective leaders and innovators. In nurturing their talents we are not only meeting their rights to access an appropriate education, but also ensuring that the future of our society is in good hands.

The adequacy of current gifted education provision in Victoria

All students have a right to an education that meets their needs. However, the Victorian education system is currently failing many gifted students.

At present there is no systematic approach to gifted education in Victoria. Provision for gifted students is very ad hoc, predominately provided on a school-by-school basis. Many schools make no, or minimal, provisions, or only implement provisions after extensive parent advocacy. The specialised gifted programs that currently exist are heavily concentrated at the secondary level and in the Melbourne metropolitan area. The absence of any evaluation mechanisms means that it is impossible to measure the quality and outcomes of current gifted education provisions.

This report examines education for gifted student in Victoria at three stages: early childhood education, primary school and secondary school. In relation to current opportunities available at each of these stages the Committee has found:

- There is very limited provision for gifted students at the early childhood stage.
- While some primary schools appear to be catering for gifted students very effectively, most primary schools are providing minimal or insufficient provisions for gifted students.
- At the secondary level, selective entry schools, specialist schools and schools offering the Select Entry Accelerated Learning (SEAL) Program play a valuable role in meeting the needs of Victoria's gifted and high-achieving students, although demand greatly exceeds available places.

The Victorian education system is clearly not meeting the needs of gifted students, with many students never given the support and stimulation they need to transform their gifts into talents. Through the recommendations in this report the Education and Training Committee of the Victorian Parliament provides a blueprint for an education system that meets both the academic and social and emotional needs of gifted students and inspires and promotes optimal performance.

Providing a solid base for the education of gifted students in Victoria

The fundamental premise of this report is that gifted education must be available in every classroom in every Victorian school, across all school sectors. This approach does not ignore the contribution made by specialist programs and schools, but rather recognises that making gifted education available in every school is the only way to truly provide equitable access and to ensure that gifted students are catered for wherever they live and attend school.

This report calls for a much more coordinated and evidence-based approach to gifted education in Victoria. Central to this approach is the development of a state gifted education policy to provide a framework and to articulate expectations in relation to gifted education. In addition, it proposes that the Department of Education and Early Childhood Development (DEECD) play a much greater role in providing information and support to all those involved in the education of gifted students, from teachers and schools, to parents and students themselves.

Identifying gifted students

Identifying a student's giftedness is an important first step in ensuring that his or her educational needs are addressed. Unfortunately the Committee's investigations show there is currently a hit and miss approach to identifying gifted students in Victoria. Many gifted students are never identified at school, or are only identified late in their educational journey.

Gifted students come from all backgrounds. However, students from some backgrounds are far less likely to have their gifts identified. Students at particular risk of having their abilities overlooked are those from backgrounds of educational disadvantage such as low socioeconomic, Indigenous or culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds, as well as students who live in rural and regional areas and students with disabilities. Targeted interventions are imperative to ensure that these students are appropriately identified.

This report proposes a far more proactive approach to identifying gifted students in Victoria. It suggests setting a clear expectation that all schools will identify their gifted

students. In addition, it recommends increased education and support for a range of professionals, from material child health nurses to teachers, as well as parents, to enhance their capacity to recognise giftedness.

Improving provision for gifted students in Victorian schools

There is no one-size-fits-all approach that can be used to educate Victoria's gifted students. Each member of this diverse group needs tailored approaches specifically designed to address his or her individual learning needs.

Research has identified a number of strategies that are highly successful in meeting the needs of gifted students, including:

- curriculum differentiation
- ability grouping
- acceleration, including early entry to primary school, year level acceleration, subject acceleration and early entry to university
- enrichment and enhancement.

The extent to which these approaches are currently used in Victorian schools varies significantly, with some schools embedding such strategies as core components of their curriculum, while other schools offer few, if any, personalised learning experiences for gifted students. Concerningly, the evidence presented to this Inquiry suggests some educators may be highly resistant to interventions that have been proven effective, particularly early entry to primary school and year level acceleration.

The Committee concludes that personalised learning, incorporating the use of curriculum differentiation, ability grouping, acceleration and enrichment and enhancement, must form the basis of provision for gifted students in Victoria. In particular, the evidence to this Inquiry emphasised the centrality of curriculum differentiation, which enables a wide range of student abilities to be catered for within a single classroom. Curriculum differentiation is particularly important at the early childhood education and primary school stages, where targeted gifted education programs are often not available.

Victorian teachers need increased access to education, information and resources to enable them to confidently and successfully implement these strategies for every gifted student. In particular, the Committee recommends clear guidelines for early entry to primary school and year level acceleration to ensure there is a transparent process for determining when these interventions are appropriate.

The gifted education opportunities that are currently available are not equally accessible to all gifted students in Victoria. Often parents must pay for gifted education programs, even those offered within schools. In addition, most gifted education opportunities are located in Melbourne and gifted students living in rural and regional areas often miss out. Some families, especially those from backgrounds of educational disadvantage, may be unaware of the available gifted education programs and schools.

This report makes a number of recommendations aimed at making gifted education opportunities more accessible to all gifted students in Victoria. Most significantly, the Committee recommends the establishment of a virtual school and utilisation of technology where possible to provide a broad range of extension opportunities for gifted

students at both primary and secondary school. The virtual school will provide stimulating learning experiences to students in all parts of the state, while allowing them to remain in their local schools.

Other key recommendations aimed at promoting broader access to gifted education programs include promoting gifted education opportunities to students from backgrounds of educational disadvantage, reviewing the selection processes for selective entry, SEAL and specialist schools to ensure they promote equitable access and increasing the outreach activities of specialist and selective entry schools.

Educating and supporting Victorian teachers

Teachers have a very powerful influence on the educational outcomes of students. However, many Victorian teachers currently have limited understanding of gifted students, having not had opportunities to study giftedness either in their initial teacher training, or through professional development at the in-service stage.

The recommendations in this report aim to equip Victoria's teachers with the skills and confidence to appropriately provide for all gifted students in their classrooms. Major recommendations in this regard include providing increased teacher access to education and training, information and resources, as well as expert support and advice.

This report also proposes education about giftedness for principals and other school leaders so that they can provide positive leadership and vision for gifted education in their schools.

Supporting gifted students and their families

Gifted students have unique social and emotional needs which must be met, in addition to their academic needs, if they are to flourish. The Committee recommends that gifted students be supported in their journey through the Victorian education system through increased access to information and counselling, as well as more opportunities to learn and socialise with other gifted students.

Raising a gifted child can be exacting and exhausting. Parents often struggle to find information about giftedness and, in particular, about educational options for their child. Many parents find that they must continually advocate on their child's behalf in order for appropriate educational provisions to be put in place. This report calls for greatly increased support for parents, including through increased access to information and expert advice. The Committee's recommendations also emphasise the importance of fostering positive relationships between parents and schools based on strong and open communication.

Promoting positive attitudes to giftedness

In conducting this Inquiry the Committee encountered many negative views and misconceptions about giftedness. Some of the most common myths include that gifted students will succeed without any tailored assistance, that gifted students are merely the result of pushy parents, and that specifically catering for gifted students is elitist. Such myths and attitudes may create significant barriers to the introduction or continuance of gifted programs and provisions in schools.

The recommendations in this report aim to create increased understanding and acceptance of giftedness, gifted students and gifted education programs and provisions.

In particular, the Committee highlights the need for all Victorian schools to develop and promote cultures of tolerance and acceptance which celebrate the gifts and successes of all students.

List of recommendations

Chapter 3: A framework for educating gifted students in Victoria

Recommendation 1: Research on the extent and causes of underachievement by gifted students 51

That the Victorian Government commission research into the extent and causes of underachievement by gifted students in Victoria.

Recommendation 2: List of gifted education programs and provisions 60

That the Victorian Government publish a list of all gifted education programs and provisions in Victorian government schools.

Recommendation 3: Program evaluation 60

That the Victorian Government undertake regular evaluation of all centrally auspiced gifted programs and provisions and, through the Victorian policy and the model school policy on the education of gifted and talented students, emphasise the importance of regular review and evaluation of all gifted programs and provisions.

Recommendation 4: A new Victorian policy on the education of gifted and talented students 67

That the Victorian Government, in consultation with students, parents, teachers, schools and other relevant stakeholders, develop and implement a Victorian policy on the education of gifted and talented students. This policy should be founded on the principle that gifted education must be available in every classroom in every Victorian school. It should also:

- provide definitions of giftedness and talent
- emphasise the importance of regular review and evaluation of gifted programs and provision (see recommendation 3)
- stipulate that schools have a responsibility to identify their gifted students (see recommendation 13)
- require schools to provide appropriate educational provisions for any student identified as gifted (see recommendation 16)
- emphasise the importance of providing personalised learning for gifted students in all Victorian schools, especially in primary schools (see recommendations 17 and 31)
- emphasise the importance of links between teachers and schools (see recommendations 21 and 48)
- emphasise the importance of teacher professional learning (see recommendation 42)
- emphasise the importance of addressing the social and emotional needs of gifted students (see recommendation 55)
- emphasise the importance of collaborative partnerships between schools and parents (recommendation 61)
- emphasise the importance of schools celebrating high achievement in all domains (see recommendation 63).

This policy should be reviewed at least every five years.

Recommendation 5: Resources to support the Victorian policy on the education of gifted and talented students 68

That the Victorian Government develop resources on giftedness and gifted education to support the Victorian policy on the education of gifted and talented students, including resources on:

- identifying gifted students (see recommendations 9, 10, 11, 12, 14 and 15)
- strategies and approaches for educating gifted students (see recommendations 18, 29 and 54)
- giftedness and educating a gifted child (see recommendations 56, 58, 59 and 60).

Recommendation 6: Encouraging school policies on the education of gifted and talented students 69

That the Victorian Government encourage all Victorian schools to develop and implement school policies on the education of gifted and talented students.

Recommendation 7: Model school policy on the education of gifted and talented students 69

That the Victorian Government, in consultation with students, parents, teachers, schools and other relevant stakeholders, develop a model school policy on the education of gifted and talented students.

Recommendation 8: Establishment of Gifted Education Unit within DEECD 73

The Victorian Government should establish a specific unit within DEECD that has clear responsibility for coordinating policy and research, as well as providing information and support on gifted education. The functions of the unit will include:

- leading the development of a new Victorian policy on the education of gifted and talented students and subsequently reviewing the policy on a regular basis (see recommendation 4)
- leading the development of a model school policy on the education of gifted and talented students and supporting schools to implement school-level gifted education policies (see recommendations 6 and 7)
- commissioning, coordinating and promoting research and evaluation in relation to gifted education and disseminating research results (see recommendations 1, 3, 25, 32, 33, 34, 54 and 58)
- providing information and resources on giftedness and identifying and educating gifted students (see recommendations 2, 5 and 47)
- leading the development of guidelines on year level acceleration and early entry to primary school (see recommendations 19 and 30)
- leading the development of new approaches to catering for gifted students, including a virtual school and mentoring program (see recommendations 20 and 23)
- supporting schools to establish links with community, business and industry partners (see recommendation 24)
- supporting increased links between schools, teachers and gifted students (see recommendations 22, 36, 49 and 57)
- providing, promoting and supporting increased learning opportunities on gifted education for teachers and early childhood educators (see recommendations 38, 39, 40, 41, 43, 44, 45 and 52).

Chapter 4: Identifying gifted students

Recommendation 9: Information and resources to assist healthcare professionals to identify giftedness 94

That the Victorian Government provide information and resources about identifying giftedness to maternal and child health nurses and other healthcare professionals who may be in a position to identify giftedness.

Recommendation 10: Identification toolkit for early childhood educators 94

That the Victorian Government develop a toolkit, including checklists and other information, to assist early childhood educators to identify giftedness.

Recommendation 11: Identification toolkit for teachers 96

That the Victorian Government develop a toolkit, including checklists and other information, to assist teachers to identify giftedness.

Recommendation 12: Identification toolkit for parents 98

That the Victorian Government develop a toolkit, including checklists and other information, to assist parents to identify giftedness.

Recommendation 13: Schools' responsibility to identify gifted students 99

That the Victorian Government, through the Victorian policy and the model school policy on the education of gifted students, stipulate that schools have a responsibility to identify their gifted students.

Recommendation 14: Information on identifying gifted students from backgrounds of educational disadvantage 106

That the Victorian Government include in toolkits and other information and resources on identifying giftedness, strategies for identifying gifted students from backgrounds of educational disadvantage.

Recommendation 15: Targeted information on identifying giftedness for schools in disadvantaged areas 106

That the Victorian Government provide targeted information and resources about identifying giftedness to schools with significant numbers of students from backgrounds of educational disadvantage.

Recommendation 16: Schools' responsibility to provide for gifted students 108

The Victorian Government, through the Victorian policy and the model school policy on the education of gifted students, require schools to provide appropriate educational provisions for any student identified as gifted.

Chapter 5: Strategies for educating gifted students: What works?

Recommendation 17: Policy support for personalised learning 112

That the Victorian Government, through the Victorian policy and the model school policy on the education of gifted students, emphasise the importance of providing personalised learning for gifted students in all Victorian schools.

Recommendation 18: Information for teachers and schools about strategies for educating gifted students 112

That the Victorian Government provide information and support for teachers and schools about strategies for educating gifted students, including:

- individual learning plans
- curriculum differentiation
- acceleration, particularly year level acceleration
- ability grouping, including vertical timetabling
- enrichment and enhancement.

Recommendation 19: Guidelines for year level acceleration 118

That the Victorian Government develop and promote guidelines for year level acceleration.

Recommendation 20: Virtual school for gifted students 127

That the Victorian Government utilise technology to establish a virtual school to provide extended learning opportunities for gifted students throughout the state.

Recommendation 21: Policy support for links between schools..... 129

That the Victorian Government, through the Victorian policy and the model school policy on the education of gifted students, emphasise the importance of schools forming links with other schools to enhance provision for gifted students.

Recommendation 22: Supporting schools to establish links..... 129

That the Victorian Government encourage and support schools to establish links with other schools to enhance provision for gifted students.

Recommendation 23: Mentoring program for gifted students 130

That the Victorian Government, in consultation with students, parents, schools, teachers, community, business and industry, establish a mentoring program for gifted students that includes opportunities for virtual mentoring.

Recommendation 24: Increased collaboration with community, business and industry..... 132

That the Victorian Government facilitate links between schools and community, business and industry to provide opportunities for gifted students.

Recommendation 25: Improving the evidence base 135

That the Victorian Government play a leadership role in promoting research in the field of gifted education, including through collaboration with universities.

Recommendation 26: Indigenous education policies that promote high achievement 143

That the Victorian Government continue to support high achievement among Indigenous students through targeted education policies.

Recommendation 27: Supporting The Aspiration Initiative..... 143

That the Victorian Government monitor The Aspiration Initiative, with a view to further supporting this program.

Recommendation 28: Supporting a Koorie academy..... 143

That the Victorian Government support the creation of a Koorie academy.

Recommendation 29: Information for teachers and schools about catering for twice exceptional students 145

That the Victorian Government provide targeted information and support to teachers and schools about catering for twice exceptional students.

Chapter 6: Improving early childhood and primary school education for gifted students

Recommendation 30: Guidelines for early entry to primary school 153

That the Victorian Government develop and promote a clear, consistent and unambiguous set of guidelines for early entry to primary school.

Recommendation 31: Policy emphasis on catering for gifted students in every Victorian primary school classroom..... 161

That the Victorian Government, through the Victorian policy and model school policy on the education of gifted students, emphasise the importance of providing personalised learning for every gifted student in every Victorian primary school classroom.

Chapter 7: Improving gifted education programs in secondary schools

Recommendation 32: Review of SEAL Program 185

That the Victorian Government undertake a comprehensive review of the SEAL Program, with a particular focus on the quality and consistency of the Program.

Recommendation 33: Regular evaluations of SEAL Program..... 185

That the Victorian Government undertake regular evaluations of the SEAL Program.

Recommendation 34: Review of selective entry, SEAL and specialist school selection processes to ensure equitable access..... 193

That the Victorian Government undertake a review of the selection criteria and processes for selective entry, SEAL and specialist schools to ensure that gifted students from all backgrounds have access to these schools.

Recommendation 35: Promoting selective entry, SEAL and specialist schools in disadvantaged areas 194

That the Victorian Government promote selective entry, SEAL and specialist schools to communities, schools, parents and students in areas with high levels of educational disadvantage.

Recommendation 36: Outreach by selective entry and specialist schools 195

That the Victorian Government work with selective entry and specialist schools to provide increased access to learning opportunities for students who are not enrolled at these schools, including through exchange programs, holiday programs and mentoring opportunities.

Recommendation 37: Early entry to university..... 199

That the Victorian Government work with universities to ensure admission policies facilitate early access to university for gifted students in appropriate cases.

Chapter 8: Teacher education and training

Recommendation 38: Pre-service training for early childhood educators..... 208

That the Victorian Government work with universities and TAFE colleges to provide increased opportunities for pre-service early childhood educators to learn about giftedness.

Recommendation 39: Professional learning for early childhood educators..... 208

That the Victorian Government develop and implement a professional learning package on giftedness for early childhood educators.

Recommendation 40: Opportunities for pre-service teachers to work with gifted students 214

That the Victorian Government work with universities to provide increased opportunities for pre-service teachers to work with gifted students as part of their teaching placements.

Recommendation 41: Increasing professional learning opportunities in gifted education 223

That the Victorian Government provide and promote increased professional learning opportunities on gifted education, including online, and support teachers to attend.

Recommendation 42: Policy support for professional learning in gifted education.. 223

That the Victorian Government, through the Victorian policy and the model school policy on the education of gifted students, emphasise the importance of teacher professional learning.

Recommendation 43: Scholarships for postgraduate study in gifted education 224

That the Victorian Government provide scholarships for teachers to undertake postgraduate study in gifted education.

Recommendation 44: Other support for postgraduate study in gifted education..... 224

That the Victorian Government support schools to support teachers to undertake postgraduate study in gifted education.

Recommendation 45: Opportunities for teachers to undertake placements in schools with gifted education programs 225

That the Victorian Government implement a scheme to provide opportunities for teachers to undertake placements or exchanges in schools with gifted education programs.

Recommendation 46: Policy support for greater teacher participation in gifted education programs within schools 225

That the Victorian Government, through the model school policy on the education of gifted students, encourage schools to provide increased opportunities to all teachers to teach as part of gifted education programs within the school.

Recommendation 47: Education for school leaders 227

That the Victorian Government provide information and education on gifted education to all school leaders.

Chapter 9: Supporting teachers and schools

Recommendation 48: Policy support for inter-school and intra-school gifted education teacher networks 234

That the Victorian Government, through the Victorian policy and the model school policy on the education of gifted students, emphasise the importance of teacher networks for gifted education teachers both within and between schools.

Recommendation 49: Supporting inter-school gifted education teacher networks... 234

That the Victorian Government support the establishment of gifted education teacher networks between schools from all school sectors.

Recommendation 50: Policy support for gifted education coordinators in schools . 236

That Victorian Government, through the model school policy on the education of gifted students, emphasise the importance of schools having a gifted education coordinator.

Recommendation 51: Supporting gifted education coordinators in schools..... 236

That the Victorian Government support schools to have a gifted education coordinator.

Recommendation 52: Supporting professional learning for gifted education coordinators 236

That the Victorian Government support school gifted education coordinators to undertake professional learning and postgraduate study in gifted education.

Recommendation 53: Gifted education advisor 237

That the Victorian Government employ a gifted education advisor, whose role is to provide expert information, support and advice to teachers, schools and parents about identifying and catering for gifted students.

Recommendation 54: Access to information, research and resources for teachers. 238

That the Victorian Government provide information, research and practical resources on gifted education for Victorian teachers and schools, including online where possible.

Chapter 10: Supporting gifted students and their families

Recommendation 55: Policy support for supporting social and emotional needs of gifted students 249

That the Victorian Government, through the Victorian policy and the model school policy on the education of gifted students, emphasise the importance of addressing the social and emotional needs of gifted students, including through information, counselling and networks of 'like minds'.

Recommendation 56: Information about giftedness for gifted students..... 249

That the Victorian Government provide information about giftedness for gifted students, including through schools and online.

Recommendation 57: Providing opportunities for gifted students to connect with like minds 249

That the Victorian Government work with schools to provide opportunities for gifted students to meet and connect with each other, including online.

Recommendation 58: Access to information, research and resources for parents... 259

That the Victorian Government provide information, research and resources for parents on giftedness and gifted education, including online where possible.

Recommendation 59: Toolkit for parents on educating gifted children 259

That the Victorian Government develop a comprehensive toolkit for parents incorporating a broad range of information about giftedness and educating a gifted child.

Recommendation 60: Tailored information and resources for parents facing particular challenges 259

That the Victorian Government, in developing information and resources for the parents of gifted children, give special consideration to the needs of the parents of gifted students from backgrounds of educational disadvantage, the parents of twice exceptional children and parents who are home educating their gifted children.

Recommendation 61: Policy emphasis on collaborative partnerships between schools and parents 259

That the Victorian Government, through the Victorian policy and the model school policy on the education of gifted students, emphasise the importance of collaborative partnerships between schools and parents.

Recommendation 62: Support for gifted education support groups..... 259

That the Victorian government provide support for groups and organisations that support the parents of gifted students.

Recommendation 63: Policy emphasis on creating school cultures that celebrate achievements in all domains 264

That the Victorian Government, through the Victorian policy and the model school policy on the education of gifted students, emphasise the importance of schools celebrating high achievement in all domains.

Recommendation 64: Education campaign for schools about giftedness 264

That the Victorian Government, in consultation with students, parents, teachers, schools and other relevant stakeholders, develop and implement an education campaign for schools about giftedness.

Recommendation 65: Policy emphasis on promoting understanding of the aims of gifted education provisions 264

That the Victorian Government, through the model school policy on the education of gifted students, emphasise the importance of educating the entire school community about the aims of any provisions for gifted students.

Glossary

Ability grouping	Grouping students together according to ability instead of age.
Acceleration	Moving students through an educational program at a faster than usual rate or younger than typical age.
ACER	Australian Council for Educational Research, an independent not-for-profit organisation that develops and administers assessments to identify academically able students.
Bright Futures	A policy on the education of gifted and talented students that operated in Victoria between 1995 and 2001.
CHIP	Children of high intellectual potential.
Curriculum differentiation	Adapting the usual curriculum in order to meet an individual student's specific learning needs.
DECV	Distance Education Centre Victoria, a government school that provides distance education for students from Prep to Year 12.
DEECD	Department of Education and Early Childhood Development.
Early entry to primary school	A student enters primary school at a younger age than the prescribed age.
Early entry to tertiary education	A student enters tertiary education at a younger age than their peers.
EMA	Education Maintenance Allowance, a benefit provided to low-income families to help with educational costs.
Enrichment	Activities and learning opportunities that supplement the curriculum, for example chess clubs and music lessons.
Extension	Any activity that extends classroom learning and deepens students' knowledge, understanding and skills, for example Tournament of Minds.
GERRIC	Gifted Education Research, Resource and Information Centre. GEERIC is located at the University of New South Wales and conducts research and provides information, education and programs in relation to the education of gifted children.
Giftedness	Natural ability in one or more areas.
Individual learning plan	A document that sets out strategies or goals for a student's education based on that student's strengths and weaknesses.
MLC	Methodist Ladies' College, an independent school for girls in Prep to Year 12.

NAPLAN	National Assessment Program—Literacy and Numeracy. NAPLAN assesses all students in Years 3, 5, 7 and 9 using national tests in literacy and numeracy.
PEDS	Parents' Evaluation of Developmental Status, a primary screening tool used by the Universal Maternal and Child Health Service to assess young children's development.
Pre-testing	Testing a student's knowledge level in a subject area prior to commencing studying that area to ascertain how much they already know about that subject.
SEAL Program	Select Entry Accelerated Learning Program. The SEAL Program provides accelerated learning to high-achieving students in participating secondary schools.
Selective entry schools	Schools for high ability students. Admission is through an entrance exam. Victoria has four selective entry high schools catering for students in Years 9 to 12: Melbourne High School; The Mac.Robertson Girls' High School; Nossal High School; and Suzanne Cory High School.
Senate committee	Senate Employment, Workplace Relations, Small Business and Education References Committee, which undertook an inquiry into gifted and talented education in 2001.
Specialist schools	Schools that provide programs for students with a gift, talent or high ability in a particular discipline. There are three specialist schools in Victoria: John Monash Science School; Maribyrnong College; and Victorian College of the Arts Secondary School.
Subject level acceleration	A student moves up a grade (or more) in one subject but stays with their regular class for their other subjects.
Talent	Outstanding performance in an area or areas.
Twice exceptional students	Gifted students who also have a disability such as a learning disability or an autism spectrum disorder.
VAGTC	Victorian Association for Gifted and Talented Children, a voluntary organisation that supports educators, parents and professionals to teach, raise, guide and advocate for gifted and talented children.
VCAA	Victorian Curriculum Assessment Authority, a statutory body which administers Victoria's curriculum frameworks.
VCASS	Victorian College of the Arts Secondary School, a coeducational specialist government school catering for students in Years 7 to 12 with abilities in dance or music.
VCE	Victorian Certificate of Education, the senior secondary school certificate offered at most Victorian schools and undertaken by the majority of senior secondary students.

VELS	Victorian Essential Learning Standards, common state-wide standards that outline the essential learning for all students in Victorian schools from Prep to Year 10.
VIS	Victorian Institute of Sport, a state government funded organisation providing training and support services to Victoria's best athletes.
VTAC	Victorian Tertiary Admissions Centre, the central office that administers the application and offer process for places in tertiary courses at university, TAFE and independent tertiary colleges in Victoria.
Year level acceleration	A student skips an entire grade (or more than one grade).

Chapter 1: Introduction

Key findings

- There are no agreed definitions of giftedness and talent. The Committee has adopted the model of Professor Francoys Gagné. Under this model giftedness refers to natural ability in one or more areas, while talent refers to outstanding performance in an area or areas. Ability transforms into talent through a complex developmental process.
- A student's educational environment plays a key role in influencing the conversion of gifts into talents.
- Gifted students come from all backgrounds and cultural groups.
- There are many domains in which an individual can be gifted. A student who is gifted in one domain, is not necessarily gifted in other domains. Some gifted students may also have a disability such as a learning disability.
- Underachievement appears to be widespread among gifted students. Between 10% and 50% of gifted students will never meet their potential.
- It is impossible to know the number of gifted students in Victorian schools. Estimates range from 23 000 to 85 000.
- Victorian students generally perform well on both national and international achievement tests, although there are some other jurisdictions that perform better.
- Gifted education is increasingly competitive with students and parents shopping around for the best educational options.
- Very few of the recommendations of two previous national reviews of gifted education have been implemented.

Introduction

On 10 February 2011 the Victorian Parliament's Legislative Assembly gave the Education and Training Committee terms of reference to conduct an inquiry into the education of gifted and talented students. The terms of reference ask the Committee to consider current programs and provisions for gifted and talented students, ways to provide more educational opportunities for gifted and talented students and possibilities to enhance support for these students, their parents, school leaders and teachers.

Gifted students are young people with natural ability or potential in an area of human endeavour. However, natural propensity does not automatically translate into high level performance in a field. Rather, gifts need to be nourished in order to become fully realised as outstanding performance, that is, talent.

Gifted students are not a homogenous group. They come from all socioeconomic and cultural backgrounds. Their gifts may be across a vast array of different domains, from academic to creative to interpersonal. A gifted student may have exceptional abilities in some areas but be average, or even below average, in others.

The many different forms in which giftedness manifests itself means that gifted students may not be easy to identify. The difficulty identifying gifted students is intensified by the fact that these students are not necessarily high achievers: they may live in an area where teachers and parents are not looking for gifted students such as a low socioeconomic or rural and regional area; they may have disengaged from education; or they may deliberately mask their abilities in order to fit in with their peers.

Once gifted students are identified new challenges arise. What is the best way to meet these students' special educational needs? How are they best challenged and supported and given every chance to be the very best they can be? How can we make sure that all gifted students throughout Victoria have equal access to the educational opportunities tailored to meet their needs? And how can we ensure that Victorian teachers and schools have the skills, knowledge and support to effectively cater for these students?

These are the issues the Committee grapples with in this report.

The school environment plays a crucial role in facilitating the conversion of a student's gifts into talents. The recommendations in this report provide a blueprint for an education system that effectively caters for the full diversity of gifted and talented students and enables these students to flourish academically, as well as socially and emotionally.

Gifted students are our prospective leaders and innovators. In nurturing their talents we are not only meeting their rights to access an appropriate education, but also ensuring that the future of our society is in good hands.

1.1 An introduction to gifted and talented students

This section introduces the students who are the focus of this report, the gifted and talented.

1.1.1 What are giftedness and talent?

A threshold question for the Committee in its consideration of the education of gifted and talented students is what constitutes giftedness and talent.

Defining giftedness and talent

There are no universally agreed definitions of giftedness and talent. In conducting this Inquiry the Committee was principally guided by the Differentiated Model of Giftedness and Talent developed by Professor François Gagné, a leading authority on giftedness and Honorary Professor of Psychology at the Université du Québec à Montréal. Gagné's model is widely accepted both in Australia and internationally.

Under Gagné's model, giftedness refers to natural ability in one or more areas, while talent refers to outstanding performance in an area or areas.¹ Ability transforms into talent through a complex developmental process.

A feature of Gagné's model is that it recognises giftedness in domains beyond the academic sphere, such as arts, business, leisure, social interaction, sports and technology.

Chapter two explores the various models of giftedness and talent in greater detail.

How does a gift become a talent?

An inherent feature of Gagné's model is that giftedness is only potential and must go through a transformative process in order to become a talent. Thus, a gifted student will not automatically become a talented student.

The factors that influence the conversion of giftedness into talent can be broadly divided into three categories: a student's intrapersonal characteristics; the student's environment; and chance.² Intrapersonal characteristics include factors such as a student's willpower or self-awareness, while environmental factors include elements such as a student's teachers, school or home life.

While there are many external factors that can influence the conversion of a gift to a talent, evidence to the Inquiry suggests that a student's educational environment plays a key role. For example, the Tasmanian Department of Education submitted:

The school represents the most important environmental factor in mediating the development of talent from giftedness. Recognising this critical role for the school points to the need for

¹ François Gagné, 'Transforming gifted into talents: The DMGT as a development theory' in Nicholas Colangelo and Gary Davis (eds) *Handbook of gifted education* (3rd edition, 2003) Pearson Education, 60.

² *ibid.*, 64–65.

teachers to identify the natural abilities of students and, through appropriate learning experiences, support the development of latent talent.³

This report is based on the fundamental premise that teachers and schools play a pivotal role in ensuring that each individual student's innate gifts are transformed into outstanding performance.

1.1.2 What do gifted students look like?

This section paints a picture of what gifted students look like. It provides a foundation on which the Committee builds later in this report in terms of identifying gifted students and designing interventions that meet their special academic and social and emotional needs.

Characteristics of gifted students

Gifted students come from all backgrounds and cultural groups. While it is impossible to create a single image of a gifted student, there are some characteristics and intrapersonal traits that are common to many gifted students. Dr Linda Kreger Silverman, Director of the Gifted Development Centre at the Institute for the Study of Advanced Development in the United States, has identified a range of characteristics of gifted students (see figure one). Silverman suggests that if a child demonstrates more than three-quarters of these traits, it is likely that he or she is gifted.

Figure 1: Characteristics of gifted students⁴

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • reasons well (good thinker) • learns rapidly • has extensive vocabulary • has an excellent memory • has a long attention span (if interested) • sensitive (feelings hurt easily) • shows compassion • perfectionistic • intense 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • judgment mature for age at times • is a keen observer • has a vivid imagination • is highly creative • tends to question authority • has faculty with numbers • good at jigsaw puzzles • morally sensitive • has strong curiosity 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • perseverant when interested • has high degree of energy • prefers older companions or adults • has a wide range of interests • has a great sense of humour • early or avid reader (or loves being read to if too young to read) • concerned with justice, fairness
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This list is consistent with other research in this area, as well as the characteristics of gifted students identified by participants in this Inquiry.⁵

³ Department of Education (Tasmania), *Submission 10*, 5. See also Australian College of Educators (Victorian Branch), *Submission 21*, 2; Ms Debbi Daff, SEAL and Enhancement Coordinator, Sale College, *Submission 70*, 4; Dr Danuta Chessor, Lecturer, School of Psychology, University of Western Sydney, *Submission 76*, 1; Victorian Association for Gifted and Talented Children (VAGTC), *Submission 34*, 11; Mr Mark Smith, Committee member, VAGTC, *Transcript of evidence*, Melbourne, 25 July 2011, 5–6.

⁴ Linda Kreger Silverman, *Characteristics of giftedness scale* (1993) Gifted Development Center. Available at <<http://www.gifteddevelopment.com>> viewed 28 February 2012.

⁵ Maureen Neihart, 'Revised profiles of the gifted: A research based approach' (Paper presented at the VAGTC Conference, Melbourne, 8–9 September 2011); George Betts and Maureen Neihart, 'Profiles of the gifted and talented' 32(2) *Gifted Child Quarterly* 248, 250–251. See also Ms Debbi Daff, *Submission 70*, above n 3, 3–4; Modern Language Teachers' Association of Victoria, *Submission 72*, 1–2; Goldfields Local Learning and Employment Network, *Submission 86*, 3–4; VAGTC, *Submission 34*, 5; Nossal High School, *Submission 57*, 17.

In considering gifted students it is important to recognise that students who are high academic achievers are not necessarily gifted. Dr John Munro, Associate Professor Exceptional Learning and Gifted Education at Melbourne University's Graduate School of Education, explained this distinction to the Committee:

There are some children in a classroom who will learn the ideas I present extremely rapidly. They will learn those ideas, they will internalise them ... There is a second group of students who will learn the ideas at a high level again, but who will be able to think creatively about them and who will take the ideas further. There is a third group of students who come into the classroom already having thought about the ideas I am going to be teaching ... I think one group should be called the high-achieving group or the easily programmed group. They are the group of students who learn extremely efficiently with two or three examples from the content that is being presented. The second group, as I said, will learn in that way and they will be able to take it further, but they will be able to be creative in quite predictable ways ... I would call the third group gifted ... They are more than being creative learners, because they are being creative about a better developed body of knowledge than their peers.⁶

Domains and levels of giftedness

There are many domains in which an individual can be gifted, ranging from maths or information technology to art or sport. A student who is gifted in one domain will not necessarily be gifted in other areas. For example, a student may be gifted in science and be capable of performing well above expectations for their age, while being an average student in all other subjects. Some gifted students may have another exceptionality such as a learning disability or an autism spectrum disorder. These students are often referred to as twice exceptional students.

There are also different levels of giftedness. This means that two students who are gifted in the same field will not necessarily have the same abilities in that field. Intellectually gifted students are commonly classified as mildly, moderately, highly, exceptionally and profoundly gifted. Figure two illustrates the levels of intellectual giftedness as defined by IQ levels and indicates the prevalence of children at these levels.

Figure 2: Levels and prevalence of giftedness⁷

Level	IQ range	Prevalence
Mildly gifted	115–129	1:6–1:40
Moderately gifted	130–144	1:40–1:1 000
Highly gifted	145–159	1:1 000–1:10 000
Exceptionally gifted	160–179	1:10 000–1:1 million
Profoundly gifted	180+	Fewer than 1:1 million

⁶ Associate Professor John Munro, Exceptional Learning and Gifted Education, Graduate School of Education, The University of Melbourne, *Transcript of evidence*, Melbourne, 19 September 2011, 6–7. See also Ms Rhonda Collins, Coordinator, Victorian Affiliated Network of Gifted Support Groups, *Transcript of evidence*, Melbourne, 10 October 2011, 2.

⁷ Miraca Gross, 'Highly gifted young people: Development from childhood to adulthood' in Larisa Shavinina (ed) *International handbook on giftedness* (2009) Springer, 337. See also François Gagné, above n 1, 67.

Underachieving gifted students

Just as not all high achievers are gifted, not all gifted students achieve highly. While there is limited data on the number of gifted students who underachieve, research suggests that somewhere between 10% and 50% of all gifted school students fail to perform at the levels of which they are capable.⁸ A significant number of gifted students leave school before completing Year 12. Again there is no clear data on how many gifted students drop out of secondary education, with estimates ranging from 10% to 40%.⁹

Underachievement may also be an issue among gifted students who are performing well at school, with teachers sometimes failing to recognise that these students have the capacity to complete work at much higher levels than the work they are assigned at school.¹⁰

Underachievement in gifted students is not well understood. The available research suggests that gifted underachievement is influenced by a broad range of factors including school, home, culture and peers.¹¹

1.1.3 How many gifted students are there in Victoria?

While it is not possible to precisely calculate the number of gifted students in Victoria, several participants in this Inquiry provided estimates. The Australian Association for the Education of the Gifted and Talented, a national association representing the interests of gifted children, estimated that there are approximately 400 000 gifted children in schools across Australia.¹² Other submissions suggested Victoria-specific figures ranging from 23 067 to 35 000, based on a presumption that 5% of the student population is gifted.¹³

Any estimate of the number of gifted students in Victoria will vary depending on the definition of giftedness adopted. Under Gagné's Differentiated Model of Giftedness and Talent, up to 10% of the population may be gifted.¹⁴ There are currently 461 162 primary school students and 386 097 secondary school students in Victoria.¹⁵ Therefore, under Gagné's definition there could be approximately 85 000 gifted students in government, independent and Catholic schools across Victoria.

⁸ Lee Wills and John Munro, 'Changing the teaching for the underachieving able child: The Ruyton School experience' in Diane Montgomery (ed) *Able underachievers* (2000) Whurr Publishers, 89; Jeffrey Hoffman, Frances Wasson and Betsy Christianson, 'Personal development for the gifted underachiever' 8(3) *Gifted Child Today* 12, 12; Ken Seeley, 'Gifted students at risk' in Linda Kreger Silverman (ed) *Counseling the gifted and talented* (1993) Love Publishing Company, 264; Wilma Vialle and Karen Rogers, 'Gifted, talented or educationally disadvantaged?' in Chris Forlin (ed) *Future directions for inclusive teacher education: An international perspective* (2012) Routledge, included in *Submission 28 Appendix C*, 3.

⁹ Senate Employment, Workplace Relations, Small Business and Education References Committee, *The education of gifted children* (2001) Commonwealth of Australia, 14. See also Joseph Renzulli and Sunghee Park, 'Gifted dropouts: The who and the why' 44(4) *Gifted Child Quarterly* 261, 261–262.

¹⁰ Sally Reis and Betsy McCoach, 'The underachievement of gifted students: What do we know and where do we go?' 44(3) *Gifted Child Quarterly* 152, 157.

¹¹ *ibid.*, 155–6.

¹² Australian Association for the Education of the Gifted and Talented, 'AAEGT information statement', included in *Submission 28 Appendix A*, 1.

¹³ CHIP Foundation, *Submission 77*, 4; Ms Henriette Boonen-Hackett, *Supplementary submission 26B*, 3.

¹⁴ François Gagné, above n 1, 60.

¹⁵ Department of Education and Early Childhood Development (DEECD), *Summary statistics Victorian schools, February 2011* (2011) DEECD (VIC). Available at <<http://www.education.vic.gov.au/about/publications/newsinfo/factsandfigures.htm>> viewed 21 December 2011.

1.2 The context for this Inquiry

This section explores the social and policy landscape within which this Inquiry takes place.

1.2.1 The policy context

This section introduces the state and national policy contexts for this review. The potential opportunities for further policy development in this area are discussed in chapter three.

State policy

There is no current Victorian policy on the education of gifted and talented students. All other Australian states and territories have developed a policy on the education of these students.

The Victorian Government has previously provided more policy support and guidance on the education of gifted and talented students. Of particular note is Bright Futures, a policy that was implemented in Victoria in 1995.¹⁶ This policy principally aimed to increase educational options for gifted students, support teachers to identify and educate gifted students and foster gifted education networks between schools. The Bright Futures policy was in place until approximately 2001. There has been no gifted education policy in place in Victoria since that time.

National policy

There is also no national policy on the education of gifted and talented students. This is despite the fact that a Senate committee recommended a national gifted education strategy in 2001.¹⁷

Some aspirational guidance in this area is provided by the 2008 Melbourne Declaration on Educational Goals for Young Australians, which sets out a ten year vision for the direction of school education across Australia. The Declaration was developed in collaboration with representatives from the three school sectors and endorsed by all Australian Education Ministers.

The Declaration does not directly refer to gifted and talented students but does contain some relevant provisions, emphasising the importance of promoting cultures of excellence in schools and nurturing every student's talents through teaching methods that focus on individual learning needs.¹⁸ Most significantly, the Declaration asserts a commitment to providing equitable learning opportunities for all students and ensuring that all students are provided with the opportunity to reach their full potential.

¹⁶ Directorate of School Education (Victoria), *Bright futures: A policy statement to support gifted students* (1995) DSE (VIC).

¹⁷ Senate Employment, Workplace Relations, Small Business and Education References Committee, above n 9, 99–100.

¹⁸ Ministerial Council on Education, Employment, Training and Youth Affairs, *Melbourne declaration on educational goals for young Australians* (2008) MCEETYA, 7.

1.2.2 How do Victorian students compare?

Research shows that, in general, Victorian students perform well on a range of national and international comparative tests.

Victorian students scored well on the 2011 National Assessment Program—Literacy and Numeracy (NAPLAN) tests. NAPLAN tests the literacy and numeracy skills of all students across Australia in Years 3, 5, 7 and 9. While Victorian students rated highly in the NAPLAN tests, they were generally outperformed by students in New South Wales and the Australian Capital Territory.¹⁹ However, Victoria consistently had a larger percentage of students performing at the highest levels compared to the national averages.

Two international tests are commonly used to compare the performance of Australian students with students around the globe:

- The Trends in International Mathematics and Science Study (TIMSS) is an international comparative assessment of mathematical and scientific achievement among Year 4 and Year 8 students.
- The Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) is an international survey of the reading, mathematical and scientific knowledge of 15-year-olds.

Victorian students generally perform well on both tests. The 2007 TIMSS results show that the proportion of Victorian students performing at advanced levels in mathematics and science are above average. However, there are other jurisdictions, both nationally and internationally, with significantly more students performing at the highest levels, for example the Australian Capital Territory, Hong Kong and Singapore.²⁰

The 2009 PISA results show that, while generally Australian students score highly, again there are jurisdictions that perform better, as illustrated by figure three. In addition, the proportion of Australian students—but not Victorian students—achieving at the top levels in reading literacy and mathematical literacy has declined between 2000 and 2009.²¹ The reason for the decline in the number of Australian students performing highly on this test is unclear. Professor Geoff Masters, Chief Executive Officer of the Australian Council for Educational Research, told the Committee:

Nobody knows exactly what is responsible for the decline ... what we do know is that over the past decade there has been a decline at the top end in reading and mathematics. One of the hypotheses is that, because we are now so focused on making sure that all students achieve at least minimally acceptable levels, schools have taken their eyes off extending very high-achieving students.²²

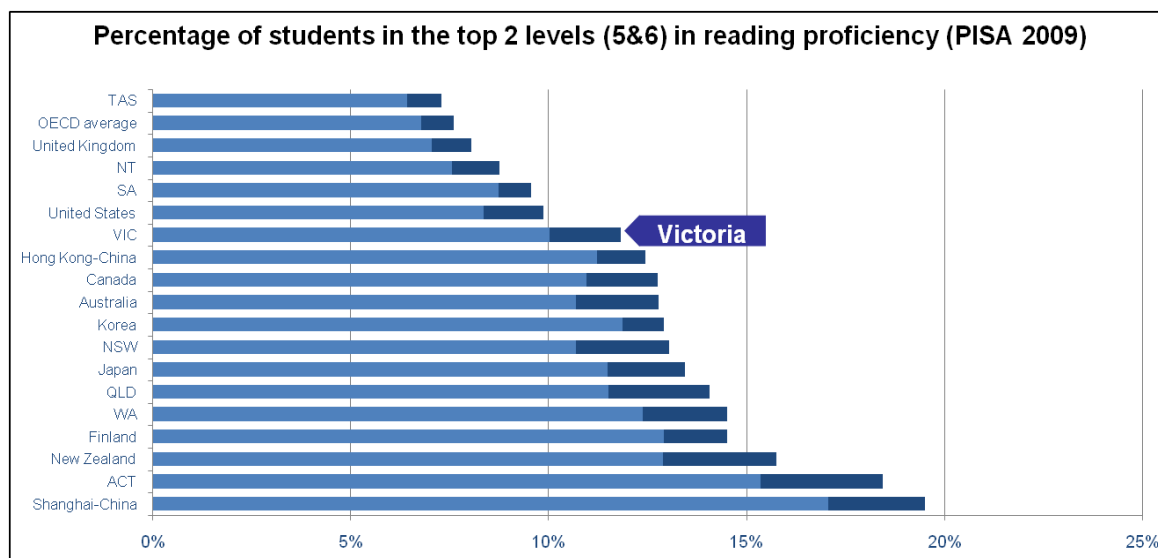
¹⁹ Australian Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting Authority, *2011 National Assessment Program – Literacy and numeracy. Achievement in reading, persuasive writing, language conventions and numeracy: National Report for 2011* (2011) ACARA.

²⁰ Sue Thomson et al, *Highlights from TIMSS 2007 from Australia's perspective: Highlights from the full report, Taking a closer look at mathematics and science in Australia* (2008) Australian Council for Educational Research (ACER).

²¹ Sue Thomson et al, *Challenges for Australian education: Results from PISA 2009: The PISA 2009 assessment of students' reading, mathematical and scientific literacy* (2010) ACER, 123, 127, 197, 199.

²² Professor Geoff Masters, Chief Executive Officer, ACER, *Transcript of evidence*, Melbourne, 25 July 2011, 2.

Figure 3: Proportion of students achieving at the highest levels in reading literacy in PISA 2009²³



Many participants in this Inquiry highlighted that these test results show that there is room to improve Victoria's performance. Mr Ian Burrage, General Manager of the Education and Policy Research Division at the Department of Education and Early Childhood Development, commented:

Victoria is a high-performing jurisdiction ... but relative to the highest performing jurisdictions we have a long way to go, and we would not step away from acknowledging that.²⁴

1.2.3 Gifted education in a competitive marketplace

This Inquiry takes place against a background of an increasingly competitive education market. Many students no longer attend their local school, with students and their families frequently seeking out schools that will cater for particular needs and interests. Mr Colin Simpson, Principal of the Victorian College of the Arts Secondary School, told the Committee:

People don't just use the local school now for a number of reasons ... People shop around for schools and we have seen that growth of shopping for schools and people look for outstanding places for their children to go to school.²⁵

The evidence received by the Committee shows that gifted education is an intensely competitive area, with gifted and talented students and their parents shopping around to find the best educational options. Many gifted and talented students travel long distances to attend their preferred school. For example, Felicity, the parent of a gifted

²³ Ian Burrage, General Manager, Education Policy and Research Division, DEECD, *Inquiry into the education of gifted and talented students*, supplementary evidence received 21 July 2011, 3.

²⁴ Mr Ian Burrage, General Manager, Education and Policy Research Division, DEECD, *Transcript of evidence*, Melbourne, 25 July 2011, 2. See also DEECD, *Submission 58*, 3; The Mathematical Association of Victoria, *Submission 68*, 1; Catholic Education Office Melbourne, *Submission 87*, 5; Victorian Catholic Schools Parent Body, *Submission 51*, 2; Dr Susan Nikakis, Education Officer, Gifted and Talented, Catholic Education Office Melbourne, *Transcript of evidence*, Melbourne, 12 September 2011, 6.

²⁵ Mr Colin Simpson, Principal, Victorian College of the Arts Secondary School, *Transcript of evidence*, Southbank, 15 August 2011, 3.

child, told the Committee 'currently I do a 1½-hour round trip to take my daughter to primary school, because they at least have some notion of how to handle her'.²⁶

Parents participating in this Inquiry reported a willingness for their gifted child to change schools if a school failed to meet the child's educational needs.²⁷ This includes moving between the three school sectors, and even home schooling.

There also appears to be growing competition between some schools to attract high-performing students, with many schools actively promoting their programs for gifted and high-ability students.²⁸

1.2.4 What other work has been done in this area?

This Inquiry is preceded by two previous reviews of the education of gifted and talented children at a national level. The Senate Select Committee on the Education of Gifted and Talented Children published its report in 1988.²⁹ This was followed by the report of the Senate Employment, Workplace Relations, Small Business and Education References Committee in 2001.³⁰

Both reports found that the needs of many gifted and talented students were not being met and that the educational provisions in Australia at that time were not enabling gifted students to realise their full potential. Common themes in both Committees' recommendations include:

- the need to recognise the special educational needs of gifted and talented students
- the importance of teacher education and professional learning
- the necessity of targeted interventions to improve the identification of gifted students from backgrounds of educational disadvantage such as Indigenous students and students from low socioeconomic backgrounds
- the need for more research into and resources on gifted education.

In her introduction to the 2001 report, the Committee's Chair, Senator Jacinta Collins, noted that little progress had been made between 1988 and 2001 in terms of improving

²⁶ Felicity, parent, *Transcript of evidence*, Melbourne, 19 September 2011, 20. See also Name withheld, *Submission 94*, 1; Marley, Year 11 student, Box Hill High School, *Transcript of evidence*, Box Hill, 29 August 2011, 3; Keely, Year 11+ student, Box Hill High School, *Transcript of evidence*, Box Hill, 29 August 2011, 3; Lara, Year 12 student, Bendigo Senior Secondary College, *Transcript of evidence*, Bendigo, 4; Ms Vanessa Reynolds, Gifted Education Coordinator, Box Hill High School, *Transcript of evidence*, Box Hill, 29 August 2011, 4; Mr Rob Carroll, Director, Sports Academy, Maribyrnong College, *Transcript of evidence*, Maribyrnong, 29 August 2011, 3.

²⁷ Ms Wendy White, parent, Box Hill High School, *Transcript of evidence*, Box Hill, 29 August 2011, 2; Ms Kim Steere, *Submission 61*, 2; Names withheld, *Submission 45*, 2; Ms Rhonda Allen, *Submission 14*, 2; Ms Sonia Fullerton, *Submission 33*, 1.

²⁸ Mr Neil Davis, Acting Principal, Box Hill High School, *Transcript of evidence*, Box Hill, 29 August 2011, 2; VAGTC, *Submission 34*, 4; Victorian Association of State Secondary Principals, *Submission 27*, 2; Maroondah Gifted Children's Parents' Association, *Submission 98*, 9.

²⁹ Senate Select Committee on the Education of Gifted and Talented Children, *Education of gifted and talented children* (1988) Australian Government Publishing Service.

³⁰ Senate Employment, Workplace Relations, Small Business and Education References Committee, above n 9.

education for gifted and talented students.³¹ Although some advancements have been made since 2001, notably the development of policies on gifted and talented students at a state and territory level, the present Inquiry revealed considerable stakeholder frustration at the continued failure to implement many of the recommendations in the 2001 report.³²

1.3 The scope of this Inquiry

The terms of reference for this Inquiry require the Committee to consider the education of gifted and talented students in Victoria. The terms of reference ask the Committee to give particular consideration to:

- the scope, coverage and effectiveness of current policies and programs for gifted and talented students
- equity of access to quality educational choices for gifted and talented students and their families
- opportunities to enhance support for gifted and talented students, their parents and carers, as well as school leaders and teachers
- the potential to work across all school sectors and with community, business and industry partners to provide improved educational opportunities for gifted and talented students.

The terms of reference did not specify which educational levels the Committee should consider. In conducting this Inquiry the Committee chose to explore education for gifted and talented students at the early childhood, primary school and secondary school levels. The Committee also considered early admission to university for gifted and talented students but did not consider tertiary education more broadly. The limited evidence the Committee received on this issue suggests that universities are more equipped to challenge and provide appropriate learning experiences for gifted and talented students.³³

The Committee received evidence about gifted education across all three school sectors: government, Catholic and independent. However, most of the evidence received relates to education in the government school sector, where the vast majority of Victorian students are educated, and that sector is the primary focus of this report.

In undertaking this Inquiry the Committee has made a clear distinction between potential (giftedness) and high level performance in a particular field (talent), in keeping with Gagné's model. Much of the discussion and many of the recommendations in this report focus on gifted rather than talented students. This approach recognises that talented students have already realised, or are well on the way to realising, their full potential. In

³¹ Senate Employment, Workplace Relations, Small Business and Education References Committee, above n 9, xi. See also John Geake, 'Senate Select Committee on the education of gifted and talented children: A ten year report card' 8(1) *Australasian Journal of Gifted Education* 57, 57–59.

³² Nossal High School, *Submission* 57, 7; Dr Maria Adams, *Submission* 65, 2; Ms Rhonda Collins, *Submission* 110, 7; Faculty of Education, Australian Catholic University, *Submission* 13, 3.

³³ Ms Caelli Greenbank, student, *Transcript of evidence*, Melbourne, 19 September 2011, 3; Ms Colleen Carapetis, Past committee member, Gifted Support Network, *Transcript of evidence*, Melbourne, 12 September 2011, 2.

focusing on gifted students, the Committee acknowledges that these students need targeted support and intervention to help develop their gifts into talents.

1.4 The Inquiry process

The Committee called for public submissions to this Inquiry in March 2011. The call for submissions was advertised in *The Age*, *The Herald Sun*, DEECD's *Inspire* magazine and nine regional newspapers throughout Victoria.

The Committee also placed an article about the Inquiry in *Inspire* magazine in May 2011.

The Chair of the Committee wrote directly to over 200 key stakeholders inviting submissions to the Inquiry. These stakeholders included government agencies, schools, parent groups, teachers' organisations and academics. The Committee received 118 written submissions to the Inquiry. A list of stakeholders who made a submission is at appendix A.

The Committee held ten public hearings on 25 and 26 July 2011; 15 and 29 August 2011; 12, 19 and 20 September 2011; 10 October 2011; 20 February 2012; and 20 March 2012. In addition, the Committee held a forum for primary school principals on 12 September 2011, which was organised in partnership with the Victorian Principals Association. The Committee also hosted a forum for the parents of gifted and talented students on 19 September 2011, inviting parents who had expressed interest in the Inquiry by making a submission or observing the public hearings. The Committee was also privileged to receive oral evidence from visiting Israeli educational expert, Rabbi David Samson, on 20 February 2012.

To inform its consideration of gifted education, the Committee visited six schools in Melbourne: Camelot Rise Primary School, Box Hill High School, The Mac.Robertson Girls' High School, Maribyrnong High School, Nossal High School and the Victorian College of the Arts Secondary School. At each of these schools the Committee toured the facilities and took evidence from teachers, school leaders, and, in some schools also spoke to students, school councillors and parents.

Appendix B lists the participants who gave evidence to the Committee during the public hearings and forums. In recognition of the sensitivity of this issue and the vulnerability of some of the Inquiry participants, the Committee has identified some participants who gave oral evidence to the Committee by first name only, including all students under the age of 18 years, as well as participants in the Committee's Parents' Forum. The names of some parents who made written submissions to the Inquiry have also been withheld at their request.

The Committee's secretariat conducted an extensive literature review on the education of gifted and talented students. The bibliography at the end of this report sets out the results of this work.

Finally, representatives of the Committee also attended a number of conferences and other events, including the 2011 conference of the Victorian Association of Gifted and Talented Children and a workshop with Canadian gifted education expert Professor Gagné. The events attended are set out in appendix C.

1.5 Outline of this report

This report is divided into eleven chapters:

- This chapter, chapter one, is an introduction to the Inquiry, providing an overview of the Inquiry's scope, context and conduct.
- Chapter two introduces the concept of giftedness. It also introduces gifted education in Victoria, outlining the current framework for educating gifted and students and key programs and provisions.
- Chapter three sets out the current framework for educating gifted students in Victoria. It considers why special programs and provisions are needed for gifted students and proposes a new policy framework for gifted education in Victoria.
- Chapter four looks at the identification of gifted students, including the different methods for identifying giftedness and ways to increase identification across Victoria.
- Chapter five discusses the effectiveness of various strategies for educating gifted and talented students. It also considers how to ensure that all gifted students in Victoria have equal access to gifted education opportunities.
- Chapter six looks at gifted education at the early childhood and primary school stages. It considers the current Victorian provision and ways to improve education at these formative stages.
- Chapter seven explores gifted education programs in Victorian secondary schools, including the Selective Entry Accelerated Learning (SEAL) Program, selective entry schools and specialist schools. It also considers ways to enhance gifted education at the secondary school level.
- Chapter eight looks at teacher education and training, identifying the education and training that teachers and school leaders need to equip them to appropriately provide for gifted students.
- Chapter nine considers the support that teachers and schools need to effectively cater for gifted students.
- Chapter ten examines the support needed by gifted students and their families and considers ways to enhance support for these groups.
- Chapter eleven contains a brief conclusion to the report.

Chapter 2: An introduction to giftedness and gifted education in Victoria

Key findings

- There are many different models and definitions of giftedness and talent. The Committee has adopted the model of Professor Francoys Gagné.
- There are two frameworks that provide the basis for educating all Victorian students, including gifted students: the Victorian Early Years Learning and Development Framework and the Victorian Essential Learning Standards. From 2013, the roll out of a new nation-wide curriculum will commence.
- Gifted education in Victoria is currently very ad hoc and predominantly provided on a school-by-school basis.
- There is no central database or list of gifted education programs and provisions in Victorian schools. This made it difficult for the Committee to ascertain the true extent of gifted education in Victoria at present.
- There appears to be very limited provision for gifted students at the early childhood stage and in government primary schools.
- Most gifted education programs in government schools appear to be focused in the secondary school years.
- Victoria's independent and Catholic schools also provide for gifted students, but the Committee received limited evidence about education in these sectors.
- There are a range of competitions, private user-pays programs and programs run by universities that provide extended learning opportunities for gifted students.
- Some Victorian parents choose to home school their gifted children.

An introduction to giftedness and gifted education in Victoria

This chapter outlines the major models of giftedness and talent. It also provides an overview of gifted education in Victoria, firstly by outlining the curriculum frameworks under which all Victorian students are educated and, secondly by providing a snapshot of current gifted education provision in this state.

2.1 Concepts of giftedness and talent

As noted in the previous chapter, there are no universally agreed definitions of giftedness or talent. This section examines the most prominent models and definitions.

2.1.1 Gagné's Differentiated Model of Giftedness and Talent

The Differentiated Model of Giftedness and Talent was developed by Professor Francoys Gagné, a leading authority on giftedness and Honorary Professor of Psychology at the Université du Québec à Montréal. Gagné's model is widely utilised both in Australia and internationally.³⁴ It was also the most frequently referenced and supported model in the evidence to this Inquiry.³⁵ As noted in chapter one, the Committee has adopted Gagné's model for the purposes of this report.

Gagné's model denotes giftedness as natural ability or potential and talent as outstanding performance or achievement. As discussed in the previous chapter, an important feature of Gagné's model is the notion of talent development: that giftedness must go through a developmental process to be transformed into talent. The factors that

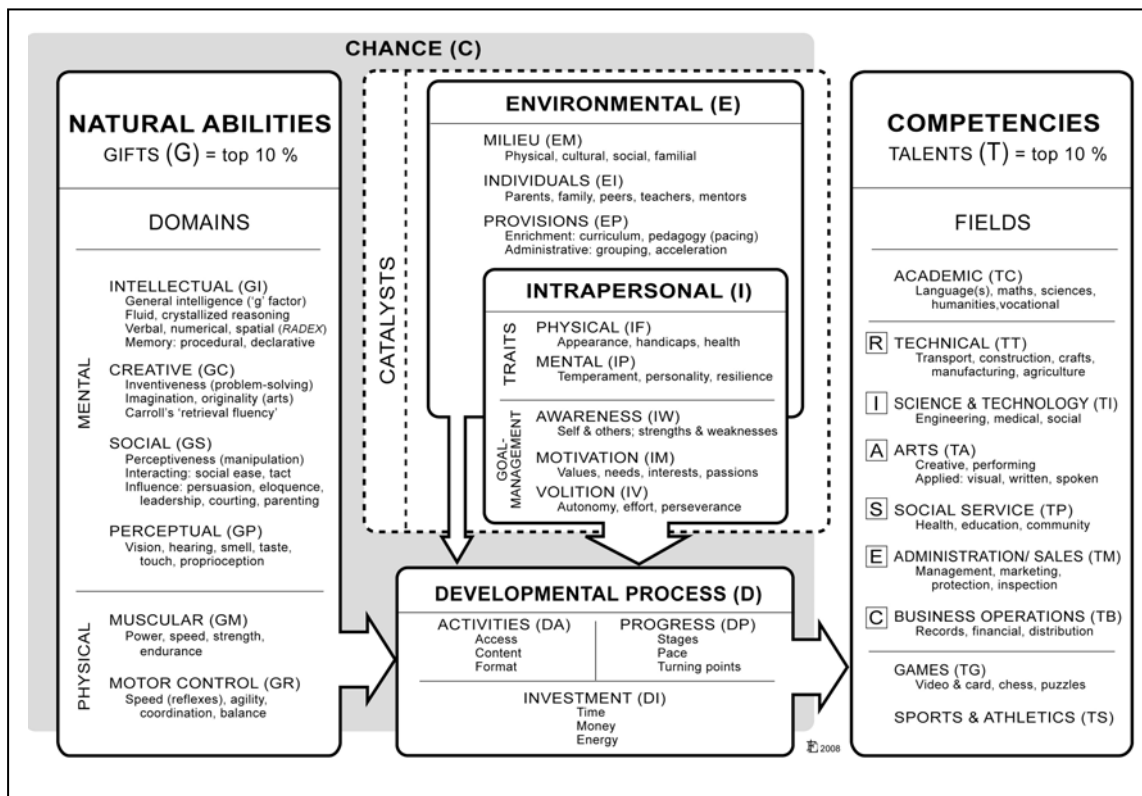
³⁴ Department of Education and Early Childhood Development (DEECD), *Submission 58*, 4; Mr Ian Burrage, General Manager, Education and Policy Research Division, DEECD, *Transcript of evidence*, Melbourne, 25 July 2011, 2–3; Department of Education and Children's Services (South Australia), *Submission 3*, 5; Department of Education (Tasmania), *Submission 10*, 5.

³⁵ Faculty of Education, Australian Catholic University, *Submission 13*, 10; Australian Association for the Education of the Gifted and Talented, *Submission 28*, 2; Victorian Association for Gifted and Talented Children (VAGTC), *Submission 34*, 11; Ms Monica Jago, SEAL Program Coordinator, Wangaratta High School, *Submission 48*, 9; Victorian College of the Arts Secondary School (VCASS), *Submission 56*, 11; Nossal High School, *Submission 57*, 15–16; Ms Pam Lyons, Coordinator, Able Learners' Enrichment Program, La Trobe University, *Submission 71*, 1–2; Principals' Association of Victorian Catholic Secondary Schools (PAVCSS), *Submission 74*, 1; Dr Debora Lipson and Ms Barbara Black, *Submission 78*, 2; Box Hill High School, *Submission 81*, 3; Suzanne Cory High School, *Submission 85*, 4–5; Goldfields Local Learning and Employment Network (LLEN), *Submission 86*, 3; Catholic Education Office Melbourne, *Submission 87*, 1–2; Dr John Munro, Associate Professor Exceptional Learning and Gifted Education, Melbourne Graduate School of Education, The University of Melbourne, *Submission 96*, 1; Australian Science Innovations, *Submission 102*, 6–7; Dr Leonie Kronborg, Coordinator of Gifted Education Assessment Clinic, Krongold Centre, Faculty of Education, Monash University, *Submission 104*, 3–4; Victorian Association of Catholic Primary School Principals, *Submission 111*, 1; Maroondah Gifted Children's Parents' Association, *Submission 98*, 2.

shape this developmental process include the child’s intrapersonal characteristics such as motivation and personality, as well as environmental factors such as family environment and learning experiences.

Notably, Gagné’s model asserts that giftedness and talent can exist outside the intellectual or academic domains. According to Gagné, gifted students can have natural abilities in the form of intellectual abilities, creative abilities, socio-affective abilities and sensorimotor abilities. Talent may develop from these abilities and manifest as developed skills in the fields of academics, arts, business, leisure, social affection, sports or technology. Gagné’s model is illustrated in figure four.

Figure 4: Gagné’s Differentiated Model of Giftedness and Talent³⁶



2.1.2 Tannenbaum’s Star Model

Another prominent model of giftedness is the Star Model developed by Dr Abraham Tannenbaum of the Teachers’ College at Columbia University. According to Tannenbaum’s model, giftedness in children is a child’s potential to become an adult with a developed talent:

Keeping in mind that developed talent exists primarily in adults, I propose a definition of giftedness in children to denote their potential for becoming critically acclaimed performers or

³⁶ Department of Education (Western Australia), *Characteristics of gifted & talented students*, <<http://www.det.wa.edu.au/curriculum-support/giftedandtalented/detcms/navigation/for-teachers/identification/characteristics-of-gifted---talented-students/?oid=Category-id-4582922>> viewed 2 April 2012.

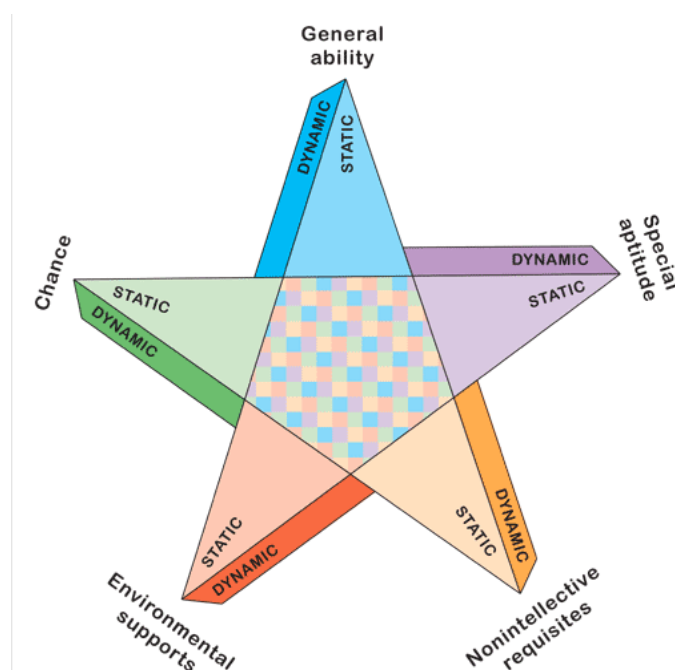
exemplary producers of ideas in spheres of activity that enhance the moral, physical, emotional, social, intellectual, or aesthetic life of humanity.³⁷

Tannenbaum asserts that there are two types of gifted people: producers who produce thoughts and tangibles, and performers who perform staged artistry or human services. According to Tannenbaum, these two kinds of gifted people demonstrate their talent either creatively or proficiently. For example, a producer of tangibles who works creatively might be someone who excels in science by using their imagination, such as an inventor, whereas a producer of tangibles who works proficiently might be someone who excels at a task because of the meticulous way they execute the task, such as a craftsman.

Like Gagné's model, Tannenbaum's conceptualisation explores the process by which ability becomes actual achievement. Tannenbaum identifies five factors that influence this conversion: superior general intellect; distinctive special aptitudes; a supportive array of non-intellective traits or personality traits such as self-concept or motivation; a challenging and facilitative environment; and chance. Each of these factors is made up of static and dynamic subfactors, with static subfactors relating to external factors such as group identity and dynamic subfactors relating to human functioning.

Tannenbaum depicts his conception of giftedness and talent in the form of a star as illustrated in figure five.

Figure 5: Tannenbaum's Star Model³⁸



Two contributors to the Committee's Inquiry, psychologist and counsellor, Dr Glenison Alsop, and the Humanist Society of Victoria, a voluntary organisation concerned with social questions of ethics, identified Tannenbaum's model as their preferred giftedness

³⁷ Abraham Tannenbaum, 'Nature and nurture of giftedness' in Nicholas Colangelo and Gary Davis (eds) *Handbook of gifted education* (3rd edition, 2003) Pearson Education, 45.

³⁸ *ibid.*, 47.

paradigm. Dr Alsop stated that she favoured the Star Model over Gagné's model, which she found 'cumbersome'.³⁹

2.1.3 Renzulli's Three-Ring Conception

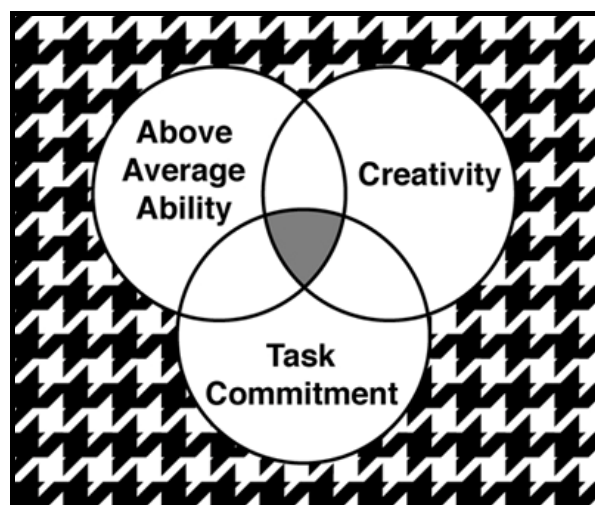
The Three Ring Conception of Giftedness was developed by Professor Joseph Renzulli, Director of the National Research Center on the Gifted and Talented in the Neag School of Education at the University of Connecticut. Renzulli defines giftedness as follows:

Giftedness consists of an interaction among three basic clusters of human traits ... above-average general abilities, high levels of task commitment, and high levels of creativity. Gifted and talented children are those possessing or capable of developing this composite set of traits and applying them to any potentially valuable area of human performance. Children who manifest or are capable of developing an interaction among the three clusters require a wide variety of educational opportunities and services that are not ordinarily provided through regular instructional programs.⁴⁰

Like Gagné and Tannebaum, Renzulli recognises that children with natural abilities will need to have a range of factors in place to develop their gifts into talents.

Figure six illustrates Renzulli concept of giftedness. In this representation, the three rings are the ingredients of giftedness and the houndstooth background represents the interactions between personality and environment, which influence the development of giftedness into actual achievement.

Figure 6: Renzulli's Three-Ring Conception of Giftedness⁴¹



Renzulli's model was not widely cited by participants in this Inquiry. However, Methodist Ladies' College, an independent school for students from Prep to Year 12 located in Melbourne, informed the Committee that it used Renzulli's model as the basis for the development of some gifted programs at the school.⁴²

³⁹ Dr Glenison Alsop, Psychologist and Counsellor, *Submission 54*, 3. See also Humanist Society of Victoria, *Submission 4*, 2.

⁴⁰ Joseph Renzulli, 'What makes giftedness? Reexamining a definition' 60(3) *Phi Delta Kappan* 180, 185.

⁴¹ Joseph Renzulli, 'Conception of giftedness and its relationship to the development of social capital' in Nicholas Colangelo and Gary Davis (eds) *Handbook of gifted education* (3rd edition, 2003) Pearson Education, 76.

⁴² Methodist Ladies' College, *Submission 84*, 1.

2.1.4 Columbus Group definition

The Columbus Group was a collection a collection of parents and psychologists, including Dr Linda Kreger Silverman who is the Director of the Gifted Development Centre in the United States and a leading authority on gifted children. Although the Columbus Group did not develop a model of giftedness, it did set out a definition of giftedness, which is regularly cited and was referenced in several submissions to this Inquiry.⁴³ The Columbus Group defined giftedness as:

asynchronous development in which advanced cognitive abilities and heightened intensity combine to create inner experiences and awareness that are qualitatively different from the norm. This asynchrony increases with higher intellectual capacity. The uniqueness of the gifted renders them particularly vulnerable and requires modifications in parenting, teaching and counselling in order for them to develop optimally.⁴⁴

2.1.5 Other models of giftedness and talent

The above discussion has focused primarily on those models and definitions of giftedness and talent that featured in evidence to this Inquiry. However, there are numerous other models of giftedness and talent. Two other frequently used definitions are worth noting here.

One of the early modern interpretations of giftedness was by Robert DeHaan and Robert Havighurst who identified six domains of giftedness: intellectual ability; creative thinking; scientific ability; social leadership; mechanical skills; and talent in the fine arts.⁴⁵

Also of note is the Multiple Intelligence Theory developed by Professor Howard Gardner, Hobbs Professor of Cognition and Education at the Harvard Graduate School of Education. This theory takes a broad approach to defining giftedness and identifies eight intelligences in which a child can be gifted: linguistic, logical-mathematical, musical, spatial, bodily-kinesthetic, interpersonal, intrapersonal and naturalist.⁴⁶ Existential is an unconfirmed ninth intelligence.⁴⁷ However, some participants in this Inquiry expressed concern about Gardner's theory. In particular, participants feared that, as the model suggests that all students are gifted in some way, its use may result in the dilution of offerings for students who have outstanding gifts in a particular area.⁴⁸

2.2 Victoria's curriculum frameworks and pathways

Victoria's curriculum frameworks provide a basis for educating Victorian students, including the gifted and talented. There are two main curriculum frameworks: the Victorian Early Years Learning and Development Framework and the Victorian Essential

⁴³ VAGTC, *Submission 34*, 12; Maroondah Gifted Children's Parents' Association, *Submission 98*, 2; Gifted Resources, *Submission 113*, 3.

⁴⁴ The Columbus Group, 'Unpublished transcript of the meeting of the Columbus Group in July 1991' in Linda Kreger Silverman (ed) *Counseling the gifted and talented* (1993) Love Publishing Company, 3.

⁴⁵ Robert De Haan and Robert Havighurst, *Educating gifted children* (1957) University of Chicago Press, 4–5. See also Faculty of Education, Australian Catholic University, *Submission 13*, 9.

⁴⁶ Howard Gardner, *Frames of mind: The theory of multiple intelligences* (1983) Basic Books.

⁴⁷ Catya Von Károlyi, Valerie Ramos-Ford and Howard Gardner, 'Multiple intelligences: A perspective on giftedness' in Nicholas Colangelo and Gary Davis (eds) *Handbook of gifted education* (3rd edition, 2003) Pearson Education, 102.

⁴⁸ CHIP Foundation, *Submission 77*, 5; Victorian Affiliated Network of Gifted Support Groups, *Submission 100 Appendix B*, 5.

Learning Standards. The Department of Education and Early Childhood Development (DEECD) informed the Committee that these frameworks provide a firm foundation for the education of Victoria's gifted students:

Victoria's learning frameworks give educators a common structure to develop challenging learning opportunities for their gifted and talented children and young people. The frameworks are easily accessible and create shared language and understanding of learning and development across early childhood services and schools.⁴⁹

In addition to these frameworks, Victoria's two senior secondary certificates—the Victorian Certificate of Education (VCE) and the Victorian Certificate of Applied Learning (VCAL)—facilitate the transition of all young people, including the gifted and talented, into higher education, training and employment.

2.2.1 Victorian Early Years Learning and Development Framework

The Victorian Early Years Learning and Development Framework provides a platform for advancing the learning and development of all Victorian children from birth to eight years of age.⁵⁰ The Framework identifies five early years learning and development outcomes for all children and eight practice principles for early childhood educators. The Framework also emphasises the importance of working closely with children's families. DEECD's submission stated that, 'The framework sets the highest expectations for all children in every community across Victoria, including gifted and talented children.'⁵¹

The Victorian Framework is aligned with nationally agreed early years learning outcomes.

2.2.2 Victorian Essential Learning Standards

The Victorian Essential Learning Standards (VELS) are common state-wide standards that outline the essential learning for all students in Victorian schools from Prep to Year 10.

The Victorian Curriculum Assessment Authority (VCAA), a statutory body that administers the curriculum frameworks, highlighted how VELS support the gifted and talented:

The VELS curriculum encourages a flexible approach to learning that is inclusive of all students including the gifted and talented. It recognises that students learn at different rates and that learning occurs along a developmental continuum rather than by age-based stages. It is designed so that content at any given level need not be constrained to a particular age.⁵²

A new national curriculum is currently being developed through a nation-wide consultative process. Commencing from 2013, nationally consistent curriculum in English, maths, science and history will be included within the structure of VELS.⁵³ The

⁴⁹ DEECD, *Submission 58*, 5.

⁵⁰ DEECD and Victorian Curriculum and Assessment Authority (VCAA), *Victorian early years learning and development framework* (2009) DEECD (VIC) and VCAA.

⁵¹ DEECD, *Submission 58*, 5.

⁵² VCAA, *Submission 8*, 3. See also *ibid*.

⁵³ VCAA, *The Australian Curriculum in Victoria*, <<http://ausvels.vcaa.vic.edu.au/>> viewed 28 February 2012.

new Australian Curriculum will be rolled out progressively to cover a broader range of subject areas, as well as the senior school years.⁵⁴

Both VCAA and the body responsible for developing the new national curriculum, the Australian Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting Authority, emphasised that the flexible approach to learning currently set out in the VELS will be continued as Victoria implements the Australian Curriculum. Ms Lynn Redley, Manager of Curriculum at the Australian Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting Authority, stated:

We are writing a curriculum for all Australians students and we believe that there is sufficient flexibility in the curriculum to cater for gifted and talented children. Teachers have that flexibility ... to take account of the widely different rates at which students develop and learn.⁵⁵

2.2.3 Senior secondary certificates

Victorian students in Years 11 and 12 can elect to undertake either the Victorian Certificate of Education (VCE) or the Victorian Certificate of Applied Learning (VCAL). High-achieving students are able to commence these programs in Years 9 or 10. VCAA told the Committee that this 'provides the opportunity for students to pursue both greater depth and breadth in their programs of study'.⁵⁶

Victorian Certificate of Education

VCE is the senior secondary school certificate offered at most Victorian schools and undertaken by the majority of senior secondary school students. VCE provides students with pathways to further study. VCAA informed the Committee that VCE studies 'allow students to demonstrate the highest level of learning'.⁵⁷

High-ability students have the opportunity to extend themselves beyond the traditional VCE curriculum through participation in the Higher Education Studies Program, which allows students to include a first year higher education subject as part of their VCE. VCAA outlined the benefits of this program:

It offers academic challenge and intellectual stimulation in a broad range of studies, credit towards an undergraduate qualification and experience of higher education institution life an access to those facilities.⁵⁸

VCAA also informed the Committee that it is currently developing an extended investigation study as part of the VCE, which will allow students to undertake advanced research culminating in an extended thesis-style work.

Victorian Certificate of Applied Learning

VCAL is a senior secondary certificate that provides students with the opportunity to complete practical work experience and build their literacy and numeracy skills. VCAA advised the Committee that VCAL offers a range of benefits for gifted and talented students:

⁵⁴ Australian Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting Authority (ACARA), *Australian Curriculum Development Timelines* (October, 2011) ACARA.

⁵⁵ Ms Lynn Redley, Manager, Curriculum, ACARA, *Transcript of evidence*, Canberra, 20 March 2012, 5. See also VCAA, *Submission 8*, 3.

⁵⁶ VCAA, *Submission 8*, 3.

⁵⁷ *ibid.*, 4.

⁵⁸ *ibid.* See also DEECD, *Submission 58*, 5.

the VCAL curriculum builds on and further develops the application of abstract and technical skills, complex problem solving, specialisation of knowledge and the application of generic and employability skills to complex tasks and contexts. It focuses on a high level of interpersonal skills, independent action and achievement of tasks that require decision-making and leadership.⁵⁹

Further, VCAL students also have the opportunity to undertake a Senior Extension (Folio Enhancement) program, which allows them to demonstrate high-level art and design skills through the creation of a portfolio.

Vocational Education and Training

Vocational Education and Training (VET) allows students to pursue vocational studies as part of their VCE or VCAL. VET students complete nationally recognised industry training, which contributes to their VCE or VCAL. VCAA submitted that 'VET programs include structured workplace learning that can enhance the skill development of gifted and talented students'.⁶⁰

2.3 Current programs and provisions for gifted and talented students in Victoria

This section provides an overview of the current educational programs and provisions for gifted and talented students in Victoria. The Committee builds on this foundation in later chapters of this report. In particular, in the next chapter, chapter three, the Committee considers the extent to which the present programs and provisions are effectively catering for Victoria's gifted and talented students.

In attempting to provide a snapshot of current educational opportunities for gifted and talented students, the Committee was constrained by the fact that gifted education in Victoria is predominantly designed at the school level. DEECD's submission highlighted the independence Victorian schools have in all areas of the curriculum, including educating gifted and talented students:

Central to Victoria's education approach is the responsibility placed on all schools to develop curriculum, pedagogy and assessment practices that place students at the centre of learning and development. This includes giving schools the autonomy to create programs and strategies for gifted and talented students ...⁶¹

There is no centralised database or list of gifted education programs and provisions at Victorian schools. Mr Ian Burrage, General Manager of the Education and Policy Research Division at DEECD, told the Committee that the Department does not collect information about programs that schools provide for their gifted students.⁶² However, he went on to emphasise that DEECD expects every school to be identifying and catering for their gifted students:

⁵⁹ VCAA, *Submission 8*, 4. See also DEECD, *Submission 58*, 5.

⁶⁰ VCAA, *Submission 8*, 4–5. See also DEECD, *Submission 58*, 5.

⁶¹ DEECD, *Submission 58*, 7–8.

⁶² Mr Ian Burrage, *Transcript of evidence*, above n 34, 7.

we would expect teachers to be working with kids. We expect them to be assessing students to understand their spread across a continuum—as opposed to thinking about a single year of ability—and to provide extension where it is appropriate.⁶³

There are a range of strategies that can be used to provide for gifted students within the regular classroom environment such as ability grouping, acceleration and curriculum differentiation. These strategies and evidence of their effectiveness are discussed in chapter five.

2.3.1 Early childhood education

The Committee received almost no evidence of targeted programs for gifted and talented students at the early childhood stage. A handful of Inquiry participants reported positive experiences, suggesting that a few individual kindergartens do cater for gifted students. For example, Ms Kim Steere, a parent of a gifted son, informed the Committee:

I was fortunate in that I was able to send him to a Montessori kindergarten. For three years he blossomed under this philosophy which focussed on meeting each individual child's needs, and extending their capabilities. Excellence and high achievement were treated as normal.⁶⁴

However, most of the evidence reflected frustration with the lack of programs and provisions at the early childhood stage. Sonia, a parent of three gifted children who participated in the Parents' Forum hosted by the Committee stated:

There are not any [early childhood programs], to my knowledge. Especially in relation to my second and third children, I am completely aware of the issue. I know they are gifted, and I am completely confident that there is nothing there.⁶⁵

The Committee asked the Victorian Government to provide information about early childhood programs for gifted students. The Minister for Education referred the Committee to the Victorian Early Years Learning and Development Framework (VEYLDF) discussed in section 2.2.1 above. The Minister wrote, 'The VEYLDF sets the highest expectations for all children in every community across Victoria, including gifted and talented children.'⁶⁶

Another way of catering for young gifted students is through early entry to primary school. Under current regulations, a child must be aged at least five by 30 April in the year they start school, however, parents may apply to DEECD to have their child admitted to school early.⁶⁷ The Minister advised that DEECD does not keep data on early entry to primary school but indicated that in 2011, 38 students younger than five years old at 30 April were enrolled at government primary schools in Victoria, up from 34 in 2010.⁶⁸ These figures are derived from the School Census and may capture young students who have transferred from interstate, as well as those granted early school admission.

⁶³ *ibid.*, 8.

⁶⁴ Ms Kim Steere, *Submission 61*, 1. See also Ms Rhonda Allen, *Submission 14*, 1; Melissa, parent, *Transcript of evidence*, Melbourne, 19 September 2011, 6; Ms Carmel Meehan, President, VAGTC, *Transcript of evidence*, Melbourne, 25 July 2011, 11.

⁶⁵ Sonia, parent, *Transcript of evidence*, Melbourne, 19 September 2011, 5. See also Ms Carolyn Priest, Secretary, Gifted Support Network, *Transcript of evidence*, Melbourne, 12 September 2011, 7; Name withheld, *Submission 91*, 1.

⁶⁶ Letter from Minister for Education (Victoria), to Chair, Victorian Parliament Education and Training Committee, 7 February 2012, 3.

⁶⁷ *Education and Training Reform Regulations 2007* (Vic) regs 12B, 12E.

⁶⁸ Letter from Minister for Education (Victoria), above n 66, 5.

The issues surrounding early childhood education and early entry to primary school are discussed further in chapter six.

2.3.2 Primary school education

The evidence received by the Committee shows that provision for gifted and talented students in Victorian primary schools varies significantly between schools.

The Committee received submissions from the Victorian Principals Association, which represents primary school principals and leaders, as well as from two primary schools, Lucknow Primary School in Bairnsdale and Serpell Primary School in Templestowe. In order to gather further evidence about gifted education in Victorian primary schools, the Committee hosted a forum for primary school principals in association with the Victorian Principals Association, which was attended by teachers and school leaders from five primary schools. The Committee also held public hearings with staff and school leaders at two Victorian primary schools, Camelot Rise Primary School in Glen Waverly and Kennington Primary School in Bendigo.

The Committee heard that some primary schools have well-developed gifted education programs and have gained informal reputations for catering for gifted and talented students. Two schools that featured prominently in the evidence from parents were Clifton Hill Primary School and Camelot Rise Primary School.⁶⁹ The Committee was told that some parents are willing move house or travel long distances each day to enable their child attend one of these schools.⁷⁰

The Committee visited Camelot Rise Primary School as part of this Inquiry. The school's Principal, Mr Bruce Cunningham, informed the Committee that approximately 70% of the school's students are performing above the expected level for their age group. Provisions at the school include curriculum differentiation, ability grouping and extension opportunities.⁷¹

The Committee received information about a range of other provisions for gifted students at Victorian primary schools, including:

- Lucknow Primary School in Bairnsdale identifies gifted students using an IQ test. Teachers are then expected to provide for identified students in the classroom. In addition, identified students meet in small groups once a week to participate in a range of challenging tasks.⁷²
- Serpell Primary School in Templestowe operates an Infinite Possibilities Enrichment Program under which parents with skills in particular fields provide workshops and seminars to high-achieving students. Sessions have been run in areas such as infectious diseases and solar energy.⁷³ The school also offers withdrawal programs for high potential students.

⁶⁹ Name withheld, *Submission 75*, 3; Names withheld, *Submission 29*, 4; Ms Maya Panisset, *Submission 31*, 1; Ms Sonia Fullerton, *Submission 33*, 1; Names withheld, *Submission 9*, 5.

⁷⁰ Name withheld, *Submission 75*, 3; Mrs Jo Freitag, Coordinator, Gifted Resources, *Transcript of evidence*, Melbourne, 19 September 2011, 4; Mr Bruce Cunningham, Principal, Camelot Rise Primary School, *Transcript of evidence*, Glen Waverley, 15 August 2011, 7.

⁷¹ Mr Bruce Cunningham, *Transcript of evidence*, above n 70, 2. See also Ms Cris Stavrou Martyn, Year 2 Teacher, Camelot Rise Primary School, *Transcript of evidence*, Glen Waverley, 15 August 2011, 3–4.

⁷² Mr James Mulcahy, Principal, Lucknow Primary School, *Submission 16*, 1–2.

⁷³ Serpell Primary School, *Submission 39*, 1–2.

- Mill Park Heights Primary School employs a Gifted and Talented Coordinator. The school places a strong emphasis on identifying gifted students and currently has approximately 90 students (out of a school population of 1000) in its gifted extension programs.⁷⁴
- Tyabb Primary School employs a Leading Teacher—Learning and Advancement to identify gifted students and to help classroom teachers develop appropriate programs for these students.⁷⁵

Ms Gabrielle Leigh, President of the Victorian Principals Association, told the Committee that many primary schools offer programs ‘like a chess club at lunchtimes, or they might be part of the Tournament of Minds ... or trivia challenges’.⁷⁶ She highlighted that many schools, particularly smaller schools, cannot afford to do more.

There are a number of user-pays programs for gifted students available in Victorian primary schools. The Committee heard that these are often the only provisions available in a school.⁷⁷ These programs are discussed in section 2.3.7 below.

Some secondary schools also offer programs for high-achieving primary school students. The Committee received evidence of two secondary schools providing for gifted primary school students. Belmont High School has permitted high-achieving students from surrounding primary schools to enrol in single subjects at the high school. For instance, a student enrolled in Year 5 at a nearby primary school completed VCE maths at Belmont High School.⁷⁸ John Monash Science School, a specialist school in Clayton, runs a science program for local primary school students who have been identified by their teachers as passionate about science.⁷⁹

Gifted education in Victorian primary schools and, in particular, opportunities to improve the current offerings, is explored further in chapter six.

2.3.3 Secondary school education

The current Victorian programs and provisions for gifted and talented students are heavily concentrated at the secondary school level. The major government school initiatives at this level are selective entry schools, the Select Entry Accelerated Learning Program and specialist schools. In addition, as at the primary school level, some individual secondary schools have developed specialist gifted programs.

This section provides an introduction to the present provision for gifted students in Victorian secondary schools. This is built on in chapter seven, where the Committee considers options to enhance the existing offerings.

⁷⁴ Ms Patricia Pace, Leading Teacher, Mill Park Heights Primary School, *Transcript of evidence*, Melbourne, 12 September 2011, 2–3.

⁷⁵ Mr Greg Lacey, Principal, Lyndhurst Primary School, *Transcript of evidence*, Melbourne, 12 September 2011, 7.

⁷⁶ Ms Gabrielle Leigh, President, Victorian Principals Association (VPA), *Transcript of evidence*, Melbourne, 12 September 2011, 5. See also VPA, *Submission 105*, 2.

⁷⁷ Maroondah Gifted Children’s Parents’ Association, *Submission 98*, 6; Box Hill High School, *Submission 81*, 5.

⁷⁸ Belmont High School, *Submission 5*, 1.

⁷⁹ Mr Peter Corkill, Principal, John Monash Science School, *Transcript of evidence*, Melbourne, 12 September 2011, 3–4.

Selective entry schools

Victoria has four selective entry high schools catering for students in Years 9 to 12. Two of these schools, Melbourne High School, which caters for boys, and The Mac.Robertson Girls' High School, which caters for girls, have educated high-ability Victorian students for over a century. Two new coeducational selective entry schools, Nossal High School and Suzanne Cory High School, were opened in 2010 and 2011 respectively.

Entrance to all four selective entry high schools is through a central entrance exam held annually.⁸⁰ There are also a range of mechanisms in place to promote equitable access to these schools (see chapter seven).

The Mac.Robertson Girls' High School, Nossal High School and Suzanne Cory High School all made submissions to this Inquiry. During this Inquiry the Committee visited The Mac.Robertson Girls' High School and Nossal High School and conducted hearings with students, teachers and school leaders at both of these schools, as well as with parents of Nossal High School students.

Select Entry Accelerated Learning Program

The Select Entry Accelerated Learning (SEAL) Program has been operating in Victoria since 1993 and provides accelerated learning to high-achieving students in participating secondary schools.⁸¹ Students in the SEAL Program complete Years 7 to 10 in three years instead of the usual four.

The SEAL Program is presently available in 36 schools across Victoria, including 13 in rural and regional areas. Figure seven lists the SEAL schools in Victoria.

A school wishing to run the SEAL the Program must obtain approval from DEECD. Each SEAL school sets its own program entry criteria and devises its own curriculum. Consequently, both the program content and delivery, and the number of participating students varies significantly between schools. All SEAL schools run the program in addition to their mainstream secondary school programs.

The SEAL Program was evaluated in 2004. While the evaluation was never publicly released, the number of SEAL schools in Victoria was subsequently increased from 29 to current levels.⁸²

The Committee received submissions from six SEAL schools, as well as submissions from teachers involved in the SEAL Program at three other schools, and the school council of one SEAL school. The Committee also visited one SEAL school, Box Hill High School, where it spoke to students, teachers, school leaders, parents and school councillors.

⁸⁰ DEECD, *Submission 58*, 6.

⁸¹ Directorate of School Education (Victoria), *Bright futures: A policy statement to support gifted students* (1995) DSE (VIC), 7; DEECD, *Select Entry Accelerated Learning Program*, <<http://www.education.vic.gov.au/studentlearning/programs/gifted/seal/default.htm>> viewed 19 March 2012.

⁸² Mr Ian Burrage, *Transcript of evidence*, above n 34, 9; Dr Margaret Plunkett, Senior Lecturer, Faculty of Education, Monash University, *Transcript of evidence*, Melbourne, 12 September 2011, 9.

Figure 7: SEAL schools in Victoria⁸³

• Balwyn High School	• McGuire College
• Bellarine Secondary College	• Mill Park Secondary College
• Belmont High School	• Mordialloc College
• Box Hill High School	• Mount Clear Secondary College
• Brighton Secondary College	• Mount Erin Secondary College
• Brunswick Secondary College	• Reservoir District Secondary College
• Buckley Park College	• Rosebud Secondary College
• Dandenong High School	• Sale College
• Emerald Secondary College	• Staughton College
• Fairhills High School	• Trafalgar High School
• Gladstone Park Secondary College	• University High School
• Gleneagles Secondary College	• Wangaratta High School
• Horsham College	• Warrnambool College
• Keilor Downs College	• Werribee Secondary College
• Koo Wee Rup Secondary College	• Westall Secondary College
• Lilydale High School	• Williamstown High School
• Lyndale Secondary College	• Wodonga Middle Years College
• Matthew Flinders Girls Secondary College	• Wonthaggi Secondary College

Specialist schools

There are three specialist government secondary schools in Victoria that provide programs for students with a gift, talent or high ability in a particular discipline.

John Monash Science School

John Monash Science School is a coeducational school that offers specialised programs in science, maths and associated technologies.⁸⁴ The school opened in 2010 and caters for students in Years 10 to 12. The school has a partnership with Monash University and is located on the university's campus in Clayton. The student application process includes a formal assessment and interview if necessary.

As part of the Inquiry, the Committee took evidence from the school's Principal, Mr Peter Corkill.

Maribyrnong College

Maribyrnong College has a sub-school, Maribyrnong Sports Academy, which opened in 2007 and offers specialist programs for students in up to twenty sports.⁸⁵ The school is coeducational and caters for students in Years 7 to 12. Students must meet academic and sporting criteria to gain entry to the Sports Academy and the selection process

⁸³ DEECD, *Select Entry Accelerated Learning Program*, <<http://www.education.vic.gov.au/studentlearning/programs/gifted/seal/default.htm>> viewed 19 March 2012.

⁸⁴ John Monash Science School, *About*, <<http://www.jmss.vic.edu.au/about>> viewed 29 February 2012.

⁸⁵ Maribyrnong Sports Academy, *About our program*, <<http://sportsacademy.maribsc.vic.edu.au/about.html>> viewed 2 March 2012.

includes selection trials, references and interview. Both able bodied athletes and athletes with a disability are eligible to apply.

The Committee visited Maribyrnong College and conducted hearings with students, teachers and school leaders.

Victorian College of the Arts Secondary School

The Victorian College of the Arts Secondary School is a coeducational school that provides specialist programs for students in Years 7 to 12 with outstanding talents in dance or music.⁸⁶ Students spend approximately half of their school day in academic classes and the other half training in their specialist area. Entry to the school is by way of a competitive audition each year.

The school has a close relationship with the Victorian College of the Arts, which has been formalised through a memorandum of understanding.

The Committee visited the Victorian College of the Arts Secondary School as part of this Inquiry and held hearings with school leaders, teachers and students.

Other secondary school programs and provisions

Many government secondary schools also run their own programs or have special provisions in place for gifted or high-achieving students. Again, the fact that these are developed and implemented at an individual school level makes it difficult for the Committee to assess their prevalence and scope. The Committee received information about a number of school-based programs and provisions, including:

- Belmont High School provides individual acceleration programs for profoundly gifted students.⁸⁷
- Bendigo Senior Secondary College runs an A++ for Year 11 and 12 students with advanced academic performance. The school also provides accelerated learning opportunities for Year 7 to 10 students from neighbouring schools.⁸⁸
- Lilydale High School provides enrichment activities and differentiated curriculum to meet the needs of gifted students who are not part of the school's SEAL Program.⁸⁹
- Rosebud Secondary College offers advanced courses for Year 10 students who have displayed high-level skills in an area.⁹⁰
- Wangaratta High School offers all gifted students in Years 10 to 12 accelerated VCE subjects and the option of studying a university enhancement subject.⁹¹

In addition to these school-based programs, the Victorian Institute of Sport (VIS) provides support to gifted and talented athletes enrolled in Victorian schools. There are

⁸⁶ VCASS, *Submission 56*, 2.

⁸⁷ Belmont High School, *Submission 5*, 1.

⁸⁸ Goldfields LLEN, *Submission 86*, 5; Ms Meredith Fetting, Assistant Principal, Bendigo Senior Secondary College, *Transcript of evidence*, Bendigo, 20 September 2011, 2–3.

⁸⁹ Lilydale High School, *Submission 47*, 1.

⁹⁰ Rosebud Secondary College, *Submission 50*, 6.

⁹¹ Ms Monica Jago, *Submission 48*, above n 35, 8.

currently 61 Victorian secondary school students in Years 7 to 12 with VIS scholarships.⁹²

VIS works closely with each student athlete and their school to ensure that a supportive structure is in place to enable student athletes to achieve optimal sporting and academic performance. As part of this support, the VIS runs the Athlete Career and Education (ACE) Program, which is designed to help student athletes develop life skills, education and career prospects along with their sport.⁹³ VIS made a submission to the Inquiry and the Committee also spoke to VIS staff and athletes at a public hearing.

2.3.4 Gifted education in independent and Catholic schools

Victoria's independent and Catholic schools also provide for many gifted and talented students, although the Committee received very limited evidence about gifted education in these sectors.

The Committee received submissions from two independent schools: Methodist Ladies' College (MLC) and Glen Eira College.

MLC informed the Committee that differentiated instruction is provided in all classrooms in the school. In addition, the school has a special learning centre called the Compass Centre, which provides withdrawal programs for gifted students, as well as professional development and support for teachers.⁹⁴ The Committee also spoke to MLC teachers at a public hearing.

Glen Eira College is an independent school catering for students in Years 7 to 12. The school runs the ACE (Accelerate, Challenge, Excellence) Program, which offers accelerated learning for Year 7 to 9 students in English, humanities, science and mathematics.⁹⁵ Entry to the program is based on an externally administered test and may include an interview. A review in 2011 found high levels of staff, student and parent satisfaction with the program.

In terms of gifted education in the Catholic school sector, the Committee received submissions from the Catholic Education Office Melbourne and the Catholic Education Office, Diocese of Sale, as well as groups representing Catholic school leaders and parents. The Committee also spoke to representatives of the Catholic Education Office Melbourne and one Catholic school, Catholic College Bendigo, at public hearings.

As in the other school sectors, gifted education programs and provisions in the Catholic system are developed and implemented on a school-by-school basis. The Principals' Association of Victorian Catholic Secondary Schools informed the Committee:

Many [Catholic] schools offer a range of different programs and programming options which can include ability groupings, curriculum differentiation and acceleration, cluster groupings, interdisciplinary projects and extracurricular activities (here schools work often in partnership with local, university and industry organisations and subject associations).⁹⁶

⁹² Victorian Institute of Sport, *Submission 52*, 17.

⁹³ *ibid.*, 13–16.

⁹⁴ Methodist Ladies' College, *Submission 84*, 1.

⁹⁵ Glen Eira College, *Submission 62*, 1–2.

⁹⁶ PAVCSS, *Submission 74*, 5. See also Catholic Education Office, Diocese of Sale, *Submission 66*, 2.

In addition, the Catholic Education Office Melbourne provides some central support, including establishing a gifted think tank, which supports the development of gifted education initiatives and providing professional learning support and resources in gifted education for teachers.⁹⁷

The Committee received detailed information about the provisions for gifted students at only one Catholic school, Bendigo Catholic College. The school runs an advanced maths program and provides a range of extracurricular activities for high-ability students.⁹⁸

2.3.5 Distance education

Some gifted students in Victoria access learning opportunities through distance education. Distance education in Victoria is predominantly provided through Distance Education Centre Victoria (DECV), a government school that caters for students from Prep to Year 12. Students can complete all of their education through DECV or they can choose to study one or more subjects through the school. DECV made a written submission to the Inquiry and the school's Principal, Ms Bronwyn Stubbs, also gave evidence at public hearing.

While DECV's student cohort has a wide diversity of abilities, DECV's submission emphasised that distance education's accessibility and versatility means that it can effectively cater for gifted students:

Distance Education allows greater flexibility for moving through the school at a higher level than chronological age suggests. Both year level and subject acceleration are possible at the Distance Education Centre Victoria ... Curriculum compaction is also an option.⁹⁹

Ms Stubbs was not able to provide an estimate of the number of gifted students enrolled at DECV. However, she suggested that gifted students may be likely to enrol in the school because of behavioural or social and emotional issues they have encountered in mainstream schools.¹⁰⁰ She also told the Committee that the school is providing accelerated subjects to 43 Year 10 and 11 students who are based in other Victorian schools.¹⁰¹ In addition, the Committee heard that gifted students who are home schooled may also access some appropriate learning opportunities through distance education.¹⁰²

DECV courses are only available to students who meet the school's eligibility criteria. Most commonly students access DECV through referrals from their schools or because they cannot access school or certain classes because of geographic location or illness.¹⁰³

⁹⁷ Catholic Education Office Melbourne, *Submission 87*, 7–8.

⁹⁸ Mr John Geary, Director of Teaching and Learning, Catholic College Bendigo, *Transcript of evidence*, Bendigo, 20 September 2011, 2; Ms Sarah Cody, Teacher, Catholic College Bendigo, *Transcript of evidence*, Bendigo, 20 September 2011, 2.

⁹⁹ Distance Education Centre Victoria, *Submission 24*, 1.

¹⁰⁰ Ms Bronwyn Stubbs, Principal, Distance Education Centre Victoria, *Transcript of evidence*, Melbourne, 10 October 2011, 3.

¹⁰¹ *ibid.*, 2.

¹⁰² Mrs Jo Freitag, *Transcript of evidence*, above n 70, 5. See also Gifted Resources, *Submission 113*, 10.

¹⁰³ Distance Education Centre Victoria, *Eligibility for P–6 students*, <<http://www.distance.vic.edu.au/enrol/enrp6elig.htm>> viewed 9 March 2012; Distance Education Centre Victoria, *Eligibility for 7–12 students*, <<http://www.distance.vic.edu.au/enrol/enr712elig.htm>> viewed 9 March 2012.

2.3.6 Competitions

There are a number of national competitions run on an annual basis that may provide challenging learning experiences for gifted students. The evidence received by the Committee suggests that these programs have strong participation rates across all school sectors. While these competitions are generally accessible to the whole school population, they may provide particular challenge and extension for gifted students.

The Committee received submissions from the organisations that run the three major competitions: Tournament of Minds; the Australian Mathematics Competition; and the Maths and Science Olympiads.

Tournament of Minds

Tournament of Minds (TOM) is a program for students in Years 4 to 10. Students work in small groups to solve open-ended challenges in four areas: applied technology; language literature; maths engineering; and social sciences. Students initially take part at a school level but can go on to compete in the Australasian Pacific Finals. TOM's submission to the Inquiry stated:

TOM is unique in its blend of using creative and critical thinking skills, problem solving strategies and cooperative learning, with an emphasis on teams rather than individuals, to present a solution to an open ended challenge in a dramatic and audience engaging format.¹⁰⁴

TOM also provides professional development to teachers who facilitate the program within participating schools.

Australian Mathematics Competition and Maths and Informatics Olympiads

The Australian Mathematics Trust, based at the University of Canberra, runs a range of competitions and enrichment programs in maths and informatics for students in Years 3 to 12. The largest event run by the Trust is the Australian Mathematics Competition, which has a strong emphasis on problem solving. Open to students of all levels, the Competition aims to 'stimulate interest in mathematics for students of all standards'.¹⁰⁵

Students who perform well in the Competition can go on to participate in the Mathematics Challenge for Young Australians. This has two stages, a challenge stage in which students have three weeks to explore and solve mathematical problems, and an enrichment stage in which students undertake formal study to enhance their problem-solving skills. Following the Challenge, some students are invited to participate in further programs and may go on to represent Australia in the International Mathematical Olympiad.

The Trust also runs similar, smaller programs in informatics in which students use computer programming to solve problems. Again students who perform well at a school and national level may be invited to participate in the International Olympiad in Informatics.

¹⁰⁴ Tournament of Minds (Vic), *Submission 43*, 4.

¹⁰⁵ Australian Mathematics Trust, *Submission 7*, 1.

Australian Science Olympiads and Rio Tinto Big Science Challenge

Australian Science Innovations is a not-for-profit organisation, which runs two science enrichment and extension programs for school students: the Australian Science Olympiad and the Rio Tinto Big Science Competition.¹⁰⁶

The Australian Science Olympiad runs parallel to the Mathematics Olympiads outlined above. Selection to participate is at a school level, with teachers nominating high achievers in biology, physics or chemistry. The first stage is a qualifying exam, with the top performing students invited to participate in the Australian Science Olympiad Summer School, which provides university-level programs in physics, chemistry and biology. A small number of students are then selected to participate in the international Olympiads in each of the three subjects.

The Rio Tinto Big Science Challenge is a national competition for students in Years 7 to 12. The competition aims to assess students' scientific literacy and problem-solving skills. The highest achieving students are invited to participate in the first step of the Olympiads selection process discussed above.

2.3.7 Private programs

There are a number of privately-run, user-pays programs that cater for gifted Victorian students. The two largest providers are G.A.T.E.WAYS and WiseOnes, which both have a focus on primary school aged students. Both organisations gave evidence to the Committee at public hearing and WiseOnes also made a submission to the Inquiry. The key features of these two programs are set out in figure eight.

Figure 8: Key features of G.A.T.E.WAYS and WiseOnes programs

G.A.T.E.WAYS ¹⁰⁷	WiseOnes ¹⁰⁸
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • user pays, some scholarships available • provides various programs for students from Prep to Year 9 • programs take place both during school hours and outside of school hours • programs and workshops are offered in a variety of subjects, including science and problem solving • size of group depends on program • demand exceeds supply, waiting lists operate • enrolment varies depending on the program. For some programs the student must be nominated by their teacher, while parents are able to enrol their child directly in other programs 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • user pays, some scholarships available • provides for students aged 6 to 14 years • programs operate at school during school hours • programs offered in variety of subjects such as forensic science and electricity • students work in groups of eight • often high demand for the program once it is introduced in a school • enrolment is based on testing carried out by WiseOnes.

¹⁰⁶ Australian Science Innovations, *Submission 102*, 1–2.

¹⁰⁷ G.A.T.E.WAYS, *Programs*, <<http://www.gateway.edu.au/programs.htm>> viewed 9 March 2012; Ms Win Smith, Director, G.A.T.E.WAYS, *Transcript of evidence*, Melbourne, 25 July 2011; Ms Jill Lawrence, Director, G.A.T.E.WAYS, *Transcript of evidence*, Melbourne, 25 July 2011.

¹⁰⁸ WiseOnes Australia, *Submission 18*; Ms Pat Slattery, Director, WiseOnes Australia, *Transcript of evidence*, Melbourne, 25 July 2011.

The Committee also received oral evidence from a representative of Starjump, a private organisation that provides user-pays programs for students who have learning disabilities, including gifted students who have a learning disability. The Starjump program has four components: assessment; behavioural modules; a literacy program; and a Starjump club where students can socialise and work together on special interest projects.¹⁰⁹

2.3.8 University-run programs

A number of universities, both in Victoria and interstate, provide programs for gifted school students.

The Committee received evidence of programs run by two Victorian universities: La Trobe University and The University of Melbourne.

The Able Learners' Enrichment Program is an annual enrichment program for high-ability students from ages five to fourteen.¹¹⁰ The program is run at La Trobe University's Bendigo campus on a user-pays basis. The program enables high-ability and gifted children to participate in enrichment activities. Workshops offered in the 2011 program included ancient Latin, song writing, as well as numbers and logic.¹¹¹ The program does not have a formal selection process, with enrolments based on parent nomination. Information seminars for parents are held in conjunction with the program.¹¹² The Committee received both written submissions and oral evidence from the La Trobe University staff coordinating the program.

The University of Melbourne advised the Committee that it runs a range of programs for gifted and talented secondary school students, including:

- the University of Melbourne Extension Program, which enables high-achieving Year 12 students to undertake a first year university subject as part of their VCE
- the Kwong Lee Dow Young Scholars Program, which provides on-campus academic enrichment opportunities to 700 high-achieving Year 11 and 12 students
- the Trinity Young Leaders' Summer School, which provides one and two week residential programs for high-performing students aged 14 to 17 who have leadership potential
- the Australian Brain Bee Challenge, a national competition designed to motivate Year 10 students to learn about the brain and science
- the School Mathematics Competition, which is of a challenging standard and, while open to all Victorian secondary students, is particularly designed to identify real mathematical ability.¹¹³

¹⁰⁹ Starjump, *Program overview*, <<http://www.starjump.com.au/pages/home/program-information.php>> viewed 1 March 2012.

¹¹⁰ Michael Faulkner and Pam Lyons, 'La Trobe University's Able Learners' Enrichment Programme: An innovation in regional Australia', included in *Submission 71 Appendix A*, 3–5.

¹¹¹ La Trobe University, *Able Learners' Enrichment Program 2011*, <<http://www.latrobe.edu.au/giftedchildren/>> viewed 29 February 2012.

¹¹² Dr Michael Faulkner, Lecturer, School of Education, La Trobe University, *Submission 95*, 1.

¹¹³ The University of Melbourne, *Submission 53*, 1–4.

The Committee also received evidence about programs for gifted and high-ability school-aged students run by universities in other Australian states, namely Edith Cowan University, Queensland University of Technology, The University of Sydney, University of Western Sydney and The University of Newcastle.¹¹⁴ Some of these programs are accessible by gifted Victorian students.

2.3.9 School specialisation

The Victorian Government has committed \$2.5 million over four years to allow 25 government primary and secondary schools to specialise in a field of their choice.¹¹⁵ Twelve schools have been allocated funding in the first round of grants and commenced their programs in 2012. Schools successful in receiving a round one grant will specialise in a broad range of areas including science, visual arts, music, aviation and sport.¹¹⁶ A second funding round will be held in 2012 to allocate funds to an additional 13 schools.

It is important to note that the programs funded under the school specialisation initiative are not necessarily aimed at students who have high-level abilities in the area of specialisation. The Minister for Education informed the Committee that, 'In the majority of cases for the first 12 schools, the specialism actually targets the entire school cohort.'¹¹⁷

While the new school specialisation initiative may provide some benefits to gifted students who have a special interest in a particular subject, the Committee notes that the program has not been established to specifically cater for gifted and talented students but rather as a mechanism to promote choice and flexibility throughout the entire school system. This fact, combined with the fact that limited information is available as the program is still in its infancy, meant the Committee did not consider the new school specialisation initiative in detail as part of this Inquiry.

2.3.10 International Baccalaureate

The International Baccalaureate (IB) is an international education program run by a not-for-profit foundation based in Switzerland. The IB has three sub-programs, primary (for students aged 3 to 12), middle years (for ages 11 to 16) and a Diploma (for students aged 16 to 19).¹¹⁸

Some Victorian students undertake the IB Diploma program instead of completing VCE or VCAL. The Diploma is a two year program with a heavy emphasis on critical thinking and international-mindedness.¹¹⁹ There are currently 15 independent schools in Victoria

¹¹⁴ Dr Nathan Hoffman, Coordinator, Edith Cowan University Maths Problem Solving Program, *Submission 1*, 1–3; Queensland University of Technology, *Submission 12*, 1–4; Faculty of Science, The University of Sydney, *Submission 38*, 1–3; Dr Danuta Chessor, Lecturer, School of Psychology, University of Western Sydney, *Supplementary submission 76A*, 1; The University of Newcastle, *Submission 103*, 1–2.

¹¹⁵ Minister for Education (Victoria), *Coalition Government investing in school specialisation and diversity* (Media release, 3 May 2011).

¹¹⁶ Letter from Minister for Education (Victoria), above n 66, 6.

¹¹⁷ *ibid.*, 7.

¹¹⁸ International Baccalaureate, *Three programmes at a glance*, <<http://www.ibo.org/programmes/>> viewed 2 March 2012.

¹¹⁹ International Baccalaureate, *The IB diploma programme*, <<http://www.ibo.org/diploma/index.cfm>> viewed 28 February 2012.

that offer the IB Diploma.¹²⁰ In 2013, Werribee Secondary College will become the first Victorian government school to offer the program.¹²¹

The Committee received very limited evidence about the IB program. One submission suggested the IB Diploma is an appropriate for gifted students.¹²² In contrast, a teacher at an independent school offering the IB, suggested that the program is not designed or targeted specifically at gifted students.¹²³ Given the limited evidence the Committee received about the IB program and the fact that only a small number of Victorian students enrol in the program, the Committee did not consider the IB Diploma or other programs as part of this Inquiry.

2.3.11 Home schooling

Some Victorian parents choose to home school their gifted children. Home schooled students must be registered with the Victorian Registration and Qualifications Authority.¹²⁴ It is a requirement of registration that home schooled children receive regular instruction in eight key learning areas: arts; English; health and physical education; languages other than English; maths; science; society and the environment; and technology.¹²⁵

During this Inquiry the Committee received both written and oral evidence from several parents who home school their gifted children.

¹²⁰ International Baccalaureate, *Find an IB world school*, <<http://www.ibo.org/school/search/index.cfm?nextStart=1>> viewed 28 February 2012.

¹²¹ Werribee Secondary College, *Werribee Secondary College*, <<http://www.werribeesc.vic.edu.au/main.htm>> viewed 28 February 2012.

¹²² Carolyn Ferguson, 'What educational options are available for gifted and talented students within Australia? Is it best to accelerate, use enrichment, curriculum differentiation, or employ a combination of methods?', included in *Submission 55 Appendix A*, 4.

¹²³ Ms Kathy Harrison, Compass Centre Coordinator, Methodist Ladies' College, *Transcript of evidence*, Melbourne, 19 September 2011, 6. See also Australian College of Educators (Victorian Branch), *Submission 21*, 5.

¹²⁴ *Education and Training Reform Act 2006* (Vic) s 2.2.1.

¹²⁵ *Education and Training Reform Regulations 2007* (Vic) regs 65–73.

Chapter 3: A framework for educating gifted students in Victoria

Key findings

- From 1995 to 2001 the Bright Futures policy provided a strong framework for educating gifted students in Victoria. There is no current Victoria policy on the education of gifted students.
- There is an urgent need for a new Victorian policy on the education of gifted students to provide a framework and to articulate expectations for gifted education in this state.
- The concepts of giftedness and talent are not well understood. Agreeing on clear definitions based on Gagné's model will contribute to better program and policy development in Victoria.
- Gifted students have distinct learning needs, which require tailored learning strategies. Failure to meet these students' needs may result in significant negative impacts, such as underachievement and mental health issues.
- Gifted students are the next generation of leaders, problem solvers and innovators. Society as a whole will benefit from these students being given every opportunity to reach their full potential.
- Underachievement by gifted students is not well understood. There is a pressing need for research in this area.
- Gifted students have a right, as a matter of equity, to access an education that meets their specific needs. For many gifted students in Victoria, this right is not currently being met.
- The present provision of gifted education in Victoria is ad hoc, of variable quality and heavily concentrated in the secondary school years.
- In order to ensure that all gifted students enjoy equitable access to an education that meets their needs, gifted education must be available in every classroom in every Victorian school, across all school sectors.
- Gifted students and their families currently struggle to find out information about what gifted programs and provisions are available in Victorian schools.
- The lack of evaluation makes it difficult to assess the effectiveness of current gifted education offerings in Victoria. All gifted education offerings should be regularly evaluated to provide an evidence base about what works.
- The Department of Education and Early Childhood Development needs to play a greatly increased role in providing central information and guidance about gifted education through a Gifted Education Unit.

A framework for educating gifted students in Victoria

This chapter explores the foundations necessary for the effective provision of education for gifted and talented students in Victoria. It considers the need for agreed terminology and definitions, as well as a clear policy to underpin gifted education in Victoria. It also examines why specialist gifted programs are needed, the adequacy of current provision and how the educational needs of gifted students are best met.

3.1 A foundation for gifted education in Victoria— Terminology and definitions

There are no agreed definitions of giftedness and talent. Nor is there agreement about the terminology that should be used to describe these students. In this section the Committee considers the need for settled terminology and definitions to provide a firm foundation for the development of gifted education policies and programs in Victoria.

3.1.1 What should gifted and talented children be called?

Some participants in this Inquiry drew the Committee's attention to negative connotations associated with the terms gifted and talented.

There were particular concerns about the word gifted, which was seen as being associated with 'privilege, achievement and success',¹²⁶ as well as implying 'something given and perhaps not deserved'.¹²⁷ The Committee heard that misconceptions about the term gifted may impact on the likelihood that a student is identified as gifted in some places such as low socioeconomic or rural and regional areas. For instance, Dr Gail Byrne, Chair of the CHIP Foundation, an independent advisory service specialising in the needs of gifted children and their families, told the Committee, 'we have had schools ring us and say, "We are in the western suburbs. We do not have any gifted children here".'¹²⁸

A small number of Inquiry participants also expressed reservations about the use of the term talented. A recent review of the Victorian College of the Arts Secondary School suggested that use of the word talented may devalue the enormous amount of hard

¹²⁶ Gifted Support Network, *Submission 49*, 12. See also Dr Michael Faulkner, Lecturer, School of Education, La Trobe University, *Submission 95*, 2.

¹²⁷ CHIP Foundation, *Submission 77*, 3. See also Ms Gabrielle Leigh, President, Victorian Principals Association (VPA), *Transcript of evidence*, Melbourne, 12 September 2011, 23.

¹²⁸ Dr Gail Byrne, Chair, CHIP Foundation, *Transcript of evidence*, Melbourne, 25 July 2011, 3.

work and dedication required to produce high-achieving musicians and performers.¹²⁹ Other participants were concerned that the term talented focuses attention on those already achieving at a high level and may mean that underachieving gifted students are not selected to participate in specialist programs.¹³⁰

Evidence received by the Committee suggests that many in the education sector are reluctant to use the terms gifted and talented. Mr Paul Double, a teacher who is on the committee of the Victorian Association for Gifted and Talented Children (VAGTC), a voluntary organisation that supports educators and parents in relation to gifted students, stated:

The G and T term I personally avoid in school as far as possible. The students virtually know who they are; there are programs provided for them. But the G and T terminology goes missing as far as I am concerned amongst the programs I am offering within the Boroondara region for the very purpose that I do not think the public perception is helpful, and the personal weight and tag on the individual are perhaps sometimes not helpful either.¹³¹

Students who spoke to the Committee also did not relate to the terminology gifted and talented. For example, Kayla a Year 12, student from The Mac.Robertson Girls' High School, one of four selective entry schools in Victoria, told the Committee:

I do not think the term goes really well with the students. It does not describe us as who we are. It kind of makes you seem like a bit of a robot: gifted goes in this box. It is not really an appropriate term. We are just students wanting to learn.¹³²

Some parents also appear to be wary of the terms gifted and talented.¹³³

Having heard about the issues with the current terminology, the Committee asked Inquiry participants to propose appropriate alternatives. There was no consensus about other suitable terms. Suggestions included:

- children of high intellectual potential (CHIP)¹³⁴
- high intelligence¹³⁵

¹²⁹ Victorian College of the Arts Secondary School (VCASS), *Submission 56*, 11; Mr Colin Simpson, Principal, VCASS, *Transcript of evidence*, Southbank, 15 August 2011, 6.

¹³⁰ Mrs Michele Whitby, *Submission 114*, 3; Victorian Affiliated Network of Gifted Support Groups, *Gifted children manual: Providing for the needs of high intelligence children in Victoria*, supplementary evidence received 10 October 2011, 2.

¹³¹ Mr Paul Double, Committee member, Victorian Association for Gifted and Talented Children (VAGTC), *Transcript of evidence*, Melbourne, 25 July 2011, 6. See also Ms Pat Slattery, Director, WiseOnes Australia, *Transcript of evidence*, Melbourne, 25 July 2011, 3; Ms Jane Garvey, Principal, The Mac.Robertson Girls' High School, *Transcript of evidence*, Melbourne, 26 July 2011, 2.

¹³² Kayla, Year 12 student, The Mac.Robertson Girls' High School, *Transcript of evidence*, Melbourne, 26 July 2011, 6. See also Anna, Year 12 student, The Mac.Robertson Girls' High School, *Transcript of evidence*, Melbourne, 26 July 2011, 6.

¹³³ Mr Bruce Verity, School Council member and parent, Nossal High School, *Transcript of evidence*, Berwick, 26 July 2011, 5; Mr Gavin Swain, School Council President and parent, Nossal High School, *Transcript of evidence*, Berwick, 26 July 2011, 6.

¹³⁴ CHIP Foundation, *Submission 77*, 3; Dr Sandra Lea-Wood, Committee member, CHIP Foundation, *Transcript of evidence*, Melbourne, 25 July 2011, 3.

¹³⁵ Victorian Affiliated Network of Gifted Support Groups, *Gifted children manual*, above n 130, 10.

- highly able¹³⁶
- fast learners.¹³⁷

While noting the issues with the current terminology, most participants who commented on this issue concluded that it should be retained. The Committee heard that the existing terminology has a long history and is widely understood both in Australia and overseas. VAGTC President, Ms Carmel Meehan, explained:

Internationally the term 'gifted and talented' is used, and we all know what we are talking about. In the research done around the world the term 'gifted and talented' is used, so if we are going to go into other terminology, we are going to be countercultural to what is happening in the gifted education world.¹³⁸

Another advantage of retaining the terminology gifted and talented is that it recognises abilities in all spheres, as opposed to some of the suggested alternatives, which are limited to academic areas.¹³⁹

The Committee notes the concerns about the negative connotations that are sometimes associated with the terms gifted and talented. However, the widespread international acceptance and understanding of these terms and the lack of agreed alternatives have led the Committee to conclude that this terminology should be retained for the purposes of policy and program development in Victoria.

To help address negative attitudes associated with the terms gifted and talented the Committee believes it is important that the concepts are clearly defined and communicated to key stakeholders, particularly teachers and schools. Definitions are discussed in the next section.

The Committee also acknowledges concern that the use of the term talented has the potential to exclude gifted students who are underachieving from accessing programs aimed at gifted students. Therefore, the recommendations in this report are strongly focused on providing appropriately for all gifted students, including those who have yet to meet their full potential.

3.1.2 How should gifted and talented students be defined?

As noted in the previous two chapters, there are no agreed definitions of giftedness and talent. Evidence to this Inquiry suggests that these concepts are not well understood in the Victorian education system. For example, the Victorian Independent Education Union, which represents staff in Catholic and independent schools, submitted that gifted

¹³⁶ Mr Mark Smith, Committee member, VAGTC, *Transcript of evidence*, Melbourne, 25 July 2011, 6; Ms Win Smith, Director, G.A.T.E.WAYS, *Transcript of evidence*, Melbourne, 25 July 2011, 3; Ms Jane Garvey, *Transcript of evidence*, above n 131, 2; Ms Anne-Marie Hermans, School Council member and parent, Nossal High School, *Transcript of evidence*, Berwick, 26 July 2011, 5.

¹³⁷ Ms Pat Slattery, *Transcript of evidence*, above n 131, 3; Anna, *Transcript of evidence*, above n 132, 6.

¹³⁸ Ms Carmel Meehan, President, VAGTC, *Transcript of evidence*, Melbourne, 25 July 2011, 6. See also Dr Debora Lipson, *Transcript of evidence*, Melbourne, 19 September 2011, 2; Ms Louise Broadbent, President, Gifted Support Network, *Transcript of evidence*, Melbourne, 12 September 2011, 4; Ms Pam Lyons, Coordinator, Able Learners' Enrichment Program, La Trobe University, *Transcript of evidence*, Bendigo, 20 September 2011, 6.

¹³⁹ Ms Claire McInerney, Principal, Plenty Parklands Primary School, *Transcript of evidence*, Melbourne, 12 September 2011, 24.

and talented 'is not a term homogeneously or uniformly understood and used by educators, much less parents'.¹⁴⁰

The Committee heard that agreeing on clear definitions of giftedness and talent is an important basis for any program or policy development in this area.¹⁴¹ In particular, a number of Inquiry participants saw agreed definitions as crucial to equipping teachers and schools to effectively identify gifted students.¹⁴² Several participants viewed misunderstandings about the concepts as leading to students being inappropriately identified to participate in gifted programs, with high achievers more likely to be selected for such programs than the truly gifted.¹⁴³

In chapter two the Committee provided an overview of the most prominent models and definitions of giftedness and talent and noted that the overwhelming number of participants in this Inquiry supported the use of the model developed by Professor François Gagné, Honorary Professor of Psychology at the Université du Québec à Montréal in Canada. Gagné's model provides a clear definition of both giftedness and talent, making it clear that giftedness is potential, while talent is outstanding performance.¹⁴⁴ According to participants in this Inquiry, one of the key advantages of this model is that it recognises that giftedness does not just occur in academic areas, but a whole range of spheres. In particular, Inquiry participants felt it was important that any definition of giftedness includes skills such as leadership and teamwork, creativity and problem solving.¹⁴⁵

Gagné's model has also been adopted as the basis for gifted and talented program and policy development in other Australian jurisdictions.¹⁴⁶

The Committee believes that having clear and widely understood definitions of giftedness and talent will contribute to better provision for gifted and talented students in Victorian schools. As noted in chapter one, the Committee has adopted the Gagné model for the purposes of this report. The Committee suggests that this model should also form the foundation of gifted education policies and programs in Victoria. The Committee believes that it is important to promote a common understanding of these concepts across the state, and suggests strategies for achieving this throughout this report, particularly in terms of policy (see section 3.5) and improving the knowledge base of both teachers (see chapters four and eight) and parents (see chapter ten).

¹⁴⁰ Victorian Independent Education Union (VIEU), *Submission 22*, 4. See also Country Education Project, *Submission 79*, 5; Box Hill High School, *Submission 81*, 4; Faculty of Education, Australian Catholic University, *Submission 13*, 9.

¹⁴¹ Victorian Affiliated Network of Gifted Support Groups, *Submission 100*, 3; Ms Barbara Black, *Transcript of evidence*, Melbourne, 19 September 2011, 2.

¹⁴² Australian College of Educators (Victorian Branch), *Submission 21*, 2; Mr Frank Sal, President, Victorian Association of State Secondary Principals (VASSP), *Transcript of evidence*, Melbourne, 25 July 2011, 3; Mr Greg Lacey, Principal, Lyndhurst Primary School, *Transcript of evidence*, Melbourne, 12 September 2011, 23.

¹⁴³ Faculty of Education, Australian Catholic University, *Submission 13*, 9; Victorian Affiliated Network of Gifted Support Groups, *Gifted children manual*, above n 130, 5.

¹⁴⁴ François Gagné, 'Transforming gifted into talents: The DMGT as a development theory' in Nicholas Colangelo and Gary Davis (eds) *Handbook of gifted education* (3rd edition, 2003) Pearson Education, 60.

¹⁴⁵ Tournament of Minds (Vic), *Submission 43*, 3; Department of Education and Early Childhood Development (DEECD), *Submission 58*, 4; Mr Ian Burrage, General Manager, Education and Policy Research Division, DEECD, *Transcript of evidence*, Melbourne, 25 July 2011, 2; VPA, *Submission 105*, 1.

¹⁴⁶ Department of Education and Communities (New South Wales), *Submission 99*, 6; Department of Education and Children's Services (South Australia), *Submission 3*, 5; Department of Education and Training (Australian Capital Territory), *Submission 20*, 3; Department of Education (Tasmania), *Submission 10*, 5.

3.2 Are special gifted programs and provisions needed?

A prevalent argument against specialised provision for gifted students identified—and dispelled—in the literature is that gifted students are able to look after themselves and do not require targeted interventions.¹⁴⁷ This section highlights the special educational needs of gifted students and the potentially dire consequences of not adequately catering for these students. It also discusses the rights of gifted students to access equitable educational opportunities.

3.2.1 The special educational needs of gifted students

The Committee heard that gifted students are a distinct cohort with special educational needs. This section considers the unique learning needs of gifted students, as well as the social and academic benefits gifted students garner from contact with like-minded peers.

How gifted students learn

Consistent with research in this area, evidence to this Inquiry emphasised that gifted students have particular learning styles and needs. A number of contributors argued that if these special learning needs are not met, students may disengage from education and may not reach their full potential.

Many Inquiry participants highlighted gifted children's passion for learning, particularly in the early years. For instance, the Gifted Support Network, a support group for parents with gifted children, submitted, 'Gifted children have a thirst for knowledge and learning that is much more intense than for mainstream children. Knowledge is happiness to the gifted child.'¹⁴⁸

Gifted students may require a different approach to learning, which includes:

- faster pace (including minimal repetition)
- independent, self-paced study
- complex, challenging and open-ended tasks that use high order thinking and problem-solving skills
- meaningful tasks with practical application
- depth of content.¹⁴⁹

¹⁴⁷ Gary Davis, Sylvia Rimm and Del Siegle, *Education of the gifted and talented* (6th edition, 2011) Pearson Education, 2.

¹⁴⁸ Gifted Support Network, *Submission 49*, 10. See also WiseOnes Australia, *Submission 18*, 5–6; Names withheld, *Submission 29*, 1; Maria, parent, *Transcript of evidence*, Melbourne, 19 September 2011, 13.

¹⁴⁹ Principals' Association of Victorian Catholic Secondary Schools (PAVCSS), *Submission 74*, 2, 10; WiseOnes Australia, *Submission 18*, 7, 10; Tournament of Minds (Vic), *Submission 43*, 10; Associate Professor John Munro, Exceptional Learning and Gifted Education, Graduate School of Education, The University of Melbourne, *Transcript of evidence*, Melbourne, 19 September 2011, 2–3; VCASS, *Submission 56*, 12; Mrs Michele Whitby, *Submission 114*, 7; Ms Louise Broadbent, *Transcript of evidence*, above n 138, 5; VAGTC,

Dr John Munro, Associate Professor Exceptional Learning and Gifted Education at Melbourne University's Graduate School of Education, provided an example that illustrates the totally different approach gifted learners may take to a topic:

[when teaching] about the digestive system in Year 7, a regular class will understand about the oesophagus, about the stomach and about the intestines. With a gifted class—and I saw this recently—they wanted to know how much hydrochloric acid is released and whether it is managed by the autonomic nervous system; also, to what extent the amount of hydrochloric acid that has been released has changed without a change in dietary habits over the last 50 years. That is the sort of behaviour that if I know to look for and I know to foster and bring together, I am more able to run with it. But if I as a teacher say, 'Hold on. We are not talking about the release of hydrochloric acid; we want to move into the intestines', I am not going to see that knowledge.¹⁵⁰

The Committee explores educational approaches that are effective in meeting the distinct learning needs of gifted students in chapter five of this report.

Benefits of links with like minds

Many Inquiry participants emphasised the importance of gifted students being able to work with like-minded students for at least some of the time.¹⁵¹ This was viewed as having both academic and social benefits.

The Committee heard that gifted students may be lonely or isolated in mainstream programs. For example, Ms Meehan of VAGTC stated:

Sometimes at school there is no-one to speak to on their level. They might be looking at the solar system and everyone else is looking at Barbies and there is just no conversation that can go on. They are lonely and they feel out of stage ... It is very lonely when people do not understand you.¹⁵²

Similarly Felicity, a participant in the Committee's Parents' Forum, commented:

[In a group of like ability] they suddenly realise they are not alone, they are not the only one, they are not the only kid who, at the age of seven, is absolutely obsessed with B-52 bombers instead of football. I think that realisation of knowing that they are not alone is huge for these kids ... That sense of isolation is the biggest thing for most of these kids to deal with and in some ways it is the easiest one to solve, because it is all about helping them network with other kids like them.¹⁵³

Participants in this Inquiry consistently stressed the benefits to a student's personal confidence and self-esteem that comes from working with other gifted students.¹⁵⁴ Conversely, allowing gifted students to work with other gifted students was viewed as an

Submission 34, 10; Catholic Education Office, Diocese of Sale, *Submission 66*, 2–3; Dr Nathan Hoffman, Coordinator, Edith Cowan University Maths Problem Solving Program, *Submission 1*, 2.

¹⁵⁰ Associate Professor John Munro, *Transcript of evidence*, above n 149, 4.

¹⁵¹ Dr Glenison Alsop, Psychologist and Counsellor, *Submission 54*, 5; Ms Win Smith, *Transcript of evidence*, above n 136, 5; Box Hill High School, *Submission 81*, 4; Mrs Jo Freitag, Coordinator, Gifted Resources, *Transcript of evidence*, Melbourne, 19 September 2011, 3; Dr Michael Faulkner, Lecturer, School of Education, La Trobe University, *Transcript of evidence*, Bendigo, 20 September 2011, 2; Ms Barbara Black, *Transcript of evidence*, above n 141, 6–7; Ms Bronwyn Stubbs, Principal, Distance Education Centre Victoria, *Transcript of evidence*, Melbourne, 10 October 2011, 4; PAVCSS, *Submission 74*, 3; Australian Association for the Education of the Gifted and Talented (AAEGT), *Submission 28*, 3; Department of Education (Tasmania), *Submission 10*, 4.

¹⁵² Ms Carmel Meehan, *Transcript of evidence*, above n 138, 13. See also AAEGT, *Submission 28*, 2.

¹⁵³ Felicity, parent, *Transcript of evidence*, Melbourne, 19 September 2011, 14–15.

¹⁵⁴ WiseOnes Australia, *Submission 18*, 5–6; Ms Debbi Daff, SEAL and Enhancement Coordinator, Sale College, *Submission 70*, 2; Ms Felicity Walker, *Submission 69*, 3–4.

important 'reality check', ensuring that these students do not become arrogant about their abilities.¹⁵⁵

The Committee heard there may be academic benefits associated with allowing gifted students to learn together. For example, the Australian Association for the Education of the Gifted and Talented, a national association representing the interests of gifted children, submitted:

Participants benefit intellectually and extend their learning and knowledge beyond the scope of the core curriculum in their school setting. The environment of such a program allows for open ended, extended learning ... the freedom to learn empowers young gifted children to confidently take on new challenges and material.¹⁵⁶

Some participants suggested that gifted students achieve higher academic results when working with other gifted students,¹⁵⁷ although not all agreed.¹⁵⁸ The paucity of evidence about the outcomes of current gifted schools and programs in Victoria is discussed further in section 3.3.3 below.

The Committee considers various specific mechanisms for enabling gifted students to work together, such as ability grouping, in chapter five and specifically focuses on selective entry, specialist and Select Entry Accelerated Learning (SEAL) Program schools in chapter seven. The Committee also explores opportunities for increasing social and learning links between like-minded gifted students in chapters five and ten.

3.2.2 Equity of access to education

Many participants in this Inquiry argued that specialised gifted education programs and provisions are required as a matter of equity.¹⁵⁹ A wide range of stakeholders, including the Department of Education and Early Childhood Development (DEECD) and teachers, acknowledged the right of all students to an education that matches their individual needs. For instance, Ms Gabrielle Leigh, President of the Victorian Principals Association, which represents primary school principals and leaders, told the Committee:

The number 1 thing that we believe is that all students have the right to develop their full potential. Students with exceptional abilities and talents have specific requirements that need to be addressed within school programs.¹⁶⁰

The 2001 report of the Senate Employment, Workplace Relations, Small Business and Education References Committee concluded that gifted students have special needs

¹⁵⁵ Dr Glenison Alsop, *Submission 54*, above n 151, 5; Praveen, Year 10 student, Nossal High School, *Transcript of evidence*, Berwick, 26 July 2011, 2–3.

¹⁵⁶ AAEGT, *Submission 28*, 2.

¹⁵⁷ VCASS, *Submission 56*, 6; Mr Colin Simpson, *Transcript of evidence*, above n 129, 4–5.

¹⁵⁸ Mr Frank Sal, *Transcript of evidence*, above n 142, 8.

¹⁵⁹ Victorian Association of Catholic Primary School Principals (VACPSP), *Submission 111*, 2; Names withheld, *Submission 45*, 4; Australian College of Educators (Victorian Branch), *Submission 21*, 5–6; Dr Susan Nikakis, Education Officer, Gifted and Talented, Catholic Education Office Melbourne, *Transcript of evidence*, Melbourne, 12 September 2011, 6; Gifted Support Network, *Submission 49*, 7; PAVCSS, *Submission 74*, 7; Goldfields Local Learning and Employment Network (LLEN), *Submission 86*, 2; Ms Jill Lawrence, Director, G.A.T.E.WAYS, *Transcript of evidence*, Melbourne, 25 July 2011, 5; Mrs Michele Whitby, *Submission 114*, 2; Victorian Catholic Schools Parent Body, *Submission 51*, 2; Maroondah Gifted Children's Parents' Association, *Submission 98*, 11; Box Hill High School, *Submission 81*, 7; Mrs Deborah DeBuhr, *Submission 46*, 5.

¹⁶⁰ Ms Gabrielle Leigh, *Transcript of evidence*, above n 127, 2. See also Mr Ian Burrage, *Transcript of evidence*, above n 145, 12; Mrs Deborah Patterson, Principal, Mill Park Heights Primary School, *Transcript of evidence*, Melbourne, 12 September 2011, 21.

and that high level policy documents that refer to students with special needs should make it clear that this includes giftedness.¹⁶¹ The majority of contributors in this Inquiry agreed with this approach, arguing that as students with special needs, gifted students require particular provisions in order to ensure that they have equitable access to education.¹⁶²

A number of contributors highlighted that specialised provisions for gifted and talented students are needed to meet the aspirations of equitable education set out in the Melbourne Declaration of Educational Goals for Young Australians discussed in chapter one.¹⁶³ While the Declaration does not specifically mention gifted and talented students, it espouses equity in Australian schooling, including promoting a culture of excellence in all schools and personalising learning to ensure that the potential of each student is reached.¹⁶⁴

Several Inquiry participants acknowledged that some members of the community find it difficult to understand the argument that gifted students should be specifically catered for as a matter of equity. For example, Mr Ian Burrage, General Manager of the Education and Policy Research Division at DEECD, stated:

I certainly know that when we put it forward as an equity issue we find some people find it hard to grasp, given the idea of the gift bestowed on these people with their innate abilities.¹⁶⁵

Similarly, primary school teacher, Ms Patricia Pace, told the Committee:

I know there are schools out there that have tried to introduce some form of gifted program where the parents have arced up and said, 'Why are you spending money on this when we've got all these other kids you need to be helping? Gifted children can look after themselves if they exist'. We need to make sure that it is acknowledged that there are gifted children, that they do have special needs and that they really deserve the same degree of treatment as everybody else.¹⁶⁶

3.2.3 The impact of not catering for gifted students

The Committee heard that failure to appropriately provide for gifted students potentially has a number of adverse consequences for these students, the education system, as well as society as a whole.

Impact on students

This section explores the common school experiences of gifted and talented students in Victorian schools and the potential impact of these experiences.

¹⁶¹ Senate Employment, Workplace Relations, Small Business and Education References Committee, *The education of gifted children* (2001) Commonwealth of Australia, 34.

¹⁶² Dr Debora Lipson, *Transcript of evidence*, above n 138, 4; Ms Rhonda Allen, *Submission 14*, 2; Ms Larelle Parker, *Submission 11*, 2; Names withheld, *Submission 9*, 5; Belmont High School, *Submission 5*, 3; Victorian Catholic Schools Parent Body, *Submission 51*, 3; Ms Kim Steere, *Submission 61*, 3; Ms Caelli Greenbank, *Submission 67*, 2; Ms Felicity Walker, *Submission 69*, 6; PAVCSS, *Submission 74*, 7; Name withheld, *Submission 91*, 3; Name withheld, *Submission 75*, 1.

¹⁶³ VAGTC, *Submission 34*, 13; DEECD, *Submission 58*, 3; Mr Ian Burrage, *Transcript of evidence*, above n 145, 2; Gifted Resources, *Submission 113*, 7.

¹⁶⁴ Ministerial Council on Education, Employment, Training and Youth Affairs, *Melbourne declaration on educational goals for young Australians* (2008) MCEETYA, 7.

¹⁶⁵ Mr Ian Burrage, *Transcript of evidence*, above n 145, 4.

¹⁶⁶ Ms Patricia Pace, Leading Teacher, Mill Park Heights Primary School, *Transcript of evidence*, Melbourne, 12 September 2011, 16.

What is school like for gifted students?

The evidence presented to the Committee suggests that boredom and frustration are common experiences for gifted children in the Victorian education system. Gifted Education Specialist and WiseOnes Teacher Ms Jennifer Grant's submission quoted one of her students, nine-year-old Daniel:

School is supposed to be for learning; not being bored to death. I feel tired, well—exhausted and listless really when I'm given work way below the level I need. It's like my brain shuts down.¹⁶⁷

Gifted children are often highly creative thinkers who approach tasks in novel ways that are not always appreciated in the mainstream education system. Tournament of Minds, which runs problem-solving activities for children at both primary and secondary levels, emphasised that 'in a world where the right answer and sometimes only answer is expected and you are not allowed to show other ways to get there, frustration can become a constant'.¹⁶⁸

As noted earlier in this chapter, school can be a lonely and isolating place for gifted students. These students are often highly emotionally sensitive and acutely aware that they are different from other students. Home schooling parent, Ms Susan Wight, told the Committee:

school is very stressful for a gifted child. He is essentially more advanced in some area[s] than his age-mates. Whilst this does not make him better than anyone else, it does make it difficult for him to make friends. He feels his difference but may not understand it—he just knows that the other kids don't like him for some reason and suspects that there is "something wrong" with him. He hears the words "weird", "nerd" and "geek".¹⁶⁹

The Committee also heard that many gifted students are the victims of bullying at school. Ms Moragh Tyler, who represented an interest group for parents and educators based in Wonthaggi, told the Committee that bullying was rife in the community, with all of the students represented in her interest group reporting having been bullied at some stage. She commented 'they are not all children who have social inadequacies; they are very sociable, very friendly, really beautiful children who can cope well in the world—but every single one has said they have been bullied'.¹⁷⁰

The impact of school experiences on gifted students

The evidence presented to the Committee demonstrates that experiences of boredom, frustration, social isolation and bullying can have a range of adverse impacts on gifted students, including underachievement, behavioural issues and mental health problems.

¹⁶⁷ Ms Jennifer Grant, Gifted Education Specialist, WiseOnes Australia teacher, *Submission 97*, 3–4. See also Mill Park Secondary College, *Submission 36*, 3; Ms Ruby Hackett, *Submission 25*, 1; Mr Wayne and Mrs Meredith Burton, *Submission 17*, 3.

¹⁶⁸ Tournament of Minds (Vic), *Submission 43*, 10.

¹⁶⁹ Ms Susan Wight, *Submission 93*, 2. See also PAVCSS, *Submission 74*, 5; Ms Pat Slattery, *Transcript of evidence*, above n 131, 2; Name withheld, *Submission 94*, 1.

¹⁷⁰ Ms Moragh Tyler, Wonthaggi interest group for gifted and talented children, *Transcript of evidence*, Melbourne, 19 September 2011, 3. See also Gifted Support Network, *Submission 49*, 10; Ms Susan Wight, *Submission 93*, 3; Ms Felicity Walker, *Submission 69*, 3; Name withheld, *Submission 90*, 4; Ms Henriette Boonen-Hackett, *Submission 26*, 1; Ms Moragh Tyler on behalf of Wonthaggi interest group for gifted and talented children, *Submission 64*, 3, 5; Dr Leonie Kronborg, Senior Lecturer, Coordinator of Postgraduate Studies in Gifted Education and Dr Margaret Plunkett, Senior Lecturer, Faculty of Education, Monash University, *Submission 92*, 4–5; Names withheld, *Submission 9*, 5; Ms Amy Porter, Assistant Principal, The Mac.Robertson Girls' High School, *Transcript of evidence*, Melbourne, 26 July 2011, 7; Victorian Affiliated Network of Gifted Support Groups, *Submission 100 Appendix B*, 4.

As noted in chapter one, research shows that many gifted students never reach their full potential. Consistent with this, participants in this Inquiry highlighted that disengagement and underachievement are common among gifted students in Victoria. Dr Debora Lipson and Ms Barbara Black, academics working in gifted education, suggested that lack of suitable challenge frequently leads to disengagement early in a child's education. They commented, 'By year three many gifted students are no longer interested in learning.'¹⁷¹

Other Inquiry participants emphasised that underchallenged gifted students may develop poor work habits that create a barrier to them ever reaching their full potential. Parent, Ms Felicity Walker, submitted:

[many gifted students lack] the necessary learning skills required for higher level studies as they've never needed them. When they finally reach a level where they ARE challenged, bad habits are too entrenched, and they're more likely to drop out than change.¹⁷²

The Committee was told it is not uncommon for gifted students to 'dumb themselves down' and underperform at school in order to fit in with their peers.¹⁷³ This behaviour appears to be particularly prevalent among girls¹⁷⁴ and in communities where individuals may not wish to stand out, such as rural communities¹⁷⁵ and some cultural groups.¹⁷⁶

Even gifted students who are performing well at school may not be meeting their full potential. Some participants pointed out that gifted students learn that they can satisfy teachers' expectations without much effort. Ms Colleen Carapetis, a parent who gave evidence on behalf of the Gifted Support Network, told the Committee that both of her children were able to coast through school:

[our daughter] got a 50 last year for PE, without really doing much work. I would say she studied right at the end, when she needed to. She did the work as she needed to do it, but I would say she really did not put in a huge effort. Our son was the same. When he went through his VCE studies I think he just did the work that he needed to hand in, and at the end he made sure he had covered what he thought he needed to cover and that got him through.¹⁷⁷

Some gifted students may never finish school. Evidence presented to the Senate inquiry indicated that somewhere between 15% and 40% of gifted students leave school without completing Year 12.¹⁷⁸ Ms Carolyn Priest, Secretary of the Gifted Support Network, told

¹⁷¹ Dr Debora Lipson and Ms Barbara Black, *Submission 78*, 3.

¹⁷² Ms Felicity Walker, *Submission 69*, 3. See also Maroondah Gifted Children's Parents' Association, *Submission 98*, 7; Australian College of Educators (Victorian Branch), *Submission 21*, 2.

¹⁷³ Mrs Michele Whitby, *Submission 114*, 3; VAGTC, *Submission 34*, 7; Gifted Support Network, *Submission 49*, 12; Names withheld, *Submission 45*, 4; VASSP, *Submission 27*, 3; Department of Education (Tasmania), *Submission 10*, 6; Dr Susan Nikakis, *Transcript of evidence*, above n 159, 3; Patrick Leader, Student Council, Year 12 student, Bendigo Senior Secondary College, *Transcript of evidence*, Bendigo, 20 September 2011, 5; Dr John Munro, Associate Professor Exceptional Learning and Gifted Education, Melbourne Graduate School of Education, The University of Melbourne, *Submission 96*, 15; Ms Felicity Walker, *Submission 69*, 2.

¹⁷⁴ Gifted Support Network, *Submission 49*, 10; Maroondah Gifted Children's Parents' Association, *Submission 98*, 5; Dr Karen Ward, *Transcript of evidence*, Bendigo, 20 September 2011, 4. See also Wilma Vialle and Karen Rogers, 'Gifted, talented or educationally disadvantaged?', in Chris Forlin (ed) *Future directions for inclusive teacher education: An international perspective* (2012) Routledge, included in *Submission 28 Appendix C*, 4.

¹⁷⁵ Dr Karen Ward, *Transcript of evidence*, above n 174, 3; Country Education Project, *Submission 79*, 4; Dr Debora Lipson and Ms Barbara Black, *Submission 78*, 3.

¹⁷⁶ Dr Karen Ward, *Transcript of evidence*, above n 174, 3; Ms Pat Slattery, *Transcript of evidence*, above n 131, 4.

¹⁷⁷ Ms Colleen Carapetis, Past committee member, Gifted Support Network, *Transcript of evidence*, Melbourne, 12 September 2011, 3. See also Gifted Support Network, *Submission 49*, 12.

¹⁷⁸ Senate Employment, Workplace Relations, Small Business and Education References Committee, above n 161, 14. See also Joseph Renzulli and Sunghee Park, 'Gifted dropouts: The who and the why' 44(4) *Gifted Child Quarterly* 261, 268–269.

the Committee about her son who is currently in Year 8, 'When he is learning something he is a different child. Now I am at the point where he may not be able to finish school, so that is a really hard journey.'¹⁷⁹

The pattern of underachievement that starts at school may continue into adulthood. Mrs Michele Whitby, a primary school teacher, submitted:

Un-catered for gifted children perhaps never reach their potential as adults as they have underachieved for a significant amount of time, and see no purpose in changing that pattern in later life. Gifted children perhaps become uninspired adults who have grown tired of their 'childhood passion', or see no 'adult' value in it, and their gift becomes nothing more than a hobby at best.¹⁸⁰

Similarly, Mr John Forsythe, Principal of Red Hill Consolidated School, told the Committee about a former gifted student who had hidden his abilities in order to fit in at school, 'I remember years later I saw his mother down the street. I asked her how her son was going. He was unemployed and doing nothing.'¹⁸¹

Participants in this Inquiry highlighted that many bored and disengaged gifted students demonstrate behavioural problems both at home and at school.¹⁸² One set of parents directly attributed their son's poor classroom behaviour to the boredom he experienced at school:

in one class he was clearly bored, 1 minute into the 16 minute explanation of the task at hand. He understood it in that first minute, and then he had to wait 14 minutes to start. At least with our son, by his personality type, he acted up and thus disrupted the class (was labelled naughty) and it triggered action.¹⁸³

Another parent reflected that it was the family that suffered as a consequence of her daughter's disengagement at school:

When she is bored at school, she exhibits behavioural issues outside of school. In school, she will fit-in and please the teacher whenever she can. When she's under-stimulated in the classroom, she is under stress for many hours in the day and as a mom, I get the fallout.¹⁸⁴

Many Inquiry participants spoke of the negative mental health consequences that may arise when the needs of gifted children are not met. Depression and anxiety appear to be especially common. Ms Katherine Pomeroy and Mr Nigel Cunningham told the Committee about their son's reaction to being under stimulated at school:

At the end of the Prep year, our son was so bored and disillusioned with school that he was almost out of control. It was so distressing for us, as parents, to see that light and excitement

¹⁷⁹ Ms Carolyn Priest, Secretary, Gifted Support Network, *Transcript of evidence*, Melbourne, 12 September 2011, 3. See also Ms Henriette Boonen-Hackett, *Submission 26*, 1.

¹⁸⁰ Mrs Michele Whitby, *Submission 114*, 4. See also Maroondah Gifted Children's Parents' Association, *Submission 98*, 9.

¹⁸¹ Mr John Forsythe, Principal, Red Hill Consolidated School, *Transcript of evidence*, Melbourne, 12 September 2011, 6.

¹⁸² VACPSP, *Submission 111*, 2; Mrs Michele Whitby, *Submission 114*, 3; Ms Larelle Parker, *Submission 11*, 1; Ms Moragh Tyler on behalf of Wonthaggi interest group for gifted and talented children, *Submission 64*, 2; PAVCSS, *Submission 74*, 5; Australian Council of State School Organisations, *Submission 32*, 4–5; VAGTC, *Submission 34*, 7; Gifted Support Network, *Submission 49*, 10.

¹⁸³ Ms Katherine Pomeroy and Mr Nigel Cunningham, *Submission 59*, 3. See also Mr Greg Lacey, *Transcript of evidence*, above n 142, 4–5; Ms Rhonda Allen, *Submission 14*, 1.

¹⁸⁴ Ms Maya Panisset, *Submission 31*, 2. See also Names withheld, *Submission 45*, 1; Ms Susan Wight, *Submission 93*, 4.

that started his school experience, be extinguished. By the end of the year he actually began to show signs of anxiety and depression at the age of six.¹⁸⁵

Some participants highlighted that gifted students may become depressed to the point of contemplating suicide. A parent whose gifted son had experienced bullying wrote:

In sixth grade he said to me very quietly one morning that there were days when he woke up and thought that he would rather throw himself off the water tower than to go to school.¹⁸⁶

Other participants emphasised that many gifted students develop low self-esteem.¹⁸⁷

On a positive note, research has identified that appropriate interventions can reverse patterns of underachievement in gifted students.¹⁸⁸ The Committee heard stories of students whose performance and mental health dramatically improved when given work of an appropriate standard and surrounded by like-minded peers. For example, Ms Caelli Greenbank, a gifted student who achieved early entry to university, told the Committee:

I know I am in a far better position today than when I was in primary school. I was not in a good mental state at all because I was not challenged, I had no friends — I really had no reason to get out of bed in the mornings. Whereas now I have got people who will text me at 10 past 5 if I do not show up at uni that night. I have got classes I need to go to because they are interesting ... So in a sense those emotional needs do increase the less a student's needs are addressed, and the longer they go on the worse it gets and the more likely it is that counselling and support are needed.¹⁸⁹

The Committee considers strategies for supporting gifted students emotionally in chapter ten of this report.

Impact on the public education system

Many Inquiry participants observed that the lack of provision for gifted students in the government school system means that many good students leave the system, either to attend independent schools or to be home schooled. Parent, Ms Kim Steere, who now sends her gifted son to an independent school, observed:

We often hear that private schools “snap up” the brightest students away from government schools. I believe the opposite is true. The public system is abandoning these gifted and talented students, and driving them away.¹⁹⁰

¹⁸⁵ Ms Katherine Pomeroy and Mr Nigel Cunningham, *Submission 59*, 1–2. See also Ms Carolyn Priest, *Transcript of evidence*, above n 179, 3; Karen, parent, *Transcript of evidence*, Melbourne, 19 September 2011, 22; Ms Maxine Cowie, Director, Starjump, *Transcript of evidence*, Melbourne, 10 October 2011, 4; Ms Rhonda Allen, *Submission 14*, 1; Gifted Support Network, *Submission 49*, 10.

¹⁸⁶ Name withheld, *Submission 94*, 1. See also VAGTC, *Submission 34*, 7; WiseOnes Australia, *Submission 18*, 8.

¹⁸⁷ Maroondah Gifted Children's Parents' Association, *Submission 98*, 7; Ms Felicity Walker, *Submission 69*, 3; Karen, *Transcript of evidence*, above n 185, 22.

¹⁸⁸ Dr Leonie Kronborg, Coordinator of Gifted Education Assessment Clinic, Krongold Centre, Faculty of Education, Monash University, *Submission 104*, 5. See also Joseph Renzulli and Sunghee Park, above n 178, 269; Susan Baum, Joseph Renzulli and Thomas Hebert, 'Reversing underachievement: Creative productivity as a systematic intervention' 39(4) *Gifted Child Quarterly* 224, 233–235.

¹⁸⁹ Ms Caelli Greenbank, student, *Transcript of evidence*, Melbourne, 19 September 2011, 5. See also Ms Moragh Tyler on behalf of Wonthaggi interest group for gifted and talented children, *Submission 64*, 5; Dr Maria Adams, *Submission 65*, 2.

¹⁹⁰ Ms Kim Steere, *Submission 61*, 3.

The Committee heard that the flow of gifted young people out of the public education system has a negative impact on the system as a whole, removing motivated, high-achieving role models and diminishing the academic results in government schools.¹⁹¹

These issues are discussed in more detail later in this chapter in the context of the quality of current provision in the Victorian education system (see section 3.3.3) and the merit of separate schools and streams for educating gifted students (see section 3.4.1).

Impact on society

Participants in this Inquiry drew the Committee's attention to the negative impact on society as a whole if gifted students are not effectively catered for by the education system.

Firstly, participants highlighted that gifted young people are the next generation of leaders, problem solvers and innovators. Mrs Deborah DeBuhr, a teacher and education consultant, submitted:

It is our obligation to allow these students to go 'beyond the norm' and reach their potential. In so doing, we can release the next generation of artists, sportspeople, creative thinkers, environmentalist[s], scientist[s], community leaders, writers, philosophers, inventors, etc. who might not otherwise reach the heights that they have the potential to reach to contribute and play an important part in our society, local communities, nation and world.¹⁹²

Ms Meehan, President of VAGTC, also stressed the important contribution that gifted young people will make to society in the future:

We have an earth that is very much in need of good problem-solvers. We have a state that is in need of good problem-solvers. We have a lot of issues that we are struggling with, and we have students at our schools who have the potential to solve those problems. One of the things that gifted students really enjoy doing is problem-solving ... Our gifted and talented students are the resource that we have to solve those problems and the people who tomorrow will be at the cutting edge of helping humanity to survive.¹⁹³

On a more sombre note, Ms Maxine Cowie, Director of Starjump, a private organisation that works with children with learning disabilities, underlined the potential detrimental impact of gifted young people becoming disengaged adults:

Failure to act is very costly. If you have a child depressed at eight, you have looming mental health problems. Brightness and anger is dangerous. You have law and order antisocial behaviour. The prisons are full of ADHD [Attention deficit hyperactivity disorder] bright people. The burden on social security is enormous ...¹⁹⁴

¹⁹¹ Australian Education Union (Victorian Branch), *Submission 106*, 4; VASSP, *Submission 27*, 1–2.

¹⁹² Mrs Deborah DeBuhr, *Submission 46*, 5. See also Mrs Michele Whitby, *Submission 114*, 2–3; Mr Andrew Lockwood-Penney, *Submission 112*, 3; Catholic Education Office Melbourne, *Submission 87*, 4; Dr Debora Lipson and Ms Barbara Black, *Submission 78*, 5; Department of Education (Tasmania), *Submission 10*, 3; Mr Ian Burrage *Transcript of evidence*, above n 145, 12.

¹⁹³ Ms Carmel Meehan, *Transcript of evidence*, above n 138, 2–3.

¹⁹⁴ Ms Maxine Cowie, *Transcript of evidence*, above n 185, 5.

3.2.4 The need for gifted programs and provisions—The Committee’s view

The evidence presented to the Committee demonstrates that gifted students have distinct learning needs, which require tailored learning strategies, as well as opportunities to link with like-minded peers. In addition, the Committee agrees that gifted students have a right, as a matter of equity, to access an education that meets their specific needs. Gifted students are the next generation of leaders, problem solvers and innovators and the whole of the Victorian community will benefit significantly from these students being given every opportunity to reach their full potential.

There is strong and disturbing evidence that the failure to meet the needs of gifted students potentially has significant impacts on these students such as underachievement, disengagement and mental health issues. Some of these negative effects may continue to be evident into adulthood, meaning that a young person may never fulfil his or her potential and may not make the contribution to society that he or she would otherwise.

The evidence presented to the Committee suggests that gifted students are frequently victims of bullying. The Committee is hopeful that the implementation of the recommendations in this report will create a school system that respects diversity and values the contribution of all students. This issue is explored fully in chapter ten.

The Committee is also very concerned about apparent high levels of underachievement among gifted students. It considers that more work is urgently needed to understand the extent and causes of underachievement among gifted students in Victoria. The Committee therefore recommends that the Victorian Government commission research into this area to help inform future interventions to address underachievement. Further recommendations in relation to improving the evidence base are made in section 3.3.5 below in relation to evaluations and chapter five in relation to research more generally.

Having reached the conclusion that special programs and provisions are required to effectively cater for the educational needs of gifted students, in the next section the Committee turns its attention to the adequacy of current provision in Victoria. That discussion is followed by a consideration of how the special educational needs of gifted students are best met.

Recommendation 1: Research on the extent and causes of underachievement by gifted students

That the Victorian Government commission research into the extent and causes of underachievement by gifted students in Victoria.

3.3 Are current programs and provisions meeting the needs of gifted students in Victoria?

This section provides a general discussion of the scope and effectiveness of current gifted education programs and provisions in Victoria. It provides the platform for more detailed consideration of how gifted education can be enhanced in the remainder of this report.

Case study 1: ‘We felt that they had placed her in the “too hard basket”’¹⁹⁵

‘We have two daughters who are academically gifted. They have both recently completed their VCE (2008 & 2010) ...

The girls’ (government) primary school did not identify them as gifted. Teachers realised that the girls were bright, but assumed they were being adequately catered for within the classroom. Not so. DD1 (elder daughter) in particular was not learning anything at all, and the boredom and lack of fulfilment were causing huge emotional problems which were being manifested in the home environment. At the beginning of grade 3, we asked that she be assessed as a basis for more appropriate educational options. This eventually took place nine months after our initial request. She was at the bottom of the list due to the fact that she met all her grade 3 benchmarks (and most likely all the grade 5 benchmarks as well) ...

The results came through the following year—almost a year after we requested the assessment. The results were not fully shared with us ... we were shown the part of the report which the principal wanted us to see, which outlined some measures which may have been helpful had they been implemented, but still would not have gone far enough to re-engage DD1 in education. There was a clear statement at the end of the report that these accommodations would be sufficient and no follow up testing would be required in later years ... The principal also told us that DD1 came out on the 90th percentile, which did not place her in the gifted category. We found this difficult to believe as it did not match what we knew of our daughter.

We finally got access to the complete report 12 months later following a change of principal. The report placed DD1 on the 99th percentile, not the 90th percentile as we had been told. We felt as though we had been deliberately cheated and kept in the dark to stop us making further requests on behalf of our daughter. We felt that they had placed her in the “too hard basket” and that was where they wanted to keep her. She had now spent two dreadfully unhappy years at primary school learning absolutely nothing ...

At no stage did we feel that the primary school understood the level of giftedness of our children, nor the interventions that would be needed to provide them with an educational setting where they would be challenged; where they could learn how to learn. Our requests for acceleration were denied ... We changed schools in order to gain a single year’s acceleration for each child. DD1 entered secondary school at the completion of grade 5, and DD2 changed primary schools in order to be accelerated.

DD2’s experience at another primary school was completely different. The new school welcomed the acceleration, acknowledged her intelligence, her maturity and her responsibility, and rewarded her with extra-curricular tasks that took place during class time but replaced classwork. The children involved in these tasks were chosen on the basis that the fact that they were missing classwork would not have a detrimental effect upon their education ...

¹⁹⁵ Names withheld, *Submission 45*, 1–4.

The secondary school we chose had a SEAL program, and therefore had some knowledge of the needs of gifted children as well as a flexible attitude. Inclusion in the SEAL class immediately re-engaged DD1. However, even this was not enough ... By halfway through her second year in the SEAL program, DD1 was desperate for further acceleration, both academically and socially. The grade skip from year 8 to year 10 was very successful, and the school also allowed her to go straight from year 8 into year 11 in her area of strength (LOTE). This was also very successful, keeping her engaged in the subject when it looked as though she was going to drop out due to lack of stimulation.

The SEAL program served DD2 well. She was reasonably well catered for with the advanced and compacted curriculum, and she fitted in well socially. However, it must also be mentioned that she was the only child in her class who had been previously accelerated, and she was between six and 20 months younger than everyone else. Whether she would have been as well served had she not been previously accelerated is one of those things that we shall never know.'

3.3.1 Do gifted students currently have equitable access education in Victoria?

In the previous section the Committee concluded that gifted students need to be specifically catered for as a matter of equity. A strong theme in the evidence, particularly from parents, was that the lack of provision for gifted students in Victoria means that they are not currently afforded equal access to an education that matches their needs.¹⁹⁶ One family told the Committee that their gifted son only learns because his family make an effort to ensure that he has access to challenging material at home. They commented:

School is for learning. As a 7 year old boy his time spent at home should not be for extension of his schooling but pursuit of his own interests and time spent with family and friends.¹⁹⁷

Other parents pointed out that their gifted children only access appropriate learning experiences through user-pays programs or extracurricular activities, which may place a heavy financial burden on parents.¹⁹⁸

One set of parents contended that each student should have equal access to the teacher's time in the classroom. They observed that this is not occurring at the moment because many gifted students already know the material being taught:

our daughter spent a whole term in a subject where she did not learn one new important point. By her *own* account, she spent the whole term revising what she already knew.¹⁹⁹

Another heavily emphasised theme was that gifted children do not currently have an opportunity to learn how to learn. The parents of two gifted girls told the Committee:

¹⁹⁶ AAEGT, *Submission 28*, 3; Victorian Catholic Schools Parent Body, *Submission 51*, 2–3; Mrs Deborah DeBuhr, *Submission 46*, 3; Box Hill High School, *Submission 81*, 7.

¹⁹⁷ Mr Wayne and Mrs Meredith Burton, *Submission 17*, 4.

¹⁹⁸ Felicity, *Transcript of evidence*, above n 153, 20; Heike, parent, *Transcript of evidence*, Melbourne, 19 September 2011, 20; Gifted Support Network, *Submission 49*, 19; Maroondah Gifted Children's Parents' Association, *Submission 98*, 7.

¹⁹⁹ Names withheld, *Submission 29*, 3. See also Ms Pieta McLean, *Submission 44*, 2; Mr Marcus L'Estrange, *Supplementary submission 19A*, 1.

Learning how to learn is something that every child needs, and very few gifted children receive this opportunity. Working on tasks at the optimum level is the right of every child—tasks where they experience persistence and learn that progression and mastery come from application and not from natural talent. Average children receive this opportunity in the classroom. Gifted children do not.²⁰⁰

Likewise, Ms Henriette Boonen-Hackett, also the parent of a gifted child, stated:

Unless children come up against barriers that they have to push through for understanding, *THEY LEARN NOT TO TRY!* It is vitally important for children to meet obstacles and difficulties so that they can learn to push past it to reach a deeper understanding. An important skill for learning, yes, but an imperative skill for LIFE.²⁰¹

Not learning how to learn was seen as contributing to the likelihood that a child will disengage and underachieve.

Many Inquiry participants drew a comparison with provisions for students with learning disabilities, arguing that while gifted students need additional support just as much as learning disabled students, they are much less likely to receive this in Victorian schools. For instance, the Australian College of Educators, which represents educators nation-wide, contended:

There is some evidence to suggest that more resources are directed into programs for children that fall behind ... Many view the availability of programs for the gifted and talented as an unnecessary luxury, whereas others would argue they are as morally required as programs addressing the needs of the struggling student.²⁰²

A survey of parents conducted by the Gifted Support Network found that 75% of children represented in the survey had a special needs teacher at their school, but only 28% of children had a special needs teacher who worked with gifted students.²⁰³

Other contributors pointed out that it is inequitable that students gifted in certain areas, especially sport, are encouraged to meet their potential, while the same opportunities are not always afforded to intellectually gifted students. The Principals' Association of Victorian Catholic Secondary Schools stated that intellectually gifted students 'should be able to realise their full potential in the same way that we encourage Olympic athletes'.²⁰⁴ Melissa, a participant in the Committee's Parents' Forum, agreed:

The test I use myself so often when people say things about gifted education is to ask, 'Would you say the same thing about sport or people with disabilities?' ... If you are saying things like, 'A young Nathan Buckley can only kick 10 metres: because the other kids can kick 10 metres, he is not allowed to kick 20 metres', you would just think that was an enormous waste of potential, but we let that thinking go on in gifted education ...

We had this at our school when we were looking at the Australian Mathematics Competition, which my daughter wanted to do. The Principal's response to that was, 'Oh, we don't encourage competition in curriculum areas'. I had to stop a second and say, 'Well, actually kids do

²⁰⁰ Names withheld, *Submission 45*, 4. See also Gifted Support Network, *Submission 49*, 10; Dr Glenison Alsop, *Submission 54*, above n 151, 5; Ms Louise Broadbent, *Transcript of evidence*, above n 138, 5; Mr Wayne and Mrs Meredith Burton, *Submission 17*, 4.

²⁰¹ Ms Henriette Boonen-Hackett, *Submission 26*, 3.

²⁰² Australian College of Educators (Victorian Branch), *Submission 21*, 5–6. See also Ms Carolyn Priest, *Transcript of evidence*, above n 179, 9; Mrs Deborah DeBuhr, *Submission 46*, 3, 9; Mrs Michele Whitby, *Submission 114*, 2; Names withheld, *Submission 29*, 6; Distance Education Centre Victoria, *Submission 24*, 2.

²⁰³ Gifted Support Network, *Submission 49*, 7.

²⁰⁴ PAVCSS, *Submission 74*, 5. See also Ms Felicity Walker, *Submission 69*, 6; Dr Debora Lipson and Ms Barbara Black, *Submission 78*, 1; Goldfields LLEN, *Submission 86*, 2.

basketball and district athletics. They're curriculum areas too, and you don't mind kids who like basketball playing with other kids who like basketball'.²⁰⁵

3.3.2 The scope of current programs and provisions

In chapter two the Committee provided an overview of the current programs and provisions for gifted students in Victoria. However, as noted in that chapter, the Committee's efforts to form a complete picture of the current gifted education landscape were hampered by the fact that schools operate relatively autonomously, and that DEECD does not collect data in relation to gifted education provision.²⁰⁶ Three participants in this Inquiry suggested that there should be an audit or analysis of the scope of such programs in Victoria.²⁰⁷

The evidence to this Inquiry, while not providing a complete picture of gifted education in Victoria, strongly suggests that the scope of current provision is not broad enough to effectively cater for all gifted students in this state. DEECD acknowledged that the Victorian approach to gifted education has varied over time, admitting that there is less provision for gifted students than there has been previously. The Department's submission stated:

In the past there has been a number of specific strategies and programs aimed at gifted and talented children, but more recently this has shifted to a broader focus on learning strategies that benefit all children including the gifted and talented.²⁰⁸

By far the biggest problem identified by Inquiry participants is that gifted education provision is currently very ad hoc, highly reliant on the energies and attitudes individual teachers or school leaders. Ms Pam Lyons, Coordinator of a holiday program for gifted school students run at La Trobe University, reflected on her experience working in central Victoria and commented:

Over the last thirteen years working with schools it has always been the attitude of the principal and teaching staff that made the most difference regarding programming or the lack of it in a particular school.²⁰⁹

The reliance on individual champions within a school has meant that gifted education programs are vulnerable to discontinuance when a particular staff member leaves a school. Ms Walker, the parent of two gifted children, told the Committee 'schools take their tone from their principal, which means that a school which does a lot for gifted children may change completely when the principal changes'.²¹⁰

Another key issue identified by participants in this Inquiry is that most of the provisions for gifted students are concentrated at the secondary school level. There is almost nothing available for gifted students at the early childhood and primary school stages. The lack of provision for gifted students in Victorian primary schools was one of the

²⁰⁵ Melissa, parent, *Transcript of evidence*, Melbourne, 19 September 2011, 17.

²⁰⁶ Mr Ian Burrage, *Transcript of evidence*, above n 145, 7.

²⁰⁷ Dr John Munro, *Submission 96*, above n 173, 7; Australian College of Educators (Victorian Branch), *Submission 21*, 5; VASSP, 'Position paper: Specialist schools', included in *Submission 27 Appendix A*, 2.

²⁰⁸ DEECD, *Submission 58*, 3.

²⁰⁹ Ms Pam Lyons, Coordinator, Able Learners' Enrichment Program, La Trobe University, *Submission 71*, 3. See also VAGTC, *Submission 34*, 3, 6; Mr Wayne and Mrs Meredith Burton, *Submission 17*, 5; Mr Paul Double, *Submission 15*, 1; VPA, *Submission 105*, 2; Gifted Resources, *Submission 113*, 11.

²¹⁰ Ms Felicity Walker, *Submission 69*, 5. See also VAGTC, *Submission 34*, 15; Dr Gail Byrne, Psychologist, Exceptional Children, *Submission 63*, 5; Ms Larelle Parker, *Submission 11*, 1.

strongest themes in the evidence. The parents of a gifted primary school student submitted:

Gifted and talented children begin their educational journey at primary school. They do not just suddenly appear in secondary school. As the system stands, there are seven years of primary school and six in secondary. If between 5–10% of all students are gifted ... then there are more of these students in primary school than in secondary school. Amazingly, there are NO clear government policies or funded programs for primary aged children who are gifted ...²¹¹

Even in secondary schools where there is specific provision for gifted students through the SEAL Program, selective entry schools (from Year 9) and specialist schools, the Committee heard that demand for places exceeds available positions (see chapter seven). In addition, as noted earlier in this chapter, gifted students who are underachieving may never have the opportunity to enter such programs.

Finally, a large number of participants emphasised that not all gifted students have equal access to the currently available gifted education opportunities. The major barriers to access identified in this Inquiry were geographic location, cultural background, disability and socioeconomic status. These barriers are explored in detail in chapter five.

3.3.3 The quality of current programs and provisions

Research conducted on behalf of DEECD found that most surveyed schools considered their gifted education programs to be effective.²¹² In contrast, the evidence to this Inquiry overwhelmingly suggests that adequate provisions are not being made to meet the educational needs of most gifted students in Victorian schools. Only a handful of parents of primary school students expressed satisfaction with the programs and provisions at their child's school.²¹³ Many parents with children in primary school were exasperated that schools failed to put in place appropriate arrangements for their gifted offspring, even after extensive advocacy by the parents.²¹⁴

Earlier in this chapter the Committee identified that gifted children have a different approach to learning. However, the evidence to this Inquiry suggests that all too often the special learning needs of these students are not taken into account in Victorian classrooms. Many parents expressed frustration that gifted students who complete their work are simply given more work at the same level. For example, one parent wrote, 'The school failed to understand that challenging him was more than giving him more work, he needed different work, or work from higher classes.'²¹⁵ One submission quoted nine-year-old Daniel:

²¹¹ Names withheld, *Submission 29*, 6. See also Ms Pieta McLean, *Submission 44*, 2; Dr Debora Lipson and Ms Barbara Black, *Submission 78*, 3; VPA, *Submission 105*, 1; Dr Glenison Alsop, *Submission 54*, above n 151, 4; Maroondah Gifted Children's Parents' Association, *Submission 98*, 5; Dr Gail Byrne, *Submission 63*, above n 210, 5; Pieta, parent, *Transcript of evidence*, Bendigo, 20 September 2011, 4; Ms Sonia Fullerton, *Submission 33*, 2.

²¹² Jane Stewart et al, *Research report: Current provision and opportunities for further central coordination of support for schools to address the educational needs of gifted and talented students in Victoria*, report for DEECD, unpublished, supplementary evidence received 6 September 2011, 4.

²¹³ Ms Sonia Fullerton, *Submission 33*, 1; Ms Maya Panisset, *Submission 31*, 2; Sonia, parent, *Transcript of evidence*, Melbourne, 19 September 2011, 5; Dr Maria Adams, *Submission 65*, 2.

²¹⁴ Names withheld, *Submission 9*, 2; Ms Kim Steere, *Submission 61*, 1–2; Ms Rhonda Allen, *Submission 14*, 2; Mr Wayne and Mrs Meredith Burton, *Submission 17*, 4; AAEGT, *Submission 28*, 1; Gifted Support Network, *Submission 49*, 7; Belgrave Parent Support Group for Gifted and Talented Students, *Submission 60*, 1–2.

²¹⁵ Ms Rhonda Allen, *Submission 14*, 2. See also Ms Susan Wight, *Submission 93*, 1; Australian Council of State School Organisations, *Submission 32*, 4; Parents Victoria, *Submission 82*, 2.

I hate it when I finish my maths (which was so easy the answers just popped into my head without having to think about it) and I'm then given another almost identical sheet ... At home I've got a book of really tricky maths problems ... I have to think about the questions. Some of them are so hard it might take a couple of weeks of thinking to work out a single problem. It's a great book.²¹⁶

Another parent voiced concern that gifted students are frequently left to learn on their own in the classroom:

Dealing with the educational needs of gifted children is not a matter of simply allowing them to work at their own pace in their current grade. Gifted students may actually be highly dependent on their teacher as they require structured and challenging work to meet their specific academic needs.²¹⁷

Satisfaction was much higher among students and parents of students enrolled in the SEAL Program, selective entry schools and specialist schools (see chapter seven).

There was also widespread satisfaction with some of the external programs outlined in chapter two, which are offered in conjunction with schools such as G.A.T.E.WAYS, WiseOnes and competitions such as the Maths and Science Olympiads.²¹⁸ However, some parents expressed concerns that these are not available in all schools, are once-off or infrequent and are user pays.²¹⁹

As noted earlier in this chapter, some parents told the Committee that the lack of appropriate provision in the government system left them with no choice but to send their gifted children to independent schools. For example, Ms Rhonda Allen told the Committee that lack of challenge at primary school meant that her gifted son became depressed:

We have since sent our son to a private boy's school at great financial cost to the family with significant sacrifices. We felt this was the only option for him to not only be happy but to achieve his full potential within a supporting and challenging environment.²²⁰

Other parents reported withdrawing their gifted children from government schools in order to home school them. Again, this was seen as a last resort prompted by the failure of the government system to offer their gifted children an appropriate education. Ms Wight, a home schooling parent, told the Committee that she withdrew her children from school in the interests of their 'mental and emotional well-being'. She added:

I feel it is a sad indictment on the school system that two children who were so keen to learn had to leave school in order to be secure and happy in a supportive learning environment. My

²¹⁶ Ms Jennifer Grant, *Submission 97*, above n 167, 5.

²¹⁷ Names withheld, *Submission 9*, 4.

²¹⁸ Ms Rhonda Allen, *Submission 14*, 2; Belgrave Parent Support Group for Gifted and Talented Students, *Submission 60*, 2; Ms Trudi Jacobson, Assistant Principal, Kennington Primary School, *Transcript of evidence*, Bendigo, 20 September 2011, 6; Ms Henriette Boonen-Hackett, *Supplementary submission 26B*, 4; Ms Moragh Tyler, *Transcript of evidence*, above n 170, 2; WiseOnes Australia, *Submission 18*, 5–6.

²¹⁹ Kim, parent, *Transcript of evidence*, Melbourne, 19 September 2011, 20; Heike, *Transcript of evidence*, above n 198, 20; Ms Jennifer Grant, *Submission 97*, above n 167, 2; Name withheld, *Submission 75*, 2; Ms Kim Steere, *Submission 61*, 3; Ms Katherine Pomeroy and Mr Nigel Cunningham, *Submission 59*, 2; Ms Rhonda Allen, *Submission 14*, 2; Belgrave Parent Support Group for Gifted and Talented Students, *Submission 60*, 2; Box Hill High School, *Submission 81*, 5; Parents Victoria, *Submission 82*, 5; VACPSP, *Submission 111*, 3.

²²⁰ Ms Rhonda Allen, *Submission 14*, 2. See also Ms Carolyn Ferguson, *Submission 55*, 2; The Mac.Robertson Girls' High School, *Submission 83*, 1; Brunswick Secondary College, *Submission 40*, 6.

husband and I are conservative people. We would never have come to home education except through desperation.²²¹

Even where schools have dedicated gifted programs, evidence to this Inquiry suggests that quality varies significantly between individual schools.²²² The Committee heard that some schools believe they are effectively catering for gifted students when, in fact, they are not.²²³ Another misgiving was that some schools use their gifted programs purely as a marketing exercise. For instance, Mr Neil Davis, Principal of Box Hill High School, which offers the SEAL Program, stated:

Many of our concerns over the years have been about the springing up of other sorts of programs which are probably, I don't know if I'm cynical or not, but in many cases they're marketing programs, not actually addressing the needs of children and so they will appear under a number of different sorts of banners and titles around the place.²²⁴

While the Committee noticed a general perception that independent schools are better at catering for gifted students, some of the evidence received indicates that this is not always the case. The Maroondah Gifted Children's Parents' Association, a voluntary parents' organisation, submitted:

Many parents believe that by obtaining a scholarship (or entry) to a private school their gifted child's educational needs will be met. Anecdotal evidence from many parents and students reveals this is often not the case. We have heard of gifted students offered a scholarship on the basis of incredible mathematical ability (for example) only to find, when at the school, they were expected to do maths with the regular mainstream class with absolutely no differentiation, enrichment or acceleration. Others have been promised withdrawal extension classes which either don't eventuate or are so ad hoc as to be of little benefit.²²⁵

Similarly, the Catholic Education Office Melbourne observed that the high rate of students exiting the Catholic system to attend selective entry schools indicates that these students' needs are not being within the Catholic education system.²²⁶

3.3.4 What are the outcomes of current programs and provisions?

There is very little available information about the outcomes of the current gifted education provisions in Victoria. A report commissioned by DEECD found that schools viewed their gifted programs as 'very effective', but noted that this view was based on a range of subjective measures rather than formal monitoring of outcomes.²²⁷ Most gifted programs and provisions do not appear to have been formally evaluated. The limited

²²¹ Ms Susan Wight, *Submission 93*, 5. See also Australian College of Educators (Victorian Branch), *Submission 21*, 7; Maroondah Gifted Children's Parents' Association, *Submission 98*, 8; Alison, parent, *Transcript of evidence*, Bendigo, 20 September 2011, 2–3; Susan, parent, *Transcript of evidence*, Bendigo, 20 September 2011, 3; Pieta, *Transcript of evidence*, above n 211, 3.

²²² Name withheld, *Submission 117*, 2; Ms Wendy White, parent, Box Hill High School, *Transcript of evidence*, Box Hill, 29 August 2011, 2–3; Gifted Resources, *Submission 113*, 11; VAGTC, *Submission 34*, 6; Dr Gail Byrne, *Submission 63*, above n 210, 5.

²²³ VAGTC, *Submission 34*, 3.

²²⁴ Mr Neil Davis, Acting Principal, Box Hill High School, *Transcript of evidence*, Box Hill, 29 August 2011, 2. See also Box Hill High School, *Submission 81*, 10.

²²⁵ Maroondah Gifted Children's Parents' Association, *Submission 98*, 9. See also Ms Henriette Boonen-Hackett, *Submission 26*, 2; Maria, *Transcript of evidence*, above n 148, 13; Dr Karen Ward, *Transcript of evidence*, above n 174, 2–3; Ms Wendy White, *Transcript of evidence*, above n 222, 3.

²²⁶ Catholic Education Office Melbourne, *Submission 87*, 5.

²²⁷ Jane Stewart et al, above n 212, 24–26.

research that has been undertaken, in particular the 2004 evaluation of the SEAL Program, has not been publicly released.

The 2001 Senate committee report recommended research into the effects and outcomes of selective schools and streams, however this research does not appear to have been undertaken in any Australian state or territory.²²⁸ While two new selective entry schools were opened in Victoria in 2010 and 2011, the Victorian Minister for Education informed the Committee, 'The Department has not undertaken any research to examine the specific impact of selectivity on the performance of these schools, or the impact of select entry schools on the broader school system.'²²⁹ However, he highlighted that VCE results and data associated with the School Accountability and Improvement Framework 'shows that these schools are performing exceptionally well, both within the government school system and when compared against all Victorian schools.'

Schools and educators participating in this Inquiry provided a range of anecdotal evidence suggesting that their provision of gifted education at a school level is effective in meeting the needs of Victorian students. This evidence is reflected in the discussions of programs in primary and secondary schools in chapters six and seven of this report.

3.3.5 Are current programs and provisions meeting the needs of gifted students in Victoria?—The Committee's view

The evidence gathered in this Inquiry makes it patently clear that the needs of gifted students are not being met by the Victorian education system. While some individual programs and schools are of high quality, overall the gifted education offerings in this state are not meeting the needs of gifted students. Of particular concern, the evidence considered by the Committee reveals that currently most gifted students in Victoria do not enjoy equitable access to educational opportunities that meet their learning needs. The Committee strongly believes that Victorian parents should not feel obliged to home school their gifted children or to send them to independent schools in order to ensure that their educational needs are met.

The Committee's investigations show that there is no systematic approach to gifted education in Victoria. In the early childhood and primary school years there appears to be extremely limited and ad hoc provision. While more is available at the secondary level, there is variable quality and demand for places exceeds supply.

The Committee is also concerned that not all Victorian students have equal access to the limited offerings that are available, with access restricted by factors such as geographic location, cultural background and socioeconomic status.

Throughout the remainder of this report the Committee suggests a raft of strategies to address these key issues. Most notably, the Committee identifies the need for:

- a state-wide gifted education policy (see section 3.5)

²²⁸ Senate Employment, Workplace Relations, Small Business and Education References Committee, above n 161, 68.

²²⁹ Letter from Minister for Education (Victoria), to Chair, Victorian Parliament Education and Training Committee, 7 February 2012, 10.

- an obligation on all schools to identify and cater for their gifted students (see chapter four)
- greater use in all Victorian schools of a range of strategies that have been proven to be effective in catering for gifted students such as curriculum differentiation, acceleration and ability grouping (see chapters five and six)
- increased provision of gifted education opportunities, most notably through a virtual school (see chapter five)
- increased access to educational opportunities for gifted students from backgrounds of educational disadvantage (see chapter five)
- improved gifted education through early childhood education and at primary school (see chapter six), as well as at secondary school (see chapter seven)
- increased education and support for teachers and school leaders (see chapters eight and nine).

The paucity of program evaluations makes it difficult for the Committee to assess the outcomes of the current gifted education offerings. Even flagship gifted provision such as selective entry schools have not been evaluated. The Committee notes that the one comprehensive evaluation that has been undertaken, the 2004 evaluation of the SEAL Program, was never publicly released.

The Committee considers it vital to regularly evaluate all gifted programs and provisions. This will provide an evidence base about what works in terms of gifted education and allow learnings to be shared. The Committee believes that evaluation should be incorporated as a core component of both the state and school-level gifted education policies, which the Committee recommends in sections 3.5.2 and 3.5.3 below.

The Committee also shares the concern of many participants in this Inquiry that it is difficult to know what gifted education offerings are available in Victorian schools. The Committee considers that the Victorian Government should collect and publish information about currently available gifted education programs and provisions in government schools.

The Committee notes that the publication of a list of available programs and provisions will not provide any guarantee of program quality. However, combined with regular program evaluation, it will assist parents and students to assess the relative merits of the various programs and options.

Recommendation 2: List of gifted education programs and provisions

That the Victorian Government publish a list of all gifted education programs and provisions in Victorian government schools.

Recommendation 3: Program evaluation

That the Victorian Government undertake regular evaluation of all centrally auspiced gifted programs and provisions and, through the Victorian policy and the model school policy on the education of gifted and talented students, emphasise the importance of regular review and evaluation of all gifted programs and provisions.

3.4 How are the educational needs of gifted students best met?

The Committee has concluded that gifted students require tailored programs and provisions to meet their special learning needs, and that the Victorian education system should do more to cater for this cohort. This section considers the evidence about how the needs of gifted students can be met.

3.4.1 Separate programs and schools?

As noted above, the Committee received positive evidence from many students, parents and teachers involved in SEAL, selective entry and specialist schools. These schools form the cornerstone of Victoria's current provision for gifted students. As will be explored fully in chapters six and seven, many participants argued that these programs should be greatly expanded, for example to include provision for primary school aged children and to allow more students to attend these schools and programs. Ms Rhonda Collins, who gave evidence on behalf of the Victorian Affiliated Network of Gifted Support Groups, a volunteer organisation that provides information and support to parents and teachers, argued that all gifted students should have the opportunity to attend a special school for the gifted, explaining, 'If we do not get a special school, the problems will still exist because any changes that are done within the system are still done by people who have no idea of what giftedness is.'²³⁰

A small number of participants in this Inquiry, predominantly teachers' organisations, argued against the creation of separate programs and schools to cater for gifted and talented students, contending that these students should be catered for within mainstream programs and schools. These arguments had two main bases: the impact on students excluded from such programs and the impact on the school system as a whole.

The most common concern was that the removal of high-achieving students from mainstream classes and schools results in the loss of high-achieving role models, which impacts negatively on the remaining students. For example, the Victorian Branch of the Australian Education Union, which represents educators and support staff in government schools, articulated:

The participation of high achieving, very creative or highly motivated students in regular classes provides all students with the benefits of learning from and sharing their enthusiasms and achievements.²³¹

Other participants suggested that highly able students who are not selected to participate in specialist programs might be discouraged from striving to reach their full potential,²³² or may not be afforded the same opportunities to meet their potential.²³³

²³⁰ Ms Rhonda Collins, Coordinator, Victorian Affiliated Network of Gifted Support Groups, *Transcript of evidence*, Melbourne, 10 October 2011, 4.

²³¹ Australian Education Union (Victorian Branch), *Submission 106*, 2. See also VASSP, *Submission 27*, 2; PAVCSS, *Submission 74*, 7, 11.

²³² VASSP, *Submission 27*, 2.

²³³ Tournament of Minds (Vic), *Submission 43*, 3. See also Stephen Lamb, 'Selective Entry Schools: The need for a re-think' 5(3) *Professional Voice* 17, 21.

Some contributors stressed the importance of young people learning to interact with diverse range of other students.²³⁴ They saw grouping gifted students together as limiting the opportunities for all students to work together cooperatively regardless of their abilities.

Some participants were also concerned about the resource implications of creating separate programs and schools for gifted students. The Victorian Independent Education Union, which represents staff in Catholic and independent schools, contended that under current funding arrangements, specialist gifted programs divert resources away from students who have learning difficulties.²³⁵ The Victorian Association of State Secondary Principals has released a position paper on specialist schools, which argues that it is unfair that specialist programs attract better resourcing and teaching than mainstream programs, and that these programs 'have a serious impact on neighbouring, non-specialist schools, in terms of enrolments and achievement data like NAPLAN and VCE results'.²³⁶

These assertions were somewhat contentious in this Inquiry and were strongly refuted, particularly by the parents of gifted students. These parents argued that it is unfair to prioritise the needs of other students and the education system as a whole over the needs of individual gifted students. Melissa, a participant in the Committee's Parents' Forum commented:

we are saying it is okay, somehow, to sacrifice the educational needs of gifted children because it might, perhaps—not that it has been proven—help the mainstream children. I think that is quite wrong and an immoral way of thinking about it.²³⁷

Similarly, Dr Leonie Kronborg, Senior Lecturer and Coordinator of Postgraduate Studies in Gifted Education in the Faculty of Education at Monash University, stated:

I think we need to focus on the needs of the students, and I know there is a concern from principals sometimes about losing gifted students in their schools, but I also think that it is the responsibility of principals and teachers to upskill all students in those schools, and taking two, three, four, five or however many students out of the school should not make a huge difference to an educational program that is taking place.²³⁸

3.4.2 The role of mainstream schools

Many participants in this Inquiry emphasised the fundamental role that mainstream schools play in providing appropriate educational opportunities for gifted students. As noted above, some teachers' organisations philosophically opposed separate gifted schools and programs. Other participants recognised the contribution that specialist schools and programs make to gifted education, but argued that, given the demand for places, it is vital that gifted children are able to be catered for in regular classrooms. For instance, the Australian Catholic University submitted:

²³⁴ Mr Nick Pastalatzis, *Submission 101*, 2; Mr Frank Sal, *Transcript of evidence*, above n 142, 8; Australian Education Union (Victorian Branch), *Submission 106*, 2.

²³⁵ VIEU, *Submission 22*, 5–6.

²³⁶ VASSP, 'Position paper: Specialist schools', included in *Submission 27 Appendix A*, 1–2. See also VASSP, *Submission 27*, 2.

²³⁷ Melissa, *Transcript of evidence*, above n 205, 18. See also Forum participant 1, parent, *Transcript of evidence*, Melbourne, 19 September 2011, 13.

²³⁸ Dr Leonie Kronborg, Senior Lecturer, Coordinator of Post Graduate Studies in Gifted Education, Faculty of Education, Monash University, *Transcript of evidence*, Melbourne, 12 September 2011, 12.

these programs are only serving a small proportion of all gifted and talented students in Victoria. To serve all gifted and talented students, the education of these students should be a concern in every classroom, including classrooms in regional and remote areas.²³⁹

Other participants agreed, with some suggesting that this represents a more equitable approach to gifted education. For instance, the Humanist Society of Victoria, a voluntary organisation concerned with social questions of ethics, stated, 'With flexible teaching and appropriate additional resources and encouragement, the pursuit of excellence in the mainstream setting is consistent with satisfying the educational needs of all students.'²⁴⁰ Dr Danuta Chessor, a Lecturer in the School of Psychology at the University of Western Sydney, cited her own research, which has found that, through personalising education, the needs of gifted students can be effectively addressed in mainstream settings. She stated:

For many children who are settled in their school and who have good social interactions within their peer group, but who need to have greater stimulation and opportunity to grow their talents, this can happen most effectively within their mainstream setting where they have opportunity to integrate aspects of the curriculum and progress at a more individual level of ability.²⁴¹

3.4.3 How are the educational needs of gifted students best met?—The Committee's view

The Committee acknowledges the valuable role played by programs and schools that have been set up to specifically to cater for Victoria's gifted and talented students, particularly at the secondary level. However, the Committee recognises that these interventions alone will not be able to provide equitable access to educational opportunities for all gifted students in the state. Therefore, the Committee concludes that mainstreams schools must form the cornerstone of gifted education provision in Victoria.

The fundamental tenet of this report is that gifted education should be available in every classroom in every Victorian school, across all school sectors. The Committee acknowledges that this will not be easily achieved. In particular, it is an approach that requires all teachers and schools to be given significant direction, advice and support. The recommendations throughout the remainder of this report aim to ensure that all Victorian schools can effectively meet the special needs of gifted students.

3.5 A new policy framework for gifted education

This section considers the need for gifted education to be supported by policy at the national, state and school levels.

3.5.1 What is the current policy framework?

As noted in chapter one, there is no policy for the education of gifted and talented students either at a state or national level.

²³⁹ Faculty of Education, Australian Catholic University, *Submission 13*, 11.

²⁴⁰ Humanist Society of Victoria, *Submission 4*, 2. See also Catholic Education Office Melbourne, *Submission 87*, 5; VACPSP, *Submission 111*, 3.

²⁴¹ Dr Danuta Chessor, Lecturer, School of Psychology, University of Western Sydney, *Submission 76*, 2.

The 2001 Senate committee report recommended the development of a national gifted education strategy to 'ameliorate the changeable and unstable state of policy and practice which results from the low profile and uncertain acceptance of this area of special needs'.²⁴² There was some frustration among participants in this Inquiry that this recommendation has not been implemented.²⁴³

At a state level, the Bright Futures policy was introduced in 1995 and continued until approximately 2001. The policy articulated a definition of giftedness, set out the responsibility of schools in relation to educating gifted students, provided for a state-wide network of schools, auspiced professional development for teachers and provided a series of pilot projects offering extension and enrichment for gifted students.²⁴⁴ The policy was supported by documents to aide implementation, as well as resources for parents and teachers, including detailed information about how to cater for gifted students.

Mr Burrage from DEECD acknowledged that the Victorian Government had previously provided more support for gifted education under Bright Futures. He told the Committee 'we have done work to republish that, but that did not go ahead', although he was unable to articulate the reasons for this.²⁴⁵

Some Victorian schools have developed their own gifted education policies. Ms Leigh of the Victorian Principals Association estimated that about a quarter of primary schools have such a policy.²⁴⁶ A sample school gifted education policy is set out in figure nine.

3.5.2 A state policy?

This section considers the benefits of a state-based gifted education policy and what such a policy should contain.

Does Victoria need a new policy framework?

There was strong support among Inquiry participants for the introduction of a Victorian policy on gifted education.²⁴⁷ In particular, the current lack of a policy framework was viewed as giving rise to an ad hoc approach to gifted education in Victoria.²⁴⁸ Mr Burrage told the Committee:

there is currently no state-wide policy on gifted and talented students within the Department and available to schools. We have identified that schools are responsible for identifying gifted and talented students, providing them with appropriate learning, experiences and support. The more you push it towards a school-level responsibility, the more variation you will get and the

²⁴² Senate Employment, Workplace Relations, Small Business and Education References Committee, above n 161, 99.

²⁴³ Nossal High School, *Submission 57*, 7; Faculty of Education, Australian Catholic University, *Submission 13*, 11.

²⁴⁴ Directorate of School Education (Victoria), *Bright futures: A policy statement to support gifted students* (1995) DSE (VIC).

²⁴⁵ Mr Ian Burrage, *Transcript of evidence*, above n 145, 9.

²⁴⁶ Ms Gabrielle Leigh, *Transcript of evidence*, above n 127, 18. See also Ms Claire McInerney, *Transcript of evidence*, above n 139, 18; Names withheld, *Submission 9*, 5.

²⁴⁷ Australian College of Educators (Victorian Branch), *Submission 21*, 1; Ms Henriette Boonen-Hackett, *Submission 26*, 3; Name withheld, *Submission 30*; Names withheld, *Submission 29*, 5–6; Ms Sonia Fullerton, *Submission 33*, 2; Mrs Jo Freitag, *Transcript of evidence*, above n 151, 2.

²⁴⁸ CHIP Foundation, *Submission 77*, 4; VASSP, *Submission 27*, 2; VPA, *Submission 105*, 1.

more patchy the approach will be. We would acknowledge that there is a significant variation in how schools provide for the needs of gifted and talented students.²⁴⁹

Participants felt that a state-wide policy would give gifted education more priority in Victorian schools and lead to better identification practices, as well as improved provision for gifted students. For example, the submission of Nossal High School, a selective entry school, submitted:

The programs and policies that are implemented at school level are a direct reflection of the directives and policies at the DEECD level, and if there are 'silences, gaps and omissions' ... at this level (of which there are) then you are unlikely to see well developed gifted programs/policies in schools.²⁵⁰

Similarly, a participant in the Committee's Parents' Forum expressed the view that a state-wide policy would provide essential support to both parents and schools:

I think if the Department had a policy in place, at least that is something the schools can then look to and say, 'That is some sort of support for us'. Once the policy is in place the school can have its own guidelines and move whichever way it needs to for its own particular school and its cohort of children, but at least there would be a framework. At the moment there is no framework and there is no support, and it is very difficult for the school to even know which way to go or for the parents to do the same.²⁵¹

DEECD acknowledged that there is considerable confusion and uncertainty in the community and in schools about giftedness and how to meet the needs of gifted students. Mr Burrage recognised that the Department could play a greater role in setting expectations about how schools would provide for these students:

The Department could provide state-wide policy guidance ... State-wide policy could provide clearer guidance on school-by-school expectations ... I think if we provided a clearer policy setting and policy context there would be a level of responsiveness from schools.²⁵²

Some participants identified that an additional advantage of a state-wide gifted education policy is that it may help overcome negative attitudes to gifted students and gifted education programs.²⁵³

What should be in a policy statement?

At present Victoria is the only Australian jurisdiction that does not have a gifted education policy. The policies in other jurisdictions cover a range of areas such as:

- definitions of giftedness and talent
- principles underpinning gifted education
- the role and responsibilities of teachers and schools in identifying catering for gifted students

²⁴⁹ Mr Ian Burrage, *Transcript of evidence*, above n 145, 3.

²⁵⁰ Nossal High School, *Submission 57*, 9. See also Ms Cris Stavrou Martyn, Year 2 Teacher, Camelot Rise Primary School, *Transcript of evidence*, Glen Waverley, 15 August 2011, 10; Names withheld, *Submission 29*, 2; PAVCSS, *Submission 74*, 4; Names withheld, *Submission 9*, 6.

²⁵¹ Forum participant 2, parent, *Transcript of evidence*, Melbourne, 19 September 2011, 17. See also Dr John Munro, *Submission 96*, above n 173, 4; Ms Marlene Laurent, Principal, Glenferrie Primary School, *Transcript of evidence*, Melbourne, 12 September 2011, 17.

²⁵² Mr Ian Burrage, *Transcript of evidence*, above n 145, 8–9. See also DEECD, *Submission 58*, 9.

²⁵³ Distance Education Centre Victoria, *Submission 24*, 2; Names withheld, *Submission 29*, 6.

- strategies for identifying and catering for gifted students
- fostering collaborative home–school partnerships
- the role of the relevant government department.²⁵⁴

The Committee asked a range of Inquiry participants what a Victorian gifted education policy should contain. There was a strong agreement that any such statement should provide clear definitions of giftedness and talent.²⁵⁵ There was also general consensus that a policy needs to stipulate how gifted students should be identified and catered for in schools.²⁵⁶

Several participants in this Inquiry spoke highly of the former Victorian Bright Futures policy. Participants particularly liked the fact that the policy:

- provided a clear definition of giftedness²⁵⁷
- outlined ways of catering for gifted students and created a clear understanding of what schools should provide for these students²⁵⁸
- placed a strong emphasis on teacher professional learning²⁵⁹
- was accompanied by resources to help teachers and schools cater for gifted students.²⁶⁰

²⁵⁴ Department of Education and Training (Australian Capital Territory), *Gifted and talented students* (GAT200808, 2008) DET (ACT); Department of Education and Training (New South Wales), *Policy and implementation strategies for the education of gifted and talented students* (2004) DET (NSW); Department of Education and Children’s Services (South Australia), *Gifted and talented children and students policy* (2010) DECS (SA); Department of Education (Western Australia), *Gifted and talented guidelines* (2011) DET (WA); Department of Education, Training and the Arts (Queensland), *Framework for gifted education* (n.d.) DETA (QLD). Available at <<http://education.qld.gov.au>> viewed 22 March 2012; Education Queensland, *Gifted and talented students action plan 2008–2010* (2008) Education Queensland; Department of Education (Tasmania), *Policy statement: Education for students who are gifted* (2000) DoE (TAS); Department of Education and Training (Northern Territory), *Policy for the education of gifted students in the Northern Territory* (3rd edition, 2006) DET (NT); Department of Education and Training (Northern Territory), *Gifted education guidelines to support the implementation of the Policy for the education of gifted students in the Northern Territory* (2006) DET (NT).

²⁵⁵ Faculty of Education, Australian Catholic University, *Submission 13*, 9; Mr Frank Sal, *Transcript of evidence*, above n 142, 3; Ms Annette Spence, High Potential Learning Coordinator, Lalor Secondary College, *Submission 41*, 1; Catholic Education Office Melbourne, *Submission 87*, 9; Australian College of Educators (Victorian Branch), *Submission 21*, 1–2.

²⁵⁶ Dr Gail Byrne, *Submission 63*, above n 210, 6; Mr Paul Double, *Submission 15*, 1; Melissa, *Transcript of evidence*, above n 205, 17; Ms Gabrielle Leigh, *Transcript of evidence*, above n 127, 16–17; Faculty of Education, Australian Catholic University, *Submission 13*, 9; Catholic Education Office Melbourne, *Submission 87*, 9; Names withheld, *Submission 9*, 6.

²⁵⁷ Victorian Affiliated Network of Gifted Support Groups, *Submission 100*, 3; Rhonda Collins, ‘Gifted education: Education for the gifted or education for all?’, included in *Submission 100 Appendix A*, 5–6.

²⁵⁸ Nossal High School, *Submission 57*, 8; Victorian Affiliated Network of Gifted Support Groups, *Submission 100*, 3; Rhonda Collins, ‘Gifted education: Education for the gifted or education for all?’, included in *Submission 100 Appendix A*, 5–6.

²⁵⁹ Nossal High School, *Submission 57*, 8; Ms Pam Lyons, *Submission 71*, above n 209, 3; Ms Cris Stavrou Martyn, *Transcript of evidence*, above n 250, 3.

²⁶⁰ Ms Pam Lyons, *Submission 71*, above n 209, 3; Ms Cris Stavrou Martyn, *Transcript of evidence*, above n 250, 3.

A Victorian gifted education policy?—The Committee’s view

The Committee considers that the lack of clear policy guidance on the education of gifted students has contributed to the current unsatisfactory, ad hoc approach to gifted education in Victorian schools. The Committee concludes that there is an urgent need for a policy on the education of gifted and talented students in this state.

The benefits of a clearly articulated gifted education policy include creating a common understanding of the concepts of giftedness and talent, recognising the special educational needs of gifted students, providing clear statements of the roles of schools, teachers and DEECD in catering for gifted students and providing guidance on how to identify and cater for gifted students. This policy should be founded on the fundamental principle identified in section 3.4.3 that gifted education must be available in every classroom in every Victorian school. The policy should also contain clear definitions of giftedness and talent based on Gagné’s model as discussed in section 3.1.2. The Committee details a number of other specific areas that should be covered by the policy in recommendations throughout this report.

The number and range of participants in this Inquiry indicates the high level of expertise and interest in gifted education. In developing a Victorian policy on the education of gifted and talented students, the Victorian Government should tap into this extensive knowledge base, consulting with a broad array of stakeholders, including students, parents, teachers and schools. The Committee also considers that the policy should be regularly reviewed to ensure that it remains relevant and effective.

Finally, the Committee recommends that the policy should be supported by extensive resources for schools, teachers and parents. These resources will help increase understanding of the policy and aid its practical implementation. The contents of these resources are discussed in more detail throughout this report.

Recommendation 4: A new Victorian policy on the education of gifted and talented students

That the Victorian Government, in consultation with students, parents, teachers, schools and other relevant stakeholders, develop and implement a Victorian policy on the education of gifted and talented students. This policy should be founded on the principle that gifted education must be available in every classroom in every Victorian school. It should also:

- provide definitions of giftedness and talent
- emphasise the importance of regular review and evaluation of gifted programs and provision (see recommendation 3)
- stipulate that schools have a responsibility to identify their gifted students (see recommendation 13)
- require schools to provide appropriate educational provisions for any student identified as gifted (see recommendation 16)
- emphasise the importance of providing personalised learning for gifted students in all Victorian schools, especially in primary schools (see recommendations 17 and 31)
- emphasise the importance of links between teachers and schools (see recommendations 21 and 48)

- emphasise the importance of teacher professional learning (see recommendation 42)
- emphasise the importance of addressing the social and emotional needs of gifted students (see recommendation 55)
- emphasise the importance of collaborative partnerships between schools and parents (recommendation 61)
- emphasise the importance of schools celebrating high achievement in all domains (see recommendation 63).

This policy should be reviewed at least every five years.

Recommendation 5: Resources to support the Victorian policy on the education of gifted and talented students

That the Victorian Government develop resources on giftedness and gifted education to support the Victorian policy on the education of gifted and talented students, including resources on:

- identifying gifted students (see recommendations 9, 10, 11, 12, 14 and 15)
- strategies and approaches for educating gifted students (see recommendations 18, 29 and 54)
- giftedness and educating a gifted child (see recommendations 56, 58, 59 and 60).

3.5.3 School policies

A number of participants in this Inquiry contended that all Victorian schools should be required to have a gifted education policy covering areas such as identification and strategies to support and educate gifted students.²⁶¹ This is the approach in New South Wales where the state gifted education policy articulates that schools have a responsibility to develop a gifted education policy.²⁶²

Dr Munro of Melbourne University expressed the view that individual school policies would supplement a state-wide policy:

Each school embeds the state perspective in its unique context and develops its explicit version. The individual versions would guide implementation and the evaluation of provision at the school level.²⁶³

School-level gifted education policies were widely seen as consistent with recent approaches at both the federal and state levels that promote individual school autonomy. Mr Phil Brown, Executive Officer of the Country Education Project, a community organisation that works to support and develop education in rural Victoria, opined that the best decisions are made at the local level: 'there is a role for government

²⁶¹ Ms Monica Jago, SEAL Program Coordinator, Wangaratta High School, *Submission 48*, 6; Ms Moragh Tyler on behalf of Wonthaggi interest group for gifted and talented children, *Submission 64*, 2; Maria, *Transcript of evidence*, above n 148, 22; Box Hill High School, *Submission 81*, 9; PAVCSS, *Submission 74*, 11; AAEGT, *Submission 28*, 4; Dr Maria Adams, *Submission 65*, 2.

²⁶² Department of Education and Training (New South Wales), above n 254, 9. See also Department of Education and Training (Australian Capital Territory), *Gifted and talented students*, above n 254, 1.

²⁶³ Dr John Munro, *Submission 96*, above n 173, 4.

setting a policy around gifted kids, and then allowing local autonomy to determine the practicalities of how that might happen'.²⁶⁴

Many educators identified time pressure as a major barrier to schools writing their own policies. To overcome this, several teachers and school leaders suggested the creation of a sample or model policy. For example, Mrs Deborah Patterson, Principal of Mill Park Heights Primary School, told the Committee:

you do not want to be reinventing the wheel. You are going for consistency and equity across the system. So give us the Departmental one [policy]; we will contextualise it.²⁶⁵

Some parents raised concerns that schools that currently have gifted education policies do not always implement them. The Belgrave Parent Support Group for Gifted and Talented Students' submission cited an example of a primary school with a policy that is not meaningfully implemented:

A policy exists, but parents do not know it exists. Furthermore, the school's processes do not follow the policy. Students are not taught 'above the level'. Streaming does not take place.²⁶⁶

The Committee believes that all Victorian schools should be encouraged to have a policy on gifted education. This will guide the local implementation of the strategies set out in the state policy. To assist and encourage schools to implement a school-level policy, the Victorian Government should develop a model policy on the education of gifted and talented students, which schools can adapt to suit their individual circumstances and needs. The Committee identifies elements that should be included as part of the model policy throughout this report. The model policy should be made readily accessible to all schools, for example, through DEECD's website.

The Committee notes that a number of participants in this Inquiry argued that all Victorian schools should be required to have a gifted education policy. The Committee does not agree. The new Victorian policy recommended in recommendation four will make it clear that all schools are expected to provide appropriate educational opportunities for gifted and talented students. The Committee considers it important that individual schools still retain some flexibility as to how they will fulfil this expectation, including whether they need to implement a gifted education policy at the school level.

Recommendation 6: Encouraging school policies on the education of gifted and talented students

That the Victorian Government encourage all Victorian schools to develop and implement school policies on the education of gifted and talented students.

Recommendation 7: Model school policy on the education of gifted and talented students

That the Victorian Government, in consultation with students, parents, teachers, schools and other relevant stakeholders, develop a model school policy on the education of gifted and talented students.

²⁶⁴ Mr Phil Brown, Executive Officer, Country Education Project, *Transcript of evidence*, Melbourne, 10 October 2011, 10. See also Mr Ian Burrage, *Transcript of evidence*, above n 145, 10.

²⁶⁵ Mrs Deborah Patterson, *Transcript of evidence*, above n 160, 17. See also Ms Claire McInerney, *Transcript of evidence*, above n 139, 18; Ms Gabrielle Leigh, *Transcript of evidence*, above n 127, 17–18.

²⁶⁶ Belgrave Parent Support Group for Gifted and Talented Students, *Submission 60*, 1.

Figure 9: Camelot Rise Primary School's Gifted and talented students policy²⁶⁷

Gifted & Talented Students

POLICY

Purpose:
Within the educational environment of Camelot Rise Primary School, the school will identify, recognise, nurture and support students who demonstrate that they are highly able, gifted or have special talents, interests, abilities or potential. The school understands that:

- There are varying degrees of giftedness and expression of talents.
- There are a variety of areas of giftedness (eg. academic, music, leadership, creativity, sport, art.)
- Students have a variety of intellectual, physical and emotional needs, all of which need to be catered for to ensure that a student's full potential is developed.

Guidelines:

- All staff will differentiate the curriculum to provide all students with the appropriate stimulus, challenge and teaching to meet their wide diversity of needs.
- The school has a commitment to provide extension, enrichment and appropriate programs for Gifted & Talented students.

Implementation:

- A variety of identification tools will be employed to identify Gifted & Talented students which may include input from teachers, parents, peers and professional consultants. This includes the identification of students preferred learning styles through surveys and other informal methods.
- Extension and special programs may operate within the curriculum and through the provision of activities outside class time.
- Special activities for Gifted & Talented students may be funded through the Gifted & Talented students budget.
- Staff will be offered regular professional development to assist them with teaching and learning approaches for Gifted & Talented students and with understanding the needs of highly able students, particularly emotional needs.
- The school will recognise and celebrate the efforts of Gifted & Talented students by acknowledging their achievements.
- The school will encourage parental support by encouraging parental involvement at the classroom level and in all community activities.
- The school will aim to provide students with special abilities a supportive and nurturing environment that will encourage personal growth and confidence.
- A Gifted & Talented students support group for parents will meet (on an as required basis) and offer resources and support for parents.
- Teachers will plan and offer a differentiated curriculum incorporating opportunities to broaden and extend all students' skills and higher order thinking processes., skills and tools.
- Some curriculum content may be negotiated between teacher and students to enable the students to pursue specific areas of study outside of the usual context and study topics of high interest.

Evaluation
This policy will be reviewed as part of the four-yearly review cycle, or earlier if necessary.

This policy was last ratified by School Council in....	September 2009
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²⁶⁷ Camelot Rise Primary School, *Gifted and talented students policy* (2009) Camelot Rise Primary School. Available at <http://www.camelotrise.vic.edu.au/gifted__talented_students> viewed 29 March 2012.

3.5.4 A national policy?

As was noted in section 3.5.1, there is no national gifted education policy, despite the fact that the Senate committee recommended such a policy in 2001. There was considerable support for a national policy among participants in the current Inquiry.²⁶⁸ Some viewed the rollout of the Australian Curriculum as providing an impetus for this. For instance, the Australian Catholic University suggested:

It is an opportune time to raise the possibility of a national policy as the Australian Curriculum continues to be developed. Victorian can support this agenda on a national level by endorsing the development of a policy that provides a definition of giftedness and talent which is supported by current educational and psychological research.²⁶⁹

The Australian Curriculum is being developed through a consultative process and is subject to endorsement by Education Ministers Australia-wide. The curriculum will commence from 2013, initially covering English, maths, science and history from foundation to Year 10 and being progressively rolled out to cover a broader range of subject areas, as well as the senior school years.²⁷⁰

There was some concern among Inquiry participants that the Australian Curriculum does not mention or include provision for gifted students.²⁷¹ This is despite the fact that the new national curriculum is founded on the principles set out in the Melbourne Declaration, which focus on equity and excellence in education.²⁷² Ms Lynn Redley, Manager of Curriculum at the Australian Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting Authority, the body charged with developing the new national curriculum, stated:

[The new national curriculum] does talk about the need for inclusivity and diversity but does not specifically identify gifted and talented students. What it does is it talks about the flexibility of the curriculum to cater for diversity across the board.²⁷³

Given that school education is predominantly the domain of state and territory governments, the Committee's approach is based on the development of a Victorian gifted education policy, supported by individual school policies as outlined in sections 3.5.2 and 3.5.3. However, the Committee acknowledges there would be merit in the development of a national policy on gifted education as recommended by the 2001 Senate committee report. Therefore, the Committee encourages the Victorian Government to participate in any moves towards national policy in this area. In particular, the Committee notes that the national collaboration underpinning the drafting of the Australian Curriculum potentially provides an opportunity to support national policy development in this area.

²⁶⁸ CHIP Foundation, *Submission 77*, 4; Dr Gail Byrne, *Submission 63*, above n 210, 6; Mr Paul Double, *Submission 15*, 1; Mrs Jo Freitag, *Transcript of evidence*, above n 151, 2.

²⁶⁹ Faculty of Education, Australian Catholic University, *Submission 13*, 12.

²⁷⁰ Australian Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting Authority (ACARA), *Australian Curriculum Development Timelines* (October, 2011) ACARA.

²⁷¹ Nossal High School, *Submission 57*, 8; Dr John Munro, *Submission 96*, above n 173, 18; Ms Annette Spence, *Submission 41*, above n 255, 1.

²⁷² ACARA, *Information sheet: A curriculum for all young Australians* (n.d.) ACARA. Available at <<http://www.australiancurriculum.edu.au/>> viewed 22 March 2012.

²⁷³ Ms Lynn Redley, Manager, Curriculum, ACARA, *Transcript of evidence*, Canberra, 20 March 2012, 6.

3.6 Coordinating gifted education in Victoria

Many participants in this Inquiry bemoaned the lack of central guidance and support in relation to gifted education in Victoria. As will be explored in detail in later chapters of this report, parents, teachers and schools all told the Committee that they need increased access to information and advice about gifted education. For example, the Gifted Support Network stated:

Without practical support from the Education Department, both the school and parents are left to experiment.

As there is currently no position with sole responsibility for gifted education within the Victorian Education Department, there is no centralised collection of data or information in respect of the education of gifted children. There is no-one within the government (or elsewhere) that is collating information about where gifted children are schooled, what programs are being offered to them within and outside the school, and the success or otherwise of these initiatives.

²⁷⁴

Mr Burrage from DEECD described the current support that the Department provides to Victorian parents, teachers and schools:

We have our presence on the website that gives some guidance and references to approaches to providing for the gifted and talented. We have the SEAL network for professional learning and regular contact. People in the Department do take calls and provide guidance to parents over the phone. They are the sort of key elements complemented by our select entry and specialist programs and the SEAL offering more generally.²⁷⁵

The Committee was told that previously under the Bright Futures policy DEECD provided much more centralised information and support in regards to gifted education.²⁷⁶ At present, the function of providing information and advice in Victoria is fulfilled mostly by volunteer-run organisations like VAGTC and the Gifted Support Network.²⁷⁷

In other Australian jurisdictions education departments play a much more active role in providing support in relation to gifted education. For example, the Tasmanian Department of Education has published a gifted education policy and supporting resources, provides regional experts to help build the capacity of teachers and school leaders to identify and cater for gifted students and works closely with community organisations to provide support and resources for teachers and families.²⁷⁸ More assistance is also evident in other school sectors, for instance the Catholic Education

²⁷⁴ Gifted Support Network, *Submission 49*, 18. See also Ms Henriette Boonen-Hackett, *Supplementary submission 26B*, 3; Forum participant 2, *Transcript of evidence*, above n 251, 17; Ms Moragh Tyler, *Transcript of evidence*, above n 170, 3.

²⁷⁵ Mr Ian Burrage, *Transcript of evidence*, above n 145, 11.

²⁷⁶ Ms Pam Lyons, *Submission 71*, above n 209, 3; Ms Cris Stavrou Martyn, *Transcript of evidence*, above n 250, 3; Nossal High School, *Submission 57*, 8.

²⁷⁷ Ms Carmel Meehan, *Transcript of evidence*, above n 138, 6; Ms Louise Broadbent, *Transcript of evidence*, above n 138, 4; Dr Gail Byrne, *Transcript of evidence*, above n 128, 2; Victorian Affiliated Network of Gifted Support Groups, *Submission 100*, 1.

²⁷⁸ Department of Education (Tasmania), *Submission 10*, 1–3. See also Department of Education and Communities (New South Wales), *Submission 99*, 3–4, 9–10; Department of Education and Training (Australian Capital Territory), *Submission 20*.

Office Melbourne employs an Education Officer, Gifted and Talented who provides support to schools and families.²⁷⁹

The Committee believes that the effective implementation of the Victorian policy on the education of gifted and talented students recommended in recommendation four is dependent on provision of information, advice and support to parents, teachers and schools. The Committee considers the current situation, where volunteer organisations are relied on for support and advice, inherently unsatisfactory, placing an unreasonable burden on these groups. The Committee believes DEECD needs to play a greatly increased role in providing central information and guidance about gifted education.

Throughout this report the Committee identifies a number of specific areas where participants have suggested a need for DEECD to provide more information and support. The provision of information, resources and support to teachers and schools (see chapter nine), as well as to parents (see chapter ten) are two key areas. The Committee believes that a specific unit should be created within the Department to fulfil this function. This unit would have a role in providing information and support to parents, teachers and schools through as many medium as possible including by the internet, phone, as well as face-to-face.

The Committee also envisages that this unit will play a leading role in the development of the gifted education policy and its regular review, as well as playing a key role in commissioning research in relation to gifted education and disseminating research results.

Recommendation 8: Establishment of Gifted Education Unit within DEECD

The Victorian Government should establish a specific unit within DEECD that has clear responsibility for coordinating policy and research, as well as providing information and support on gifted education. The functions of the unit will include:

- leading the development of a new Victorian policy on the education of gifted and talented students and subsequently reviewing the policy on a regular basis (see recommendation 4)
- leading the development of a model school policy on the education of gifted and talented students and supporting schools to implement school-level gifted education policies (see recommendations 6 and 7)
- commissioning, coordinating and promoting research and evaluation in relation to gifted education and disseminating research results (see recommendations 1, 3, 25, 32, 33, 34, 54 and 58)
- providing information and resources on giftedness and identifying and educating gifted students (see recommendations 2, 5 and 47)
- leading the development of guidelines on year level acceleration and early entry to primary school (see recommendations 19 and 30)
- leading the development of new approaches to catering for gifted students, including a virtual school and mentoring program (see recommendations 20 and 23)

²⁷⁹ Catholic Education Office Melbourne, *Submission 87*, 3. See also Ms Carmel Meehan, *Transcript of evidence*, above n 138, 9; Names withheld, *Submission 9*, 7.

- supporting schools to establish links with community, business and industry partners (see recommendation 24)
- supporting increased links between schools, teachers and gifted students (see recommendations 22, 36, 49 and 57)
- providing, promoting and supporting increased learning opportunities on gifted education for teachers and early childhood educators (see recommendations 38, 39, 40, 41, 43, 44, 45 and 52).

Chapter 4: Identifying gifted students

Key findings

- Identifying a student's giftedness is an important first step in ensuring that his or her needs are met.
- Currently many gifted students in Victoria are not identified until late in their educational journey. Sometimes they are not identified at all.
- There is no single approach to identify giftedness. Giftedness is best identified using a variety of tools over a period of time.
- While there is not a best time to identify giftedness, it should be identified as early as possible.
- There are a range of people who are well placed to identify giftedness in children, including early childhood educators, healthcare professionals and teachers. These identifiers need information and support to increase their capacity to identify giftedness.
- Gifted students from backgrounds of educational disadvantage are less likely to have their giftedness identified. Targeted interventions are required to ensure that gifted students from these backgrounds are appropriately identified.
- Victorian schools are not currently obliged to identify gifted students or to provide appropriately for any student identified as gifted. Such a requirement is an important starting point in ensuring that the rights of gifted students to access an equitable education are met.

Identifying gifted students

Identifying a student's giftedness is the crucial first step in helping that student to fulfil his or her potential. This chapter looks at how gifted students are currently identified in Victoria and the effectiveness of these mechanisms. This chapter also explores ways to improve the identification of giftedness in students from all backgrounds.

4.1 Why identification is important

In chapter three the Committee concluded that gifted students have a right to access an education that meets their specific needs. Appropriate identification is an important precursor to the fulfilment of that right: if gifted young people are not identified, chances are they will never be able to access appropriate education programs or provisions, even if these are available.

The previous chapter outlined the serious negative consequences that may arise if a gifted student's educational needs are not met, including:

- behavioural issues
- underachievement
- disengagement from education
- depression or other mental health problems.

Early identification of giftedness is therefore an important preventative mechanism which provides a pathway to the full realisation of a gifted student's potential.

4.2 Current approaches to identification

This section outlines the tools and processes currently used to identify gifted students in Victoria.

4.2.1 What tools are used to identify giftedness?

There is no single test or tool that can be used to identify giftedness. Figure ten summarises the most commonly used approaches to identification. These approaches are sometimes used singly, while at other times different tools are used in conjunction with each other. The three most frequently used tools—achievement tests, formal psychological assessments and observation—and the issues associated with these are considered further in section 4.4.1.

Figure 10: Common approaches to identifying giftedness²⁸⁰

Intelligence tests	Achievement tests
<p><i>Formal psychological assessment</i></p> <p>A formal psychological assessment, generally referred to as an IQ test, is a cognitive assessment carried out by a psychologist. The Wechsler Intelligence scales (WISC) and the Stanford-Binet scales are the most commonly used psychologist-administered tests.</p> <p><i>Informal intelligence tests</i></p> <p>Informal intelligence tests, sometimes referred to as screening tools, are tests used to find indicators of giftedness. These tests do not need to be administered by a psychologist. A common example of this kind of test is the Raven's Progressive Matrices, which consists of multiple choice intelligence tests comprised of a series of matrices with a missing element.</p>	<p>Achievement tests test the level of a student's acquired knowledge within a defined syllabus. NAPLAN is a form of achievement testing.</p>
Reasoning tests	Observational techniques
<p>Reasoning tests assess quantitative, verbal or abstract reasoning skills. This form of testing is often used for selection for scholarships or selective entry school programs.</p>	<p>Parents, teachers, peers or health professionals can sometimes identify giftedness through observational techniques. Most often, behavioural checklists are used to match observations of the child's behaviour with the traits of giftedness.</p>
Dynamic testing	Multi-factorial teacher-administered tests
<p>Dynamic testing is an approach that involves working with students prior to a test so that they understand both the nature of the task, as well as strategies for completing it. The best known example in Australia is the Coolabah Dynamic Assessment Test.</p>	<p>Multi-factorial teacher-administered tests consist of a teacher gathering information from a range of sources to assess giftedness across a range of aptitudes. Testing often involves the use of ratings scales, such as the Gifted Ratings Scales, which involves teachers rating the gifted behaviours observed in a student.</p>

4.2.2 How are gifted students currently identified?

Gifted students are currently identified at a range of stages and by a variety of parties.

Identification by parents

Research shows that parents are very effective identifiers of giftedness in their children.²⁸¹ The evidence presented to the Committee supported this, with many parents stating that they were the first to notice signs of giftedness in their child. For example, parent, Ms Kim Steere, stated:

From a very early age I knew he learned differently to his peers. At age three he was frustrated and angry at himself because he could not read a supermarket catalogue he picked up.²⁸²

²⁸⁰ Australian Council for Educational Research (ACER), *Submission 88*, 2–3; Dr Gail Byrne, Chair, CHIP Foundation, *Transcript of evidence*, Melbourne, 25 July 2011, 3–4; Dr Glenison Alsop, Committee member, CHIP Foundation, *Transcript of evidence*, Melbourne, 25 July 2011, 3–4.

²⁸¹ John Feldhusen, Joyce Van Tassel-Baska and Ken Seeley, *Excellence in educating the gifted* (1989) Love Publishing Company, 86–87; Linda Kreger Silverman, Donna Chitwood and Jana Waters, 'Young gifted children: Can parents identify giftedness?' 6(1) *Topics in Early Childhood Special Education* 23, 35. See also Australian Association for the Education of the Gifted and Talented (AAEGT), 'AAEGT information statement', included in *Submission 28 Appendix A*, 2.

²⁸² Ms Kim Steere, *Submission 61*, 1. See also Ms Rhonda Allen, *Submission 14*, 1; Names withheld, *Submission 9*, 1; Names withheld, *Submission 29*, 1; Name withheld, *Submission 91*, 1; Ms Henriette Boonen-Hackett, *Supplementary submission 26B*, 1.

Other Inquiry participants also acknowledged the significant role Victorian parents presently play in identifying giftedness in their children. Box Hill High School's submission noted that most students who apply for the school's Select Entry Accelerated Learning (SEAL) Program 'have been identified because the parents have become aware that their child is different from other students'.²⁸³

Identification by early childhood professionals

All Victorian children are assessed by the Universal Maternal and Child Health Service at ten key ages and stages from birth to school age. Two validated evidence-based developmental screening tools are used as part of these assessments:

- Parents' Evaluation of Developmental Status (PEDS), a primary screening tool
- Brigance, a secondary screening tool used when PEDS identifies potential issues.²⁸⁴

The Minister for Education advised the Committee that the Brigance is used as part of the maternal and child health checks 'to identify children who may have language, learning or global delays and can also identify children who may have academic talent or intellectual giftedness'.²⁸⁵ The Minister indicated that where a child receives a Brigance score suggesting giftedness, the maternal and child health nurse will refer the child to a general practitioner or paediatrician for further assessment.

The evidence to the Inquiry suggests that some children are being identified as potentially gifted as a result of these early childhood checks. Ms Louise Broadbent, President of the Gifted Support Network, a support group for parents with gifted children, told the Committee that maternal and child health nurses in her area are picking up signs of giftedness in some children and referring them on to her organisation.²⁸⁶ Karen, a participant in the Committee's Parents' Forum, shared her success story:

I recently took my nearly four-year-old son to the maternal and child health nurse and outlined some of the experiences we had had with my older son. As she was going through the PEDS, which is the Parents' Evaluation of Development Status program, she said, 'Okay. We'll do a Brigance on your younger son'.²⁸⁷

In terms of identification at the early childhood education and care stage, the Minister advised that specific testing for giftedness does not occur at this time. However, he told the Committee 'close observation of a child would reveal indicators which would prompt a referral of the child onto other professionals with specialized knowledge'.²⁸⁸

The evidence to this Inquiry demonstrates that some early childhood educators are detecting giftedness in children in their care. For example, Parent Forum participant,

²⁸³ Box Hill High School, *Submission 81*, 4. See also Mr David Huggins, Assistant Director, Student Services, Catholic Education Office Melbourne, *Transcript of evidence*, Melbourne, 12 September 2011, 3.

²⁸⁴ Letter from Minister for Education (Victoria), to Chair, Victorian Parliament Education and Training Committee, 7 February 2012, 2.

²⁸⁵ *ibid.*, 2–3.

²⁸⁶ Ms Louise Broadbent, President, Gifted Support Network, *Transcript of evidence*, Melbourne, 12 September 2011, 4.

²⁸⁷ Karen, parent, *Transcript of evidence*, Melbourne, 19 September 2011, 3–4. See also Ms Rhonda Collins, Coordinator, Victorian Affiliated Network of Gifted Support Groups, *Transcript of evidence*, Melbourne, 10 October 2011, 5.

²⁸⁸ Letter from Minister for Education (Victoria), above n 284, 3.

Melissa, told the Committee that her youngest daughter's preschool had recognised her advanced development and suggested early entry to primary school.²⁸⁹

Identification at school

There are no systematic processes in place to identify gifted students in Victorian schools. A number of Inquiry participants emphasised that schools generally rely on individual classroom teachers to identify gifted students.²⁹⁰ In addition, evidence suggests that schools are increasingly relying on data from the National Assessment Program—Literacy and Numeracy (NAPLAN) to identify student potential.²⁹¹ NAPLAN was introduced in 2008 and assesses all students in Years 3, 5, 7 and 9 using national tests in reading, writing, spelling, grammar and punctuation, as well as numeracy.²⁹²

While some Victorian schools have established formal assessment processes, these seem to be the exception rather than the rule. The Committee received evidence from a handful of government primary schools that have procedures to identify gifted students:

- Mill Park Heights Primary School uses identification methods such as the Raven's Progressive Matrices as well as teacher nomination and achievement test results.²⁹³
- Camelot Rise Primary School in Glen Waverly uses a range of resources including IQ tests, achievement tests, parent nomination and teacher observation.²⁹⁴
- Lucknow Primary School in Bairnsdale contracts an educational psychologist to carry out IQ tests.²⁹⁵

The Australian Council for Educational Research (ACER), an independent not-for-profit organisation that develops and administers assessments to identify academically able students, informed the Committee that two government primary schools are using ACER's Higher Ability Selection Test (HAST).²⁹⁶ This tool tests students' reading comprehension, mathematical reasoning, abstract reasoning and written expression at the middle primary level.²⁹⁷

As noted in chapter two, there are a number of government secondary schools in Victoria that specifically provide for gifted and high-achieving students. There are a

²⁸⁹ Melissa, parent, *Transcript of evidence*, Melbourne, 19 September 2011, 6. See also Ms Rhonda Allen, *Submission 14*, 1; Alec, parent, *Transcript of evidence*, Melbourne, 19 September 2011, 3.

²⁹⁰ Belgrave Parent Support Group for Gifted and Talented Students, *Submission 60*, 1; Mr Wayne and Mrs Meredith Burton, *Submission 17*, 1; Faculty of Education, Australian Catholic University, *Submission 13*, 9.

²⁹¹ Victorian Association for Gifted and Talented Children (VAGTC), *Submission 34*, 4; Catholic Education Office, Diocese of Sale, *Submission 66*, 2; Mr Michael Bond, Vice President, VAGTC, *Transcript of evidence*, Melbourne, 25 July 2011, 3–4; Department of Education (Tasmania), *Submission 10*, 8.

²⁹² National Assessment Program and Australian Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting Authority, *About*, <<http://www.nap.edu.au/About/index.html>> viewed 13 March 2012.

²⁹³ Ms Patricia Pace, Leading Teacher, Mill Park Heights Primary School, *Transcript of evidence*, Melbourne, 12 September 2011, 2.

²⁹⁴ Camelot Rise Primary School, *Gifted and talented students*, <http://www.camelotrise.vic.edu.au/gifted_talented_students> viewed 5 March 2012.

²⁹⁵ Mr James Mulcahy, Principal, Lucknow Primary School, *Submission 16*, 1.

²⁹⁶ Mr Ralph Saubern, Director, Assessment Services, ACER, *Transcript of evidence*, Melbourne, 25 July 2011, 6.

²⁹⁷ ACER, *HAST—P: Higher Ability Selection Test—Primary* (n.d.) ACER. Available at <<http://www.acer.edu.au/tests/hast-primary>> viewed 16 March 2012.

range of different tests and tools used to determine entry to these programs and schools:

- A central entrance exam is held annually to select students for Victoria's four selective entry high schools.
- Each of Victoria's 36 SEAL schools determines its own entry criteria. Some use tests only, while others also use other mechanisms such as interviews.
- Each of Victoria's three specialist secondary school has its own selection process. These processes relate to the area of speciality, for instance the Victorian College of the Arts Secondary School holds auditions for musicians and dancers, while Maribyrnong College runs selection trials for admission to its sports academy. The John Monash Science School holds an entrance exam, but may also use interviews and references to determine entry.

The entry requirements these schools and programs are discussed more fully in chapter seven.

Some participants in this Inquiry suggested that independent schools are more successful at identifying gifted students as they incorporate appropriate mechanisms in their enrolment processes. ACER informed the Committee that many independent schools use its tests, predominantly for the purposes of awarding scholarships.²⁹⁸ Dr Leonie Kronborg, Coordinator of the Gifted Educational Advisory Service at the Krongold Centre at Monash University, told the Committee, 'most independent schools, if not all—probably most—actually do ability testing at the beginning of Year 7 for most students who go into those schools'.²⁹⁹

The Committee received detailed information about the identification methods used in only two Victorian independent schools. Ms Kathy Harrison, Coordinator of the Compass Centre at Methodist Ladies' College (MLC), a school for girls from Prep to Year 12, told the Committee that MLC uses a variety of mechanisms to identify potential over an extended period of time, including achievement tests, IQ tests, the Gifted Ratings Scale, as well as teacher, parent and peer observation. Ms Harrison stated:

We aim to collect as many pieces of evidence as possible. We have a database where we register all of these things against any student, so anything we know about them we have at our fingertips.³⁰⁰

Glen Eira College, an independent school catering for students in Years 7 to 12, informed the Committee that it holds an annual test for admission to its accelerated learning program. In addition, information is sought from each student's primary school and parents, and applicants may also be interviewed.³⁰¹

The identification of gifted students in the Catholic school sector is predominantly the responsibility of individual schools. However, the Catholic Education Office Melbourne

²⁹⁸ Mr Ralph Saubern, *Transcript of evidence*, above n 296, 6.

²⁹⁹ Dr Leonie Kronborg, Coordinator of Gifted Education Assessment Clinic, Krongold Centre, *Transcript of evidence*, Melbourne, 12 September 2011, 4. See also VAGTC, *Submission 34*, 16; Ms Kathy Harrison, Compass Centre Coordinator, Methodist Ladies' College, *Transcript of evidence*, Melbourne, 19 September 2011, 3.

³⁰⁰ Ms Kathy Harrison, *Transcript of evidence*, above n 299, 3. See also Methodist Ladies' College, *Submission 84*, 5.

³⁰¹ Glen Eira College, *Submission 62*, 1.

does provide some centralised support in terms of providing access to IQ testing.³⁰² Dr Susan Nikakis, the Office's Education Officer, Gifted and Talented, told the Committee she also provides some professional development to Catholic school teachers to assist them with identification:

I will refer them to our definition of giftedness and how gifts come in very many packages ... We also use student identification, which is peer identification, parent identification and teacher identification—we use a variety of lists ... we do use formal identification measures, but we use a barrage of as many methods as we can, including a check for underachieving gifted students ... We try to provide our teachers with as many tools for identification as we possibly can.³⁰³

In addition to identification by teachers or through formal processes in schools, gifted students are sometimes identified by external extension services and competitions held within schools.

WiseOnes, a private provider of educational withdrawal programs for gifted students in schools, offers free testing for giftedness for students. WiseOnes uses the Raven's Progressive Matrices, as well as other criteria such as parent or teacher nomination to identify gifted students to participate in its user-pays programs.³⁰⁴

Many schools also participate in annual national maths and science competitions, which were outlined in chapter two. The organisers of these events suggested that these competitions can sometimes play an important role in identifying gifted students, particularly those who are underachieving. For example, the Australian Mathematics Trust, which runs the Australian Mathematics Competition stated, 'sometimes a competition will help discover a latent talent which had not always shown in the traditional way'.³⁰⁵

4.3 Are current identification practices adequate?

The overwhelming majority of evidence to this Inquiry suggests that the present practices are not adequately identifying Victoria's gifted students.

Several Inquiry participants highlighted that, in the absence of any standard testing or assessment procedure, identification of giftedness currently depends on the knowledge and views of individual educators.³⁰⁶ This creates an ad hoc approach to identification, which means that some children's giftedness is not detected.

While many parents felt that their child's giftedness was clearly evident, they reported that a range of professionals failed to detect it. For example, parents, Ms Katherine Pomeroy and Mr Nigel Cunningham, stated:

³⁰² Mr David Huggins, *Transcript of evidence*, above n 283, 2–3.

³⁰³ Dr Susan Nikakis, Education Officer, Gifted and Talented, Catholic Education Office Melbourne, *Transcript of evidence*, Melbourne, 12 September 2011, 3.

³⁰⁴ Ms Pat Slattery, Director, WiseOnes Australia, *Transcript of evidence*, Melbourne, 25 July 2011, 4.

³⁰⁵ Australian Mathematics Trust, *Submission 7*, 3. See also Australian Science Innovations, *Submission 102*, 7; Tournament of Minds (Vic), *Submission 43*, 10.

³⁰⁶ Mr Wayne and Mrs Meredith Burton, *Submission 17*, 1; Belgrave Parent Support Group for Gifted and Talented Students, *Submission 60*, 1.

Our children are not unusual within the subset of highly gifted children, but by their nature, being 1/1000, they stand out at a regular school. Having said this, neither child was identified by a nurse, doctors, kindergarten teacher or a school teacher.³⁰⁷

Parents were frustrated that clear signs such as early reading ability were not recognised, or that strong NAPLAN or competition results were not followed up.³⁰⁸ Some parents expressed concern that schools rarely suggest formal testing for a child who shows signs of giftedness, or if they do so, there is a long wait for an assessment.³⁰⁹

A number of participants expressed the view that many teachers do not have a good understanding of the characteristics of giftedness. Mr Paul Double, a teacher who is on the committee of the Victorian Association for Gifted and Talented Children (VAGTC), a voluntary organisation that supports the educators and parents of gifted and talented students, commented:

Traditionally teachers are very bad predictors of gifted and talented children in their classrooms, because they go for the happy, smiling, successful, colour-between-the-lines type of child. They get quite offended by any child who is badly behaved or bored with their classroom ... and they conveniently leave them out of any identification process.³¹⁰

However, not all participants agreed. Representatives of private gifted educational program provider, G.A.T.E.WAYS, told the Committee teachers are usually good at selecting the students to participate in its programs.³¹¹

The Committee also heard that teachers sometimes confuse the characteristics of giftedness with another diagnosis. Mr Murray Jones, the parent of a gifted son, described his experience:

The third day of prep I got a phone call, "Please come and see the Principal. Your son is not normal". I have gone through Asperger's tests, intelligence tests, IQ tests, physio tests, psychology tests, occupational therapy tests ... I have been through all of that. The kid is normal.³¹²

Case study four outlines how various teachers mistakenly suspected that another gifted child might have an autism spectrum disorder or an auditory processing disorder.

There was also frustration among Inquiry participants that identification processes tend to be focused on students perceived as having 'problems' or developmental needs. One submission to the Inquiry included the comments of a preschool field officer in regional Victoria whose role is to work with children with additional needs:

³⁰⁷ Ms Katherine Pomeroy and Mr Nigel Cunningham, *Submission 59*, 1.

³⁰⁸ Ms Sonia Fullerton, *Submission 33*, 1; Mr Wayne and Mrs Meredith Burton, *Submission 17*, 1; Box Hill High School, *Submission 81*, 4; Gifted Support Network, *Submission 49*, 5.

³⁰⁹ Ms Henriette Boonen-Hackett, *Supplementary submission 26B*, 3; Names withheld, *Submission 9*, 2; Names withheld, *Submission 45*, 1; Names withheld, *Submission 29*, 1; Gifted Support Network, *Submission 49*, 5; Forum participant 1, parent, *Transcript of evidence*, Melbourne, 19 September 2011, 4; Ms Colleen Carapetis, Past committee member, Gifted Support Network, *Transcript of evidence*, Melbourne, 12 September 2011, 2.

³¹⁰ Mr Paul Double, Committee member, VAGTC, *Transcript of evidence*, Melbourne, 25 July 2011, 11. See also The University of Melbourne, *Submission 53*, 4.

³¹¹ Ms Win Smith, Director, G.A.T.E.WAYS, *Transcript of evidence*, Melbourne, 25 July 2011, 3; Ms Jill Lawrence, Director, G.A.T.E.WAYS, *Transcript of evidence*, Melbourne, 25 July 2011, 3.

³¹² Mr Murray Jones, parent, Nossal High School, *Transcript of evidence*, Berwick, 26 July 2011, 4. See also CHIP Foundation, *Submission 77*, 4; Dr Michael Faulkner, Lecturer, School of Education, La Trobe University, *Transcript of evidence*, Bendigo, 20 September 2011, 3; Mr Wayne and Mrs Meredith Burton, *Submission 17*, 1.

In my twenty years in this role where the service averages approximately eighty to one hundred new referrals every year, I have never had a referral seeking support directly for a child who has been identified as gifted ... however every year I receive a number of referrals for children who kinder staff observe as having challenging behaviour, or social emotional difficulties. Yet when I go to the kindergarten to observe the child ... it is my professional view that these children are very likely to be intellectually gifted.³¹³

As noted earlier in this chapter, research has found that parents are very effective identifiers of giftedness. However, many parents participating in this Inquiry reported that they were brushed off, ignored or labelled as 'pushy parents' when they raised their suspicions about their child's giftedness with a professional such as an early childhood worker or teacher. Seventeen out of the 18 participants in the Committee's Parents' Forum indicated that they received such a response from their child's school.³¹⁴

The Committee heard the current identification practices mean that gifted students are not identified early enough in their journey through the education system, or sometimes not identified at all. The Maroondah Gifted Children's Parents' Association, a voluntary parents' association, informed the Committee, 'We have had contact with many parents whose gifted children have gone right through primary and even well into secondary school without being identified'.³¹⁵ Similarly, Ms Caelli Greenbank, a gifted student now at university, wrote:

I was finally identified as gifted in Grade 5. My teacher, whilst realising I was above average, had no idea I was exceptionally gifted. Had my primary school teachers understood my academic capabilities earlier in my school life my education could have been adapted to suit my individualised learning needs and made my education much easier on me and my parents, who have had to fight almost every step of the way.³¹⁶

The evidence presented to the Committee clearly demonstrates that the current identification practices are not meeting the needs of gifted children and their families. The Committee is concerned that it is not uncommon for gifted students to be identified late in their education or not identified at all. While the Committee notes that some parents did report positive experiences of having their gifted children identified, these experiences appear to be the exception rather than the rule.

4.4 Improving the identification of gifted students

The Committee considers the potential impacts of not identifying and providing for these students too great to leave their identification to chance. This section considers how the current identification processes can be enhanced. In particular it focuses on the tools used to identify giftedness, the timing of identification, the knowledge and skills of identifiers and the role of schools in identification.

³¹³ Ms Moragh Tyler on behalf of Wonthaggi interest group for gifted and talented children, *Submission 64*, 32. See also Ms Felicity Walker, *Submission 69*, 1; Ms Katherine Pomeroy and Mr Nigel Cunningham, *Submission 59*, 1; Sonia, parent, *Transcript of evidence*, Melbourne, 19 September 2011, 5; Dr Michael Faulkner, *Transcript of evidence*, above n 312, 3.

³¹⁴ Mr David Southwick MP, Chair, Education and Training Committee, *Transcript of evidence*, Melbourne, 19 September 2011, 6. See also Mrs Deborah DeBuhr, *Submission 46*, 2; Sonia, *Transcript of evidence*, above n 313, 5; Ms Maree Germech, Victorian Affiliated Network of Gifted Support Groups, *Transcript of evidence*, Melbourne, 10 October 2011, 2–3.

³¹⁵ Maroondah Gifted Children's Parents' Association, *Submission 98*, 4. See also Box Hill High School, *Submission 81*, 5.

³¹⁶ Ms Caelli Greenbank, *Submission 67*, 1.

Case study 2: 'My son is confident that he will attend Melbourne University and study medicine'³¹⁷

'As a mother with a background in early childhood education I was aware from an early age that my son functioned on a different level to his peers, this became more apparent when he began [to] ... attend kindergarten becoming increasingly frustrated with his peers and needed to be challenged at a different level. We were very supported by his 4 year old kindergarten teacher who was able to pick up on his interest and give him the opportunity to expand his ideas, once even allowing him to explore a DVD player.

School presented ... challenges. Our sons' prep teacher although agreeing that he was bright did not believe that he was gifted. He continued to have teachers that while supportive never challenged him and never truly believed he was gifted. Things began to fall apart in grade 3 when a fantastic teacher become ill and had to take leave. My son, at this time becomes increasingly frustrated and was often unhappy not wanting to attend school, being physical with his peers and on a number of occasions attending the Principals office. My concerns led me to take him to a child psychologist, for what I began to believe was behavioural issues. The psychologist first thought was to get his IQ tested. The results were surprising even for a mother who believed in him. He was gifted and needed to be challenged in order to relieve the frustrations. After a number of sessions with the psychologist it also become apparent that his frustrations led to depression, which as a parent was a major concern.

All the information gathered throughout these numerous sessions was documented and compiled into a report for the school and his teachers.

The school failed to understand that challenging him was more than giving him more work, he needed different work, or work from higher classes. His school was never able to accommodate this and for the following year the same issues continued. The most disappointing thing with this was that as parents we had spent a great deal of time, money and energy trying to get information to the school to support them in their role. The information was never passed from his grade 3 teacher to his grade 4 teacher.

As parents we investigated and discovered the GATEWAYS program a truly wonderful organisation. Our son is the only child I know who voluntarily went to school every second Saturday to be stimulated and challenged. He would walk out of those workshops buzzing with the excitement of being with like minded peers. These programs are very costly and put pressure on families to do the best by their child.

We have since sent our son to a private boy's school at great financial cost to the family with significant sacrifices. We felt this was the only option for him to not only be happy but to achieve his full potential within a supporting and challenging environment. Since beginning at the school he has been in the extension English and Maths program and has thrived. He now studies 3 languages to a high level achieving A and A+. His maths extension teacher believes he is capable of 50 in VCE ...

³¹⁷ Ms Rhonda Allen, *Submission 14*, 1–3.

These children often need support to interact with their peers and understand where they fit in. My son at the age of 14 years is only now beginning to be comfortable with himself and his abilities. This has been a long process and is only possible due to the support and programs he has gained at the school which he currently attends. My son is confident that he will attend Melbourne University and study medicine. He sees this as a very achievable goal.'

4.4.1 Which tools should be used to identify giftedness?

The tools commonly used to identify giftedness were set out in section 4.2.1. The three most commonly used tools in Victoria are achievement tests, formal psychological assessments and observational techniques. However, evidence presented to the Committee suggests that each of these tools has limitations.

Achievement testing

Many participants in this Inquiry were concerned about the heavy reliance that schools currently place on achievement test results, particularly NAPLAN, to identify gifted students. For example, VAGTC stated:

It is of great concern that some schools exclusively use NAPLAN results to 'identify' students for extension programs. This is becoming an increasingly significant problem, as NAPLAN results provide only a very limited perspective of the characteristics of gifted and talented students.³¹⁸

The main concern with the use of achievement tests is that they identify achievement rather than ability or potential. The focus on acquired knowledge rather than ability means that such tests may not pick up gifted students who are underachieving.³¹⁹

The literature in this area suggests that tests to assess giftedness should have 'an unusually high ceiling'.³²⁰ However, most achievement tests are not designed this way. VAGTC Vice President, Mr Michael Bond, commented, 'up to 60 per cent of students will answer some of the more difficult questions on NAPLAN, so clearly this assessment has not been set up as an identification tool, nor was it designed to be that type of tool'.³²¹

Some Inquiry participants also highlighted that achievement tests offer limited scope for gifted students to show the true depth of their abilities. For example, Mr Ian Burrage, General Manager of the Education and Policy Research Division at the Department of Education and Early Childhood Development (DEECD), stated:

[Assessments at schools] tend to be closed assessments, so there is either a right or wrong answer, and so in the assessment tools you would expect in this area you might need some more open-ended spaces so that kids could more readily express the full range of their skills.³²²

³¹⁸ VAGTC, *Submission 34*, 4. See also Australian Education Union (Victorian Branch), *Submission 106*, 2.

³¹⁹ Methodist Ladies' College, *Submission 84*, 5; CHIP Foundation, *Submission 77*, 5; Ms Pat Slattery, *Transcript of evidence*, above n 304, 4; Ms Kim Steere, *Submission 61*, 2.

³²⁰ Miraca Gross, *Exceptionally gifted children* (2nd edition, 2004) Routledge, 267.

³²¹ Mr Michael Bond, *Transcript of evidence*, above n 291, 4.

³²² Mr Ian Burrage, General Manager, Education and Policy Research Division, Department of Education and Early Childhood Development (DEECD), *Transcript of evidence*, Melbourne, 25 July 2011, 4. See also Dr John Munro, Associate Professor Exceptional Learning and Gifted Education, Melbourne Graduate School of Education, The University of Melbourne, *Submission 96*, 4–5.

Some participants acknowledged that it may be easier to coach a student to succeed in an achievement test rather than an ability test such as an IQ test or a reasoning test.³²³ Other participants highlighted that achievement tests are linked to literacy skills and are problematic for some students, such as those from non-English speaking backgrounds of those with literacy difficulties.³²⁴ This issue is explored further in section 4.5.1 below.

While achievement tests were generally viewed as being inappropriate as a single measure of giftedness, there was some support among Inquiry participants for using these tests as one of a range of tools. For example, Ms Carolyn Priest, Secretary of the Gifted Support Network, told the Committee:

There have to be some flags. When the NAPLAN results come back, if the maths result is right at the top ... when the teacher sees the dot is at the top they should be able to automatically say, 'This child should not be sitting here'.³²⁵

Formal psychological assessments

Cognitive assessments or IQ tests carried out by a psychologist are frequently used to identify intellectual giftedness. DEECD has identified IQ testing as being 'the most reliable measure of intellectual potential'.³²⁶ Several participants in this Inquiry agreed. For instance, the CHIP Foundation, an independent advisory service specialising in the needs of gifted children and their families, submitted, 'Formal assessments conducted by registered psychologists surpass achievement tests, nominations, folios and group tests of abstract reasoning'.³²⁷

However, formal cognitive assessments do have some limitations. ACER noted that performance on IQ tests may be impacted by factors such as 'nutrition, health, psychological state, educational and cultural background'.³²⁸ In addition, by their nature these tests identify academic giftedness and will not identify students gifted in other spheres, for example leadership or art.

The Committee also heard that not all psychologists have the requisite knowledge and skill to identify giftedness. Psychologist, Dr Gail Byrne, expressed concern that many psychologists are not trained to identify giftedness, and may misdiagnose gifted students, for example, as having an autism spectrum disorder.³²⁹

However, many of the participants in this Inquiry saw formal assessments as useful and were concerned about the limited accessibility of these services. Some schools facilitate student access to an educational psychologist, but the Committee heard there are often long waiting lists for this service.³³⁰ Many parents who contributed to this Inquiry felt they

³²³ Dr Leonie Kronborg, Senior Lecturer, Coordinator of Post Graduate Studies in Gifted Education, Faculty of Education, Monash University, *Transcript of evidence*, Melbourne, 12 September 2011, 12; Professor Geoff Masters, Chief Executive Officer, ACER, *Transcript of evidence*, Melbourne, 25 July 2011, 8.

³²⁴ CHIP Foundation, *Submission 77*, 5, 6; Tournament of Minds (Vic), *Submission 43*, 9.

³²⁵ Ms Carolyn Priest, Secretary, Gifted Support Network, *Transcript of evidence*, Melbourne, 12 September 2011, 6. See also Box Hill High School, *Submission 81*, 6; Ms Annette Spence, High Potential Learning Coordinator, Lalor Secondary College, *Submission 41*, 1.

³²⁶ DEECD, *Select Entry Acceleration Learning (SEAL) Program guidelines* (2007) DEECD (VIC), 16.

³²⁷ CHIP Foundation, *Submission 77*, 6. See also Dr Leonie Kronborg, Coordinator of Gifted Education Assessment Clinic, Krongold Centre, Faculty of Education, *Submission 104*, 2.

³²⁸ ACER, *Submission 88*, 4.

³²⁹ Dr Gail Byrne, Psychologist, Exceptional Children, *Submission 63*, 3–4. See also Names withheld, *Submission 45*, 1–2. Ms Felicity Walker, *Submission 69*, 2.

³³⁰ VAGTC, *Submission 34*, 7; Names withheld, *Submission 9*, 2; Names withheld, *Submission 45*, 1.

had no choice but to seek private assessments.³³¹ The evidence indicates that a formal assessment can cost anywhere from \$450 to \$2000.³³² Cost was seen as a huge barrier to accessing assessment services and many parents argued these tests should be subsidised. One set of parents commented:

Obtaining an accurate IQ test can be financially prohibitive for many families. At the time we had our daughters tested, the cost was 4% of our combined gross annual income. This needs to be made much easier.³³³

Some participants also highlighted the paucity of assessment services in rural and regional areas, with parents forced to travel to Melbourne or to pay for private assessments.³³⁴

Many parents felt that obtaining a psychological assessment was the only way to have their child's giftedness recognised by the school. Wayne, a Bairnsdale-based parent, shared his experience:

we travelled to Melbourne and paid \$450 for an independent psychologist to assess our son, and they put him in the top 1 per cent. We took that to the school and the barriers disappeared, but that was all on our initiative—otherwise, unless you have got that credibility behind you, you are coming up against some cultural barriers there ...³³⁵

However, not all parents saw the value in formal psychological assessments. Susan, a parent who home schools her three gifted children, stated:

We had our eldest son tested ... It cost us several hundred dollars for a report that did not tell us anything that we did not already know. It told us the areas he was very strong in and the areas he was not so strong in. We knew that when he was two, so it gave us a piece of paper.³³⁶

Observation

Another common approach to assessing giftedness is to observe a student's behaviour and characteristics. Observation can be carried out by a range of professionals including teachers or health professionals, as well as by others who know the student such as their parents or peers.

Many participants in this Inquiry emphasised the importance of observation as an assessment tool. For example, the Australian Council of State School Organisations, the peak national organisation representing the interests of parents, families and school communities of government school attendees, commented:

³³¹ Names withheld, *Submission 9*, 2; Names withheld, *Submission 29*, 1; Names withheld, *Submission 45*, 2; Mr Wayne and Mrs Meredith Burton, *Submission 17*, 2; Ms Felicity Walker, *Submission 69*, 2.

³³² Dr Karen Ward, *Transcript of evidence*, Bendigo, 20 September 2011, 2; Wayne, parent, *Transcript of evidence*, Melbourne, 19 September 2011, 6; Alison, parent, *Transcript of evidence*, Bendigo, 20 September 2011, 4.

³³³ Names withheld, *Submission 45*, 3. See also Heike, parent, *Transcript of evidence*, Melbourne, 19 September 2011, 9; Name withheld, *Submission 75*, 2.

³³⁴ Ms Moragh Tyler on behalf of Wonthaggi interest group for gifted and talented children, *Submission 64*, 2; Wayne, *Transcript of evidence*, above n 332, 6; Mr John Geary, Director of Teaching and Learning, Catholic College Bendigo, *Transcript of evidence*, Bendigo, 20 September 2011, 6.

³³⁵ Wayne, *Transcript of evidence*, above n 332, 6. See also Pieta, parent, *Transcript of evidence*, Bendigo, 20 September 2011, 5; Ms Caelli Greenbank, student, *Transcript of evidence*, Melbourne, 19 September 2011, 7.

³³⁶ Susan, parent, *Transcript of evidence*, Bendigo, 20 September 2011, 4.

Identification of a student needs to involve more than a test. It must involve a discussion with a number of individuals in many settings who are able to identify the range of skills a student may show.³³⁷

However, ACER's submission noted that the drawback of observational techniques is that they 'can be seen as subjective and not amenable to wide-ranging comparisons'.³³⁸

Nevertheless, the overwhelming majority of evidence in this Inquiry supported the use of observational techniques and suggested the development of tailored checklists to assist various parties to assess students' giftedness. This is considered in more detail in section 4.4.3.

A broad-ranging approach to identification

The above discussion has revealed a range of issues with some of the commonly used identification tools. To overcome concerns associated with individual tools, many participants in this Inquiry emphasised the importance of using a range of tools to identify giftedness, including both formal and informal; and subjective and objective measures.³³⁹

Participants in this Inquiry also highlighted that different approaches and tests will be appropriate for children at particular ages and stages.³⁴⁰ For example, for very young children, tests that use pattern identification and behavioural observation are frequently used. In addition, different tools may also be useful in identifying students with gifts in particular domains.³⁴¹ For example, IQ tests are often used to assess academic giftedness, while auditions and selection trials (observational techniques) are used to test ability in areas such as music and sport.

The New South Wales Department of Education and Training has developed a support package on identification, aimed primarily at schools, which recommends the concurrent use of a range of approaches to identifying giftedness, including:

- evaluation of student responses to a range of classroom activities
- nomination by parent/caregiver, peer, self and teacher
- assessment of responses to challenging competitions
- off-level testing (testing at a level designed for older students)
- standardised tests of creative ability
- IQ tests and other culturally appropriate measures of ability
- observation and anecdotal evidence

³³⁷ Australian Council of State School Organisations, *Submission 32*, 6.

³³⁸ ACER, *Submission 88*, 4.

³³⁹ AAEGT, 'AAEGT information statement', included in *Submission 28 Appendix A*, 3; Ms Debbi Daff, SEAL and Enhancement Coordinator, Sale College, *Submission 70*, 3; Mr Ross Huggard, Senior School Leader, Cranbourne Secondary College, *Submission 42*, 2; Maroonah Gifted Children's Parents' Association, *Submission 98*, 4; Principals' Association of Victorian Catholic Secondary Schools (PAVCSS), *Submission 74*, 10; Catholic Education Office, Diocese of Sale, *Submission 66*, 1; Mrs Michele Whitby, *Submission 114*, 6–7.

³⁴⁰ Faculty of Education, Australian Catholic University, *Submission 13*, 6–7; Mr Ralph Saubern, *Transcript of evidence*, above n 296, 6.

³⁴¹ ACER, *Submission 88*, 3; Dr Leonie Kronborg, Krongold Centre, *Transcript of evidence*, above n 299, 4.

- behavioural checklists
- interviews
- academic grades.³⁴²

Which tools should be used to identify giftedness?—The Committee's view

The evidence clearly shows that there is no single test or approach that can identify giftedness. In the Committee's view, what is needed is an approach that incorporates the use of a variety of tools, recognising that various tools may be more appropriate to certain types of giftedness, or at particular stages of a child's development. The Committee considers that those in a position to identify giftedness need to be provided with information about the full range of approaches that can be used to identify giftedness. Therefore, the Committee suggests that this material should be incorporated into the information and toolkits for healthcare professionals, early childhood educators, teachers and parents, which are recommended in section 4.4.3 below.

The Committee is concerned that currently achievement tests are being heavily relied on to identify gifted students. While the Committee acknowledges that tests such as NAPLAN may have some role to play in identifying gifted students, for example flagging high performance, it is concerned that such tests have significant limitations and will not identify gifted students who are underachieving. The Committee considers that information about tools to identify giftedness should note the limitations of some of the major forms of testing, particularly achievement testing.

The Committee notes that formal assessments administered by a psychologist are sometimes useful to identify giftedness in academic areas. It acknowledges concerns about the accessibility of these services, in particular that these services are expensive and not available in all parts of the state. The Committee is of the view that improved identification practices, particularly among educators and healthcare professionals will reduce the need to rely on formal testing. The Committee considers strategies for improving the capacity of potential identifiers of giftedness in section 4.4.3.

4.4.2 When should gifted students be identified?

Just as there is no single tool for identifying giftedness there is also no one age or development stage at which it can or should be identified.

Some Inquiry participants emphasised that identification processes must be continuous, rather than once-off events, allowing a child to exhibit his or her abilities at any stage. Ms Harrison of MLC told the Committee that her school uses multiple instruments to assess giftedness over an extended period of time:

If you have a single test, quite often a child may not perform well at any one time. Also some gifted behaviours emerge over time. We believe to just test once and rely on that is not adequate ...³⁴³

³⁴² Department of Education and Training (New South Wales), *Policy and implementation strategies for the education of gifted and talented students. Support package: Identification* (2004) DET (NSW), 11.

While generally recognising the need for identification to be possible at any stage, many participants in this Inquiry stressed the need for early identification of giftedness. Early identification was seen as important to prevent these students disengaging from education due to boredom or lack of challenge. Mr Burrage of DEECD told the Committee:

the points of disengagement can occur quite early. The earlier kids are in school and the earlier they show signs of giftedness, the earlier we need to have a coherent response for kids showing those signs.³⁴⁴

Ms Greenbank, a gifted student, agreed:

The main thing is early identification. The earlier you can figure out a child is gifted, then the earlier you can make a difference, the earlier you can do something that is going to help them ...³⁴⁵

Visiting international education expert, Rabbi David Samson, told the Committee that in Israel there is a strong emphasis on the early identification of giftedness. He stated:

The assessments are done in kindergarten. Kindergarten teachers are asked by the government to identify gifted children ... So between the parents and the teachers in the kindergarten and the first grade there is very early assessment.³⁴⁶

Rabbi Samson observed that not all children's giftedness is evident at this early stage and thus there is an identification process that continues until the end of high school.

Many contributors to this Inquiry agreed that the ideal time for identifying giftedness is before a child starts primary school or in the early years of primary school.³⁴⁷ Some participants even advocated that all Victorian students should be screened or tested for giftedness at one of these stages, arguing that this is the only way to make sure that gifted students are not overlooked.³⁴⁸ For example, Ms Henriette Boonen-Hackett, the parent of two gifted children, argued:

Don't leave it to chance. To stop gifted children slipping through the net, every child should be given a basic IQ test at the start of their first year of school (not just testing what they know, but testing how they think).³⁴⁹

However, not all participants in this Inquiry felt that universal screening is warranted. Mr Burrage commented:

³⁴³ Ms Kathy Harrison, *Transcript of evidence*, above n 299, 3. See also AAEGT, 'AAEGT information statement', included in *Submission 28 Appendix A*, 3; Dr Leonie Kronborg, *Submission 104*, above n 327, 3; Ms Debbi Daff, *Submission 70*, above n 339, 3.

³⁴⁴ Mr Ian Burrage, *Transcript of evidence*, above n 322, 5. See also Maria, parent, *Transcript of evidence*, Melbourne, 19 September 2011, 13; Mr Michael Bond, *Transcript of evidence*, above n 291, 13; Dr Leonie Kronborg, *Submission 104*, above n 327, 8.

³⁴⁵ Ms Caelli Greenbank, *Transcript of evidence*, above n 335, 2. See also Goldfields Local Learning and Employment Network, *Submission 86*, 6; WiseOnes Australia, *Submission 18*, 6.

³⁴⁶ Rabbi David Samson, Founder and Dean, Atid School System, *Transcript of evidence*, Melbourne, 20 February 2012, 6.

³⁴⁷ Alec, *Transcript of evidence*, above n 289, 3; Ms Pat Slattery, *Transcript of evidence*, above n 304, 4; Ms Moragh Tyler on behalf of Wonthaggi interest group for gifted and talented children, *Submission 64*, 2; WiseOnes Australia, *Submission 18*, 6, 15.

³⁴⁸ Ms Katherine Pomeroy and Mr Nigel Cunningham, *Submission 59*, 3; Ms Pat Slattery, *Transcript of evidence*, above n 304, 4; Ms Carolyn Priest, *Transcript of evidence*, above n 325, 4; Alec, *Transcript of evidence*, above n 289, 3; Karen, *Transcript of evidence*, above n 287, 3–4; Sonia, *Transcript of evidence*, above n 313, 5; Alison, *Transcript of evidence*, above n 332, 8–9; WiseOnes Australia, *Submission 18*, 15.

³⁴⁹ Ms Henriette Boonen-Hackett, *Supplementary submission 26B*, 1. See also Forum participant 1, *Transcript of evidence*, above n 309, 4; Mr James Mulcahy, *Submission 16*, above n 295, 3.

I do not think it is a matter of screening, which is what large population assessments effectively do. Our broader approach is to provide assessment and try to get delivery at a point of need, so understanding kids' progression on a continuum and making sure there is appropriate assessment and then corresponding instruction ... to screen an entire population for a relatively small identification does not seem to be particularly efficacious to me.³⁵⁰

Other contributors argued that improving current identification, particularly by early childhood educators and primary school teachers, would be a better approach than universal screening for giftedness. For example, Ms Jo Freitag, Coordinator of Gifted Resources, a not-for-profit information service for parents and teachers, told the Committee, 'No, I do not think everybody should be tested for giftedness, but I do think that if the teachers had that education, they would be able to locate the children who should then go to a psychologist'.³⁵¹

The New South Wales support package on identification discussed earlier in this chapter emphasises the importance of early identification, but also recommends that identification be an ongoing process throughout students' education.³⁵²

The Committee agrees that it is important for giftedness to be identified as early as possible. This will allow gifted children to be appropriately provided for at an early age, reducing the risk that these students will disengage from education. However, given the relatively low incidence of giftedness in the community, the Committee believes that improved mechanisms for identifying gifted children, particularly at the early childhood and primary school stages, will be more efficient than universally screening all children for giftedness. This approach will ensure that the identification of giftedness is not a once-off event, but can and does occur at a range of stages throughout a child's educational journey. The next section focuses on how to increase the capacity of professionals working in the early childhood and school sectors, as well as parents, to identify gifted children.

Case study 3: '[O]ur daughter was hungry to learn'³⁵³

'The identification of our child occurred over a period of time. She began speaking in clear, concise sentences with an advanced vocabulary at an early age and we knew she was different to her age peers. Throughout her pre-school years her language continued to be a standout and we continually received comments about this from her preschool teachers, maternal child care nurse, other parents and our family members. Combined with her language skills, she loved to be read to and would memorise books she heard. However, she did not exhibit an interest in reading until the commencement of school.

³⁵⁰ Mr Ian Burrage, *Transcript of evidence*, above n 322, 4.

³⁵¹ Mrs Jo Freitag, Coordinator, Gifted Resources, *Transcript of evidence*, Melbourne, 19 September 2011, 2. See also Ms Jill Lawrence, *Transcript of evidence*, above n 311, 4; Dr Leonie Kronborg, Krongold Centre, *Transcript of evidence*, above n 299, 3; Ms Louise Broadbent, *Transcript of evidence*, above n 286, 4–5; Dr John Munro, *Submission 96*, above n 322, 4.

³⁵² Department of Education and Training (New South Wales), *Support package: Identification*, above n 342, 9–10, 16.

³⁵³ Names withheld, *Submission 29*, 1–2.

When she started school, our daughter began to learn to read, write, spell and do basic maths. It quickly became obvious that she learned more rapidly than her age peers. As she was progressing so quickly we asked her grade teacher if we should have her tested for giftedness but she did not feel it was necessary. We felt as though the teacher thought it would be a waste of time and money and that it would not provide any information we could use practically. As time passed, it became somewhat of a struggle to continue to get her teacher to give new learning opportunities to our daughter. Mid-way through the year, our daughter had progressed so far that the set curriculum was not enough to keep her learning for [the] remainder of the year. At this point, we felt some doubt about whether we should continue to ask her teacher to provide extension work or whether we should leave things as they were. But our daughter was hungry to learn and we could not ignore this very important need. We therefore decided we needed some concrete evidence to prove extension work was justified for our daughter. We felt the best way we could do this was by getting her assessed.

We researched and found a private, well-recognised child psychologist in inner Melbourne. The testing was not cheap at \$750 and we had to weigh up whether this cost would be justified by the chance it could provide us with some helpful insights into our daughter's learning styles and capabilities. We were lucky we were able to afford this testing and it saddens us to think of the many students whose parents may not be able to afford the testing thus will remain unidentified by the system.

The results of the testing confirmed our suspicions that our daughter was gifted. Having an official report by a respected and qualified professional in the field helped us realise that we needed to make some changes for her long-term benefit. The assessment was very helpful, making the clear point that "she will have special learning needs which must be addressed to ensure she performs at a level more commensurate with her abilities". It recommended grade advancement and that in subsequent years, she be placed in the lower part of a composite grade so she will be "naturally" exposed to higher curriculum. It also advised she would require an ongoing individual education plan in certain subjects as grade advancement may not be sufficient to meet her needs.

We shared the results with her grade teacher and Principal. They fully accepted and supported the recommendations of the report including grade advancement which was a big relief to us as we had spoken to a number of parents of gifted children who faced an uphill battle with the schools regarding grade acceleration.

It should be noted that our school had no recent experience with grade acceleration. They also said that without the report they would not have recommended such a course of action. In fact, no course of action would have been recommended if we did not go ahead and this saddens us greatly.'

4.4.3 Enhancing the capacity of identifiers

There are a number of parties who are well placed to identify a child's giftedness, including early childhood professionals, teachers and parents. This section explores opportunities to enhance the capacity of each of these groups to identify giftedness.

Enhancing the capacity of early childhood professionals to identify giftedness

Participants in this Inquiry agreed that maternal and child health nurses are in a good position to identify giftedness in very young children.³⁵⁴ As outlined in section 4.2.2 there are a range of tests at the maternal and child health check stage that have the potential to identify giftedness. The Committee did hear some stories of these tests successfully identifying giftedness, but these appear to be isolated events. Karen, a parent whose youngest son's giftedness was identified through the maternal and child health nurse checks, suggested that procedures already in place such as PEDS can be used to more systematically to identify giftedness in the early years:

we do not really need to be reinventing the wheel; if there is something already out there that can possibly identify these children early, before they get to school, then maybe this is something we should already be looking into ...³⁵⁵

There was also agreement among Inquiry participants that early childhood educators are well placed to identify giftedness.³⁵⁶ Again, while the Committee did hear of a handful of positive experiences, some parents felt that their gifted children went undetected at this stage, despite demonstrating clearly gifted behaviour such as early reading.³⁵⁷ The Gifted Support Network highlighted that early childhood educators need increased education about the characteristics of giftedness and suggested that they should be provided with tools such as checklists to help them identify gifted children in their care.³⁵⁸

In New South Wales there is a more proactive approach to identifying gifted young students at kindergarten under the Best Start Gifted and Talented Kindergarten Project. In that jurisdiction, each student is assessed on entry to kindergarten to identify those who are operating above the expected levels for literacy and numeracy.³⁵⁹ While the test is not designed to assess the extent of a student's giftedness, it is used as a starting point to meet students' needs. A range of resources are available to help kindergarten teachers administer the tests and act on the results.³⁶⁰

The Committee agrees that early childhood professionals are well positioned to identify giftedness in young children. The Committee considers that the current assessments

³⁵⁴ Name withheld, *Submission 75*, 1; Ms Katherine Pomeroy and Mr Nigel Cunningham, *Submission 59*, 3; Victorian Affiliated Network of Gifted Support Groups, *Submission 100*, 3; Ms Rhonda Collins, *Transcript of evidence*, above n 287, 5.

³⁵⁵ Karen, *Transcript of evidence*, above n 287, 3. See also Ms Carolyn Priest, *Transcript of evidence*, above n 325, 4; Ms Rhonda Collins, *Transcript of evidence*, above n 287, 5; Catholic Education Office Melbourne, *Submission 87*, 9.

³⁵⁶ Ms Katherine Pomeroy and Mr Nigel Cunningham, *Submission 59*, 3; Ms Rhonda Collins, *Transcript of evidence*, above n 287, 5.

³⁵⁷ Ms Sonia Fullerton, *Submission 33*, 2; Melissa, *Transcript of evidence*, above n 289, 6.

³⁵⁸ Gifted Support Network, *Submission 49*, 6.

³⁵⁹ Letter from Learning and Development R/General Manager, Department of Education and Communities (New South Wales), to Chair, Victorian Parliament Education and Training Committee, 15 November 2011, 4–5.

³⁶⁰ Department of Education and Training (New South Wales), *What is Best Start?*, <<http://www.curriculumsupport.education.nsw.gov.au/beststart/information/index.htm>> viewed 4 January 2012.

provided by the Universal Maternal and Child Health Service provide a strong platform for the identification of gifted children. However, in the Committee's view, maternal and child health nurses need to have a stronger understanding of giftedness to help them identify it as part of these checks. The Committee considers that these nurses and other relevant healthcare professionals such as general practitioners should be provided with information and resources to help them identify giftedness.

The Committee also believes that early childhood educators would benefit from targeted information about giftedness and resources to help them identify giftedness. In particular, it believes that a toolkit should be developed that contains information about the range of approaches to identifying giftedness, as well as a checklist to help early childhood educators to identify gifted traits and behaviour in children in their care. The Committee also considers that early childhood educators would benefit from increased education and training about giftedness, including identification. This is discussed in detail in chapter eight.

Recommendation 9: Information and resources to assist healthcare professionals to identify giftedness

That the Victorian Government provide information and resources about identifying giftedness to maternal and child health nurses and other healthcare professionals who may be in a position to identify giftedness.

Recommendation 10: Identification toolkit for early childhood educators

That the Victorian Government develop a toolkit, including checklists and other information, to assist early childhood educators to identify giftedness.

Enhancing the capacity of teachers to identify giftedness

There is some literature suggesting that teachers may not be good identifiers of gifted students. Dr Miraca Gross, Professor of Gifted Education and Director of the Gifted Education Research Resources and Information Centre at the University of New South Wales, has suggested that 'teacher nomination used in isolation is the least effective method of identification'.³⁶¹ The Victorian Affiliated Network of Gifted Support Groups, a volunteer organisation providing information and support to parents and teachers, went so far as to argue that teachers are inherently unable to identify giftedness, stating, 'Teachers cannot identify gifted students even if they are trained because they are looking at the gifted student through the lens of the education system.'³⁶²

However, other research in this area has suggested that teachers can indeed be effective identifiers of gifted students.³⁶³ In fact, many participants in this Inquiry felt that teachers have the potential to identify giftedness but simply lack the skills and knowledge to do so at present. Ms Meredith Fetting, Assistant Principal at Bendigo Senior Secondary College, acknowledged that staff at her school are currently failing to identify their gifted pupils:

³⁶¹ Miraca Gross, 'Inequity in equity: The paradox of gifted education in Australia' 43(1) *Australian Journal of Education* 87, 100.

³⁶² Victorian Affiliated Network of Gifted Support Groups, *Submission 100*, 3. See also Ms Maree Germech, *Transcript of evidence*, above n 314, 5.

³⁶³ François Gagné, 'Are teachers really poor talent detectors? Comments on Pagnato and Birch's (1959) study of the effectiveness and efficiency of various identification techniques' 38(3) *Gifted Child Quarterly* 124, 126; Robert Hoge and Laurinda Cudmore, 'The use of teacher-judgment measures in the identification of gifted pupils' 2(2) *Teaching & Teacher Education* 181, 191.

We know that our gifted and talented students are not an homogenous group, so I think teachers would know when a student is actually very intelligent and very clever and excelling very well. But for some of the other areas where there are gifted students ... it is hidden, and I think our staff would have a fairly low level of ability to identify the gifted students in their classrooms.³⁶⁴

Some participants noted that it is unrealistic to expect teachers to be experts on giftedness, but stressed that they need a basic knowledge of the traits and characteristics of gifted students. Alison, a parent who home schools her gifted child, told the Committee:

I think it is probably not practical to have every teacher in every school totally trained in giftedness, but they should at least be able to say, 'This person is a little different; maybe I need to send him on to a specialist' ... you need to be at least a little aware, be able to funnel them on and then be supported back at the school with specialist expertise.³⁶⁵

Many Inquiry participants suggested that teachers need to be supported to identify gifted students through increased training, as well as greater access information.³⁶⁶ In particular, behavioural checklists were widely viewed as useful tools for teachers. Ms Broadbent of the Gifted Support Network told the Committee:

if teachers and early childhood people have that checklist, even if it is in the back of their mind and they have a child in front of them and they think, 'Actually, I'll pull that checklist out, because I'm already noticing a couple of things that are different' ...³⁶⁷

Ms Harrison told the Committee that behavioural checklists are used as a professional development tool at MLC:

We would sit with the classroom teacher and go through and actually observe a particular child and rate them ... It gives you an idea of whether they are likely to be gifted, highly able or whatever. That is very powerful, because you enter a discussion with the teachers then, and a lot of the mentoring that we do happens in those situations.³⁶⁸

A small number of participants contended that schools should have access to expert assistance to help them identify giftedness. Dr Kronborg stated:

[all school regions] should have a number of guidance officers who are informed in gifted education to be able to do the assessments ... if you have got guidance officers in regions who

³⁶⁴ Ms Meredith Fetting, Assistant Principal, Bendigo Senior Secondary College, *Transcript of evidence*, Bendigo, 20 September 2011, 5. See also Australian College of Educators (Victorian Branch), *Submission 21*, 2; Victorian Catholic Schools Parent Body, *Submission 51*, 4; Ms Carmel Meehan, President, VAGTC, *Transcript of evidence*, Melbourne, 25 July 2011, 7; Mr Phil Brown, Executive Officer, Country Education Project, *Transcript of evidence*, Melbourne, 10 October 2011, 3–4.

³⁶⁵ Alison, *Transcript of evidence*, above n 332, 8–9.

³⁶⁶ Belgrave Parent Support Group for Gifted and Talented Students, *Submission 60*, 1; Maroondah Gifted Children's Parents' Association, *Submission 98*, 4; Ms Carmel Meehan, *Transcript of evidence*, above n 364, 7; Dr Gail Byrne, *Submission 63*, above n 329, 4; Dr Maria Adams, *Submission 65*, 1; CHIP Foundation, *Submission 77*, 6; Ms Moragh Tyler on behalf of Wonthaggi interest group for gifted and talented children, *Submission 64*, 1; Ms Moragh Tyler, Wonthaggi interest group for gifted and talented children, *Transcript of evidence*, Melbourne, 19 September 2011, 2.

³⁶⁷ Ms Louise Broadbent, *Transcript of evidence*, above n 286, 4–5. See also Mr Mark Smith, Committee member, VAGTC, *Transcript of evidence*, Melbourne, 25 July 2011, 7; Ms Claire McLnerney, Principal, Plenty Parklands Primary School, *Transcript of evidence*, Melbourne, 12 September 2011, 17; Ms Carmel Meehan, *Transcript of evidence*, above n 364, 11; Dr Leonie Kronborg, Krongold Centre, *Transcript of evidence*, above n 299, 5.

³⁶⁸ Ms Kathy Harrison, *Transcript of evidence*, above n 299, 3. See also Ms Moragh Tyler, *Transcript of evidence*, above n 366, 2.

are responsible for assessment, they are going to be highly informed, which schools will be aware of and able to call on, so they can actually assess individual students ...³⁶⁹

DEECD's website does currently contain some information about giftedness, including a checklist for teachers.³⁷⁰ However, Mr Burrage acknowledged, 'I think we could do more around providing kits and assessment tools to help people identify giftedness'.³⁷¹

The relevant government departments in some other Australian jurisdictions provide significantly more guidance for teachers and others on identifying gifted students. Substantial resource packages on identifying gifted students have been developed in New South Wales and Tasmania and the relevant websites in Queensland and Western Australia also provide detailed information about identifying gifted students.³⁷²

The Committee recognises that all Victorian teachers have an important role to play in the identification of gifted students. Teachers need to be provided with information about giftedness and, in particular, identification, to support them in this role. The Committee therefore recommends the development of a toolkit on identification for teachers that contains information about the characteristics of gifted students from all backgrounds, information about the range of approaches that can be used to identify giftedness and includes a behavioural checklist.

Earlier in this chapter the Committee noted parents' concerns that they frequently feel brushed off by teachers when they suggest that their child may be gifted. To address this issue, the toolkit should also contain information about the role that parents can play in identification and advice about steps teachers should take once a parent has flagged that a child may be gifted.

Finally, the Committee considers that teachers also need to be supported to identify gifted students through increased education and training. This is discussed in chapter eight.

Recommendation 11: Identification toolkit for teachers

That the Victorian Government develop a toolkit, including checklists and other information, to assist teachers to identify giftedness.

Enhancing the capacity of parents to identify giftedness

The important role that parents play in identifying their children as gifted has already been noted in section 4.2.2. However, the Committee heard that, while recognising that their child was developmentally advanced, many parents did not realise that their child

³⁶⁹ Dr Leonie Kronborg, Krongold Centre, *Transcript of evidence*, above n 299, 3–4. See also WiseOnes Australia, *Submission 18*, 15.

³⁷⁰ DEECD, *Ability, aptitude and achievement testing*, <<http://www.education.vic.gov.au/studentlearning/programs/gifted/highpotential/determingift.htm>> viewed 14 March 2012.

³⁷¹ Mr Ian Burrage, *Transcript of evidence*, above n 322, 8.

³⁷² Department of Education and Training (New South Wales), *Support package: Identification*, above n 342; Education Queensland, *Gifted education*, <http://www.learningplace.com.au/default_suborg.asp?orgid=23&suborgid=158> viewed 20 March 2012; Department of Education (Western Australia), *Identification checklists*, <<http://www.det.wa.edu.au/curriculumsupport/giftedandtalented/detcms/navigation/for-teachers/identification/identification-checklists/>> viewed 7 March 2012; Department of Education (Tasmania), *Submission 10*, 2.

was in fact gifted. Ms Colleen Carapetis, a past committee member of the Gifted Support Network and the parent of two gifted children, told the Committee:

I had no idea I had a gifted child. I knew he was different. I thought gifted was, you know, writing some great musical piece when they were four. He read the newspaper when he was four. We thought all kids did that; we thought he was just a little bit ahead.³⁷³

Similarly, parent, Ms Larelle Parker, stated:

[He] was doing and saying things which to me were not like I had experienced with other children we knew, or with his sisters or his cousins. As he was so unusual I discussed it with a teacher ... Nathan was eventually tested in the middle of Grade 1 and he has an IQ of 99.6 percentile, which is very high. I had never heard of Giftedness before this.³⁷⁴

Parents from some backgrounds may be less able to identify giftedness. Ms Annette Spence, Lalor Secondary College's High Potential Learning Coordinator, queried, 'What if a parent doesn't know what giftedness is?'³⁷⁵ She suggested that parents from migrant or low socioeconomic backgrounds, or those living in regional areas, are less likely to identify giftedness in their children.

There appears to be a genetic component to giftedness, and many of the parents involved in this Inquiry have two or more gifted offspring.³⁷⁶ Parents often reported that the experiences with their oldest child and, in particular, their knowledge of the characteristics and traits associated with giftedness, meant that their other children were identified more easily.³⁷⁷

Some Inquiry participants were critical of the lack of support currently available to parents to help identify their gifted children. Ms Broadbent gave evidence that early childhood centres often refer parents whose children show advanced development to the Gifted Support Network. She commented, 'there should be something more than just a parent volunteer support group that these parents can go to'.³⁷⁸

Parents may also need support after their child has been formally identified as gifted. Ms Carmel Meehan, President of VAGTC, stated:

We get people who ring up or get on the website and say, 'My child has been identified as gifted, and I do not know what to do next. I am worried and I am upset. Who can I turn to and what can I say to the school? How can I talk to the principal and the coordinators to get the best education for my child?'.³⁷⁹

DEECD currently provides some information for parents on its website, including a list of the characteristics of gifted students and a checklist for parents.³⁸⁰ However, some Australian jurisdictions provide more detailed information for parents. For example, the

³⁷³ Ms Colleen Carapetis, *Transcript of evidence*, above n 309, 4.

³⁷⁴ Ms Larelle Parker, *Submission 11*, 1.

³⁷⁵ Ms Annette Spence, *Submission 41*, above n 325, 2.

³⁷⁶ Robert Plomin and Thomas Price, 'The relationship between genetics and intelligence' in Nicholas Colangelo and Gary Davis (eds) *Handbook of gifted education* (3rd edition, 2003) Pearson Education, 120–121. See also Ms Pam Lyons, Coordinator, Able Learners' Enrichment Program, La Trobe University, *Transcript of evidence*, Bendigo, 20 September 2011, 3.

³⁷⁷ Name withheld, *Submission 94*, 1; Names withheld, *Submission 45*, 2; Ms Henriette Boonen-Hackett, *Supplementary submission 26B*, 3.

³⁷⁸ Ms Louise Broadbent, *Transcript of evidence*, above n 286, 4.

³⁷⁹ Ms Carmel Meehan, *Transcript of evidence*, above n 364, 9.

³⁸⁰ DEECD, *For parents*, <<http://www.education.vic.gov.au/studentlearning/programs/gifted/forparents/default.htm#2>> viewed 7 March 2012.

New South Wales Department of Education and Training has published a support package for parents, which includes information on the identification of gifted students.³⁸¹

The Committee acknowledges the key role that parents play in identifying their children as gifted. To support parents in this role, the Committee considers that the Victorian Government should develop a comprehensive toolkit for parents to help them identify giftedness. This should include information on the characteristics and traits of giftedness, as well as advice about where to go for help and support.

The Committee considers support for the parents of gifted students more broadly in chapter ten of this report.

Recommendation 12: Identification toolkit for parents

That the Victorian Government develop a toolkit, including checklists and other information, to assist parents to identify giftedness.

Practical support for identifiers

In this section the Committee has identified a range of people who are in a good position to detect giftedness and recommended a range of information and resources to help improve their capacity to identify gifted children. The Committee considers it important that, in addition to written information, these parties have access to individualised support and advice to assist them to identify gifted students.

In chapter three the Committee recommended that DEECD establish a specific unit with responsibility for providing information, resources and support on gifted education (see recommendation eight). The Committee envisages that an important function of this unit will be to provide expert advice and assistance on an as-needs basis to aide early childhood professionals, teachers and schools, as well as parents to identify gifted students. In particular, this will be achieved through the employment of a gifted education advisor whose role will include providing expert advice and support about identifying and catering for gifted students (see recommendation 53).

4.4.4 What role should schools play in identification?

At present schools and teachers have no obligation to identify gifted students in their classrooms. A more proactive approach is taken in New South Wales, with the state gifted education policy stipulating that both school communities and teachers have a responsibility to identify gifted students.³⁸² Support is provided to schools to do this through the comprehensive information package on identification discussed above.

The Committee believes that the current approach to identifying gifted students in Victorian schools leaves too much to chance. The evidence suggests that all too often gifted children are not being detected by their teachers and schools. The Committee considers that a more proactive response is required. The Committee therefore recommends that the policy underpinning gifted education in Victoria that was proposed

³⁸¹ Department of Education and Training (New South Wales), *Policy and implementation strategies for the education of gifted and talented students. Support package: Parent information* (2004) DET (NSW).

³⁸² Department of Education and Training (New South Wales), *Policy and implementation strategies for the education of gifted and talented students* (2004) DET (NSW), 7. See also Department of Education and Training (Australian Capital Territory), *Gifted and talented students* (GAT200808, 2008) DET (ACT), para 1.2.

in chapter three should make it clear that all Victorian schools are required to identify their gifted students. This should be reinforced by the model school policy.

The Committee considers that DEECD should support schools to fulfil this obligation by providing resources (see recommendation 11) and practical support (see recommendation 53) to teachers and schools. In addition, schools will require extra support to help them identify giftedness among students from backgrounds of educational disadvantage. This important issue is covered in the next section.

Recommendation 13: Schools' responsibility to identify gifted students

That the Victorian Government, through the Victorian policy and the model school policy on the education of gifted students, stipulate that schools have a responsibility to identify their gifted students.

4.5 Increasing identification of gifted students from backgrounds of educational disadvantage

While gifted students can come from all backgrounds, the evidence suggests that some students are less likely to have their gifts identified. Students at particular risk of having their gifts overlooked are those from backgrounds of educational disadvantage, such as low socioeconomic, Indigenous or culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds, as well as students who live in rural and regional areas and students with disabilities.

This section looks at the challenges of identifying gifted students from backgrounds of educational disadvantage and explores ways to improve identification of giftedness among these students.

4.5.1 Why are some students less likely to be identified as gifted?

There are a variety of reasons why gifted students from some backgrounds are less likely to be identified as gifted. The main causes of under identification highlighted by participants in this Inquiry are low expectations of achievement, the nature of the tools used to identify giftedness and the fact that giftedness in some students may be hidden, either deliberately, or by an external factor such as a disability.

Low expectations of achievement

The Committee heard that some teachers and schools may have low expectations of their student population as a whole, or certain groups in their student body.

As noted earlier in this chapter, the evidence suggests that many teachers and school leaders have preconceived ideas about what gifted students look like that may inhibit the identification of gifted students from certain backgrounds. Many participants in this Inquiry highlighted that teachers commonly consider that gifted students are well behaved, high-achieving students from middle class families. Mr David Lyons, the Student Welfare Officer at a school in regional Victoria, submitted:

I find that teachers and school communities often assume gifted & talented students come from well off backgrounds. Working with the students of Trafalgar High School's SEAL Program has shown, gifted & talented students come from all walks of life.³⁸³

Dr Michael Faulkner, a Lecturer in the School of Education at La Trobe University, told the Committee that in conducting research on gifted education he has encountered school principals who have denied that there are any gifted students in their school. He added, 'if a person is not recognising that there are unusual children in a body of 200 or 700 children, that means they are not looking for it, so they do not see it'.³⁸⁴ It appears that such attitudes are not uncommon among teachers and school leaders in low socioeconomic areas and rural and regional areas.³⁸⁵ In relation to students living in rural and regional areas, Mr Phil Brown, Executive Officer of the Country Education Project, a community organisation that works to support and develop education in rural Victoria, commented:

The expectation in a rural community of educational performance is much lower, and that has a huge impact. It comes from parents, it comes from teachers and it comes from fellow students.³⁸⁶

The Committee heard that low expectations of Indigenous students are a particular cause for concern. The submission of the Victorian Aboriginal Education Association, an organisation that represents Victoria's Indigenous community in relation to education, stated 'the current culture of low expectations for Koorie students is a significant cause of low academic achievements'.³⁸⁷ Ms Jirra Harvey, who gave evidence on behalf of the Aurora Project, an organisation that delivers programs and services in relation to Indigenous education, told the Committee of her experience as an Indigenous pupil in a Victorian school:

when I was young I would ask for harder work at school, and the teachers would comment, 'Why bother wasting our teachers' time, when she is just going to be pregnant at 16 and drop out like all the rest of them'.³⁸⁸

Similarly, Mr Richard Potok, Director of the Aurora Project, cited a study that found that most of the Indigenous students who performed strongly on a culturally appropriate test were considered by their teachers to be average or below average students.³⁸⁹

Participants in this Inquiry saw increasing teachers' awareness and understanding of giftedness as crucial to improving the identification of gifted students from backgrounds of educational disadvantage. Mr Burrage of DEECD stated:

³⁸³ Mr David Lyons, Student Welfare Officer, Trafalgar High School, *Submission 2*, 1. See also Faculty of Education, Australian Catholic University, *Submission 13*, 9; Dr Debora Lipson and Ms Barbara Black, *Submission 78*, 3; DEECD, *Submission 58*, 9; Ms Pam Lyons, Coordinator, Able Learners' Enrichment Program, La Trobe University, *Submission 71*, 3.

³⁸⁴ Dr Michael Faulkner, *Transcript of evidence*, above n 312, 3. See also Ms Pam Lyons, *Transcript of evidence*, above n 376, 6.

³⁸⁵ Dr Michael Faulkner, Lecturer, School of Education, La Trobe University, *Submission 95*, 2–3; Ms Barbara Black, *Transcript of evidence*, Melbourne, 19 September 2011, 7.

³⁸⁶ Mr Phil Brown, *Transcript of evidence*, above n 364, 9.

³⁸⁷ Victorian Aboriginal Education Association Incorporated (VAEAI), *Submission 116*, 3. See also Mr Lionel Bamblett, General Manager, VAEAI, *Transcript of evidence*, Melbourne, 12 September 2011, 3.

³⁸⁸ Ms Jirra Harvey, Victorian State Coordinator, The Aspiration Initiative, *Transcript of evidence*, Melbourne, 19 September 2011, 5.

³⁸⁹ Mr Richard Potok, Director, The Aurora Project, *Transcript of evidence*, Melbourne, 19 September 2011, 7. See also Graham Chaffey and Stan Bailey, 'The use of dynamic testing to reveal high academic potential and underachievement in a culturally different population' 18(2) *Gifted Education International* 124, 135.

it is our responsibility to explain to educators and principals as educational leaders that for particular cohorts they under-identify in terms of their gifts and talents, and they actually need to be sought out within the school environment.³⁹⁰

In terms of addressing the culture of low expectations in the Indigenous community, several participants in this Inquiry emphasised the importance of providing role models to show that excellence can exist in that community. Mr Lionel Bamblett, General Manager of the Victorian Aboriginal Education Association, told the Committee that sporting success is widely celebrated in his community but that role models are needed in other spheres:

Not every Aboriginal person is going to be a sports star ... We need to broaden the view on that and look at some high academic achievers and put them forward as role models ...³⁹¹

He also informed the Committee that the Indigenous community was increasingly celebrating the academic success of its high performing students.³⁹²

Impact of tools commonly used to identify giftedness

Participants in this Inquiry highlighted that the tools currently used to identify giftedness may unintentionally inhibit identification of students from some backgrounds. For example, Mr Bamblett told the Committee 'we think the majority of the testing regime has a decided bias, and a monoculture bias, and it does not really address diversity in this country'.³⁹³ In particular, the Committee heard that achievement tests and other tools that assume English language competency may not be good at detecting giftedness among some groups.

The Committee has already noted the frequent use of achievement tests to identify gifted students in Victoria and highlighted a number of issues associated with these tests. An additional issue with the use of achievement tests is that they are unlikely to identify a gifted student from a background of educational disadvantage. Participants in this Inquiry drew the Committee's attention to research that found a high correlation between a student's socioeconomic status and their performance on achievement tests.³⁹⁴

Many of the tools used to identify giftedness are language based and will inherently disadvantage students from culturally diverse backgrounds. The Committee heard that language may significantly effect the results of both formal and informal identification processes. First, teachers may make judgments about a student's ability based on their spoken English. Mr Bamblett explained how such assumptions impact Indigenous students:

³⁹⁰ Mr Ian Burrage, *Transcript of evidence*, above n 322, 6. See also Ms Matilda Darvall, Policy and Research Manager, VAEAI, *Transcript of evidence*, Melbourne, 12 September 2011, 6; DEECD, *Submission 58*, 10.

³⁹¹ Mr Lionel Bamblett, *Transcript of evidence*, above n 387, 4–5. See also Ms Jirra Harvey, *Transcript of evidence*, above n 388, 8; Mr Ian Burrage, *Transcript of evidence*, above n 322, 5.

³⁹² Mr Lionel Bamblett, *Transcript of evidence*, above n 387, 3–4.

³⁹³ *ibid.*, 3.

³⁹⁴ Australian Education Union (Victorian Branch), *Submission 106*, 5; Dr Debora Lipson and Ms Barbara Black, *Submission 78*, 1. See also Donna Ford, Tarek Grantham and Gilman Whiting, 'Culturally and linguistically diverse students in gifted education: Recruitment and retention issues' 74(3) *Exceptional Children* 289, 294; ACER, *Disadvantage in Australian schools* (2012) ACER eNews. Available at <Disadvantage in Australian schools> viewed 16 March 2012; Victorian Auditor-General, *Literacy and numeracy achievement* (2009) Victorian Auditor-General's Office, 38.

Most of our students ... talk what we would call Koorie English. So when our students are enrolled in school, in the prep years and the first years of schooling, that comes into play. You are immediately judged, when you enter a school environment, around standard English. That can actually cause children to be identified with issues and problems and not be looked at in the sense that they have that higher potential ...³⁹⁵

In addition, some of the more formal tools used to identify giftedness assume a certain level of English language literacy. Participants highlighted that this disadvantages students from some backgrounds, including students from culturally and linguistically diverse communities and those with disabilities such as dyslexia.³⁹⁶

Professor Geoff Masters, Chief Executive Officer of ACER, explained that his organisation designs its tests to take English language ability into account:

We recognise that often children's backgrounds and their language backgrounds can be an impediment to identifying exactly where they are at in terms of what they are capable of, and that is why we tend to use a mix of assessments, including sometimes spatial assessments, not just verbal assessments in particular because they can sometimes put particular groups of students at a disadvantage ... Beyond that I guess what we are trying to do is use breadth as well, so we are looking at not just verbal ability or quantitative reasoning ability but at spatial ability, where there is no language as such used in the test.³⁹⁷

Many other participants in the Inquiry also emphasised the importance of using multiple assessment criteria and methods to ensure identification of gifted students from all backgrounds.³⁹⁸ Approaches such as dynamic testing and non-verbal tests like Raven's were viewed as particularly appropriate for identifying giftedness in students from backgrounds of educational disadvantage.³⁹⁹ Dynamic testing is an approach that involves working with students prior to a test so that they understand both the nature of the task, as well as strategies for completing it. There is some evidence from trials in New South Wales that this approach is successful in identifying giftedness among Indigenous students.⁴⁰⁰

Hidden giftedness

Some students' giftedness may be particularly difficult to detect because it is hidden. This may be because of the deliberate action of a young person wanting to fit in or may

³⁹⁵ Mr Lionel Bamblett, *Transcript of evidence*, above n 387, 6.

³⁹⁶ Dr Debora Lipson and Ms Barbara Black, *Submission 78*, 3; PAVCSS, *Submission 74*, 8; Mr Ian Burrage, *Transcript of evidence*, above n 322, 5; Ms Barbara Black, *Transcript of evidence*, above n 385, 7; Dr Karen Ward, *Transcript of evidence*, above n 332, 2–3; Ms Pat Slattery, *Transcript of evidence*, above n 304, 3; CHIP Foundation, *Submission 77*, 6.

³⁹⁷ Professor Geoff Masters, *Transcript of evidence*, above n 323, 4, 8.

³⁹⁸ Dr Leonie Kronborg, *Submission 104*, above n 327, 3; Ms Barbara Black, *Transcript of evidence*, above n 385, 7; PAVCSS, *Submission 74*, 8; Australian Education Union (Victorian Branch), *Submission 106*, 6.

³⁹⁹ Dr Glenison Alsop, *Transcript of evidence*, above n 280, 4; Dr Leonie Kronborg, Krongold Centre, *Transcript of evidence*, above n 299, 4; Associate Professor John Munro, Exceptional Learning and Gifted Education, Graduate School of Education, The University of Melbourne, *Transcript of evidence*, Melbourne, 19 September 2011, 4–5; Dr John Munro, *Submission 96*, above n 322, 5 citing Carol Lidz and Sheila Macrine, 'An alternative approach to the identification of gifted culturally and linguistically diverse learners: The contribution of dynamic assessment' 22(1) *School of Psychology International* 74, 89–92.

⁴⁰⁰ Angela Chessman, *Identification of students from culturally diverse backgrounds: Coolabah Dynamic Assessment Model (CDAM) (2006) Curriculum K–12 Directorate, Department of Education and Training (New South Wales)*, 8–9; Graham Chaffey, Stan Bailey and Ken Vine, 'Identifying high academic potential in Australian aboriginal children using dynamic testing' 12(1) *Australasian Journal of Gifted Education* 42, 42–55. See also John Munro, 'Identifying gifted knowledge and learning in Indigenous cultures: Africa and Australia' in Wilma Vialle (ed) *Giftedness from an Indigenous Perspective* (2011) AAEGT, 32–33.

be entirely unintentional, with the giftedness masked by the impact of another factor such as a disability.

Hiding giftedness to fit in

In chapter three the Committee noted it is often not considered ‘cool’ to be gifted and that it is not uncommon for gifted students to intentionally mask their abilities in order to fit in with their peers. The Committee heard that the pressure to conform may be even higher in some groups. Ms Pat Slattery, Director of WiseOnes, stated, ‘there is a lot of peer pressure in some cultural groups not to stick your head up’.⁴⁰¹ Similarly, the Country Education Project, submitted:

if talented students are not provided with the opportunity to be involved in learning programs to support their extended learning needs, they often choose to “dumb down” so they are not seen as someone different. This seems to become more extenuated within rural education settings where there are lower numbers of students within a school.⁴⁰²

Some participants suggested that gifted girls are also under enormous social pressure to mask their abilities, which may lead to their underrepresentation in gifted programs. This was emphasised in the submission of Box Hill High School (BHHS):

Girls are extremely unlikely to be identified as gifted under current policies. Our experiences over the past 17 years confirm much of the research available which acknowledges girls as being under-identified for gifted programming ... applicants for the BHHS SEAL program have been consistently two thirds boys and one third girls ... Our experience indicates that social issues are a major influence on gifted girls’ choices about education ...⁴⁰³

However, there is conflicting research on this issue, with some recent Australian research suggesting that gifted boys are more likely to deliberately underachieve.⁴⁰⁴

Giftedness hidden by a disability

Some gifted students also have a disability such as a learning disability or an autism spectrum disorder, which may conceal their gifts to some degree. Such students are commonly called twice exceptional students.

Many Inquiry participants highlighted the heightened challenges associated with identifying giftedness in twice exceptional students. For example, the Gifted Support Network told the Committee, ‘their disabilities can conceal their gifted talents. Thus, under identification is even more prevalent in this group than for the “regular” gifted population’.⁴⁰⁵

⁴⁰¹ Ms Pat Slattery, *Transcript of evidence*, above n 304, 4. See also Dr Karen Ward, *Transcript of evidence*, above n 332, 3.

⁴⁰² Country Education Project, *Submission 79*, 4. See also Dr Debora Lipson and Ms Barbara Black, *Submission 78*, 3; Dr Karen Ward, *Transcript of evidence*, above n 332, 3.

⁴⁰³ Box Hill High School, *Submission 81*, 4. See also Mr Ross Huggard, *Submission 42*, above n 339, 2; CHIP Foundation, *Submission 77*, 5; Ms Jennifer Grant, Gifted Education Specialist, WiseOnes Australia teacher, *Submission 97*, 2; Sally Reis, ‘Gifted females in elementary and secondary school’ in Maureen Neihart et al (eds) *The social and emotional development of gifted children: What do we know?* (2002) Prufrock Press, 125.

⁴⁰⁴ Dorothy Monceaux and Paul Jewell, ‘Social influences on the underachievement of gifted male adolescents’ 16(1) *Australasian Journal of Gifted Education* 30, 30.

⁴⁰⁵ Gifted Support Network, *Submission 49*, 5. See also Dr Michael Faulkner, *Submission 95*, above n 385, 4; Dr Karen Ward, *Transcript of evidence*, above n 332, 2–3; Ms Maxine Cowie, Director, Starjump, *Transcript of evidence*, Melbourne, 10 October 2011, 2–3, 5; PAVCSS, *Submission 74*, 4.

The Committee heard that many teachers do not realise that a student with a learning disability can also be gifted. Ms Maxine Cowie, the Director of Starjump, an organisation that works with children with learning disabilities, told the Committee:

They have an IQ test with a 99 percentile in perceptual reasoning and an average score in their verbal processing, and the teachers will argue with me about the validity of that IQ test because they do not understand twice exceptionality. That child never gets the real issues identified. They are given remediation programs. The focus is on remediation, not on giftedness.⁴⁰⁶

The parents of twice exceptional students suggested that formal giftedness assessments may be particularly useful for identifying giftedness in this group. Dr Karen Ward, the parent of a gifted child with dyslexia, shared her experience:

We took him to the Krongold Centre at Monash ... and he was genius rated in non-verbal language areas and average in language areas. The school had not picked it up.⁴⁰⁷

Case study 4: '[B]eing amongst a cohort of like minded children working at an accelerated pace has changed his life completely'⁴⁰⁸

'My son ... was originally identified by his kindergarten teacher as potentially autistic, as he was blatantly uninterested in what was going on in the classroom and spent most of his time dreamily staring out the window. Testing soon showed that he was highly gifted and was in fact probably completely bored and unstimulated by the classroom activities.

A few years later I was again approached, this time by a school teacher, who was concerned that he had an auditory processing disorder, as he almost never participated in the classroom, rarely completed work and mostly appearing to be in another world mentally. He was tested again, same results—highly gifted, probably completely bored.

At that point he was in a local private school, and they had a gifted support program and did manage to make some progress with him ... Unfortunately due to financial reasons in grade 4 he was moved to a local primary school. I did extensive research to determine which local school was most able to cater for him, and briefed them extensively on his abilities.

Halfway through grade 4, he was routinely bullied, often physically, wasn't participating in class and was beginning to show suicidal tendencies. He stopped completing any work for fear of teasing, and was rapidly going backwards.

At this point the school decided to use "their" psychologist to test him. This was a total disaster as it was clear that she was used to testing kids at the other end of the scale, and had no idea how to cope with a highly gifted child. For example, when asking "what's similar about water and milk" my son answered—hydrogen atoms. She marked it as wrong (she wanted him to say liquids, obviously!) and in fact after a few more questions decided he was being a smart arse.

⁴⁰⁶ Ms Maxine Cowie, *Transcript of evidence*, above n 405, 3. See also Dr Leonie Kronborg, Krongold Centre, *Transcript of evidence*, above n 299, 5.

⁴⁰⁷ Dr Karen Ward, *Transcript of evidence*, above n 332, 2. See also Pieta, *Transcript of evidence*, above n 335, 5.

⁴⁰⁸ Ms Felicity Walker, *Submission 69*, 1–2.

The end result was that she said her testing was inconclusive as the results were so extreme. She refused to accept that her personal input was the cause of this disparity, despite the evidence that testing areas with no personal judgment required by her were the ones he scored right off the top of the scale, and any tests where she had input he scored at the bottom of the scale.

The end result of this was that the school refused to accept the earlier reports by the private educational psychologist, and in the words of the Vice Principal “he just has to get over it and get on with things. We see no evidence in the classroom of above average ability—in fact, he appears below average”.

Early in grade 5 it became clear that he was sinking into depression, and had completely shut down at school, refusing to complete any work at all. At that point I moved him to a primary school a 40 minute drive away, as other friends with gifted children recommended it and it was something of a magnet school for gifted children, even if that was not an official function of the school.

In year 7 [he] was entered into the SEAL programme at Box Hill High School, and he’s now halfway through his second year there. It’s almost impossible to describe the difference in him now. He is so happy, confident and relaxed, it’s hard to imagine he’s the same boy from early in grade 5. His last primary school started the transformation, albeit with some bumps, but being amongst a cohort of like minded children working at an accelerated pace has changed his life completely.’

4.5.2 Increasing identification of gifted students from backgrounds of educational disadvantage—The Committee’s view

The evidence presented to the Committee makes it clear that there are currently many barriers to the identification of gifted students from backgrounds of educational disadvantage, including low socioeconomic, Indigenous and culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds, as well as those living in rural and regional areas and twice exceptional students. The Committee considers it imperative that greatly improved efforts are made to identify gifted students in these groups.

The Committee believes that a lack of understanding of giftedness significantly contributes to the under identification of gifted students from backgrounds of educational disadvantage. In particular, the Committee is concerned that many teachers do not understand that giftedness occurs in all segments of the community.

Earlier in this chapter, the Committee recommended the development of targeted information and resources to increase identification of gifted students generally (see recommendations 9, 10, 11 and 12). The Committee considers that this material should contain specific information about strategies for identifying students from backgrounds of educational disadvantage. The Committee considers the New South Wales support package on identification, which provides detailed information about identifying gifted students from a range of non-dominant cultures, to be a good model.⁴⁰⁹

⁴⁰⁹ Department of Education and Training (New South Wales), *Support package: Identification*, above n 342, 13–15.

The Committee also concludes that teachers' capacity to identify gifted students from all backgrounds will be enhanced by increased education and training at both the pre-service and in-service stages. Teacher education is explored more fully in chapter eight.

The Committee is greatly troubled by evidence suggesting that some teachers and school leaders, particularly in schools in disadvantaged areas, incorrectly assume there are no gifted students in their schools. To address this the Committee recommends that schools in areas with significant levels of educational disadvantage receive targeted information and resources about giftedness, which particularly focuses on identification of students from disadvantaged backgrounds.

Once identified, gifted students from backgrounds of educational disadvantage need to have access to appropriate programs catering for their specific needs. Chapter five explores the important issue of ensuring that these students have access to appropriate gifted education opportunities.

Recommendation 14: Information on identifying gifted students from backgrounds of educational disadvantage

That the Victorian Government include in toolkits and other information and resources on identifying giftedness, strategies for identifying gifted students from backgrounds of educational disadvantage.

Recommendation 15: Targeted information on identifying giftedness for schools in disadvantaged areas

That the Victorian Government provide targeted information and resources about identifying giftedness to schools with significant numbers of students from backgrounds of educational disadvantage.

4.6 What happens after a student is identified as gifted?

After a child is identified as gifted, the next step is to ensure that he or she is provided with opportunities that match his or her specific needs. Professor Masters of ACER highlighted the purpose of identifying gifted students:

The principle that underpins the work that we do is that every child needs to be given learning opportunities appropriate to their current needs as learners ... Our assessments are primarily designed to ensure a better matching of students to the kinds of learning opportunities that are going to be appropriate for them.⁴¹⁰

However, the evidence presented to the Committee suggests that identification does not always result in a student's special needs being met. The Gifted Support Network's submission stated:

The psychologist usually provides a detailed report that the school can use to cater for the child's needs. When the IQ report is presented to the school, the parents are under the

⁴¹⁰ Professor Geoff Masters, *Transcript of evidence*, above n 323, 3–4. See also Dr Gail Byrne, *Transcript of evidence*, above n 280, 4.

expectation that this will provide momentum to gain access to a more appropriate education for their child. It is disappointing when the school offers to put action in place and then doesn't, or worse, does not accept that any changes in the child's schooling are required.⁴¹¹

The parents of two gifted children told the Committee that their oldest daughter was assessed at school but the full results of the assessment were withheld from them:

The principal told us we had to use Freedom of Information legislation if we wanted to access the complete report. In the meantime, we were shown the part of the report which the principal wanted us to see, which outlined some measures which may have been helpful had they been implemented, but still would not have gone far enough ... We felt as though we had been deliberately cheated and kept in the dark to stop us making further requests on behalf of our daughter.⁴¹²

The Committee also heard that teachers and schools sometimes do not understand assessments of giftedness and or what kind of educational interventions are required as a result. Dr Kronborg told the Committee:

It is a concern that sometimes teachers get these reports and they just put them in drawers. There is also concern sometimes that teachers do not understand the implications of what the reports are saying, or they actually do not believe what the reports are telling them.⁴¹³

The Committee has already noted that in some other Australian jurisdictions schools have an obligation to identify gifted students. Those jurisdictions take that further by requiring schools and teachers to ensure that appropriate opportunities are provided to identified students. For example, the Australian Capital Territory's gifted education policy states:

School principals, in consultation with their school community, will ensure that there are effective and equitable procedures for the identification and provision of developmentally appropriate programs for all gifted and talented students.⁴¹⁴

The Committee recognises that proper identification is only useful insofar as it will lead to appropriate educational opportunities for a gifted student. The Committee therefore recommends that schools be required to implement appropriate provisions to meet the educational needs of any student identified as gifted. This requirement should be set out in the Victorian gifted education policy recommended in chapter three, and reinforced in the model school policy.

The range of strategies that can be used to meet the needs of gifted students and how teachers and schools can be supported to implement these in every Victorian classroom are the subject of the next chapter.

⁴¹¹ Gifted Support Network, *Submission 49*, 5. See also Ms Katherine Pomeroy and Mr Nigel Cunningham, *Submission 59*, 2; Ms Felicity Walker, *Submission 69*, 1–3.

⁴¹² Names withheld, *Submission 45*, 1–2.

⁴¹³ Dr Leonie Kronborg, Krongold Centre, *Transcript of evidence*, above n 299, 3. See also Emma, parent, *Transcript of evidence*, Melbourne, 19 September 2011, 10; Maroondah Gifted Children's Parents' Association, *Submission 98*, 4–5; Ms Rhonda Allen, *Submission 14*, 2; Dr Karen Ward, *Transcript of evidence*, above n 332, 2–3.

⁴¹⁴ Department of Education and Training (Australian Capital Territory), *Gifted and talented students*, above n 382, para 1.2. See also Department of Education and Training (New South Wales), *Policy and implementation strategies for the education of gifted and talented students*, above n, 382, 7.

Recommendation 16: Schools' responsibility to provide for gifted students

The Victorian Government, through the Victorian policy and the model school policy on the education of gifted students, require schools to provide appropriate educational provisions for any student identified as gifted.

Chapter 5: Strategies for educating gifted students: What works?

Key findings

- Every gifted student has unique learning needs, which require personalised educational approaches.
- There are many strategies that can be used to provide personalised learning for gifted students. Key strategies are individual learning plans, curriculum differentiation, acceleration, ability grouping, enrichment and enhancement.
- Teachers and schools need access to increased information, education and support to enable them to effectively implement personalised learning for gifted students.
- While research shows that year level acceleration can be highly effective in catering for gifted students, there appears to be considerable resistance to this intervention among educators and it is difficult to obtain. Guidelines are needed to provide a clear framework and process for obtaining year level acceleration.
- There is considerable potential to use technology to provide increased learning opportunities for all gifted students throughout Victoria.
- There is significant scope for Victorian schools to work together to enhance provision for their gifted students.
- Increased collaboration between schools and community, business and industry has the potential to provide extended learning opportunities for gifted students. In particular, mentoring offers significant benefits for gifted students.
- There is currently limited research conducted on gifted education in Australia. There is a need to encourage research in this area and to improve mechanisms to communicate research findings.
- Gifted students from backgrounds of educational disadvantage face significant barriers to accessing educational opportunities that meet their needs. The main barriers are cost and distance.
- Gifted Indigenous students and gifted students with disabilities face particular barriers to accessing appropriate educational opportunities. Targeted interventions are required to ensure that these students can access an education that meets their needs.

Strategies for educating gifted students: What works?

This chapter explores the various strategies that can be used to meet the distinct learning needs of gifted students. It also considers the current research gaps in relation to gifted education and how these can be filled. Finally, this chapter looks at how we can ensure that all gifted students, regardless of their background, have access to appropriate learning opportunities.

5.1 Approaches to educating gifted students

There are many different approaches that can be used to educate gifted students. This section explores approaches that evidence to the Inquiry suggested are particularly effective. First, this section discusses the need for personalised learning opportunities to meet the diverse range of student needs. Then it considers a range of approaches commonly viewed as providing a foundation for gifted education, namely curriculum differentiation, acceleration, ability grouping, as well as extension and enrichment. Finally, this section explores approaches that represent new directions for gifted education in Victoria including using technology, links between schools, and collaboration with community, business and industry partners.

5.1.1 Personalised learning

This section considers the diversity of gifted students and the need for tailored interventions that meet their individual needs.

Why personalised learning is important

As outlined in chapter three, gifted students are a distinct cohort with special educational needs that may require a different teaching approach. However, while gifted students may share some attributes, it is important to recognise that no two gifted students are the same: each requires access to educational opportunities that are customised to meet his or her particular needs. This has been highlighted by Associate Professor Wilma Vialle and Dr Karen Rogers of the University of Wollongong:

Gifted students are not a homogenous group; they vary as much from each other as they do from their non-gifted peers ... It stands to reason, then, that there is no single approach that will fit the needs of all students. Planning for gifted learners needs to match their distinctive profiles.⁴¹⁵

⁴¹⁵ Wilma Vialle and Karen Rogers, *Gifted, talented or educationally disadvantaged?*, in Chris Forlin (ed) *Future directions for inclusive teacher education: An international perspective* (2012) Routledge, included in *Submission 28 Appendix C*, Australian Association for the Education of the Gifted and Talented (AAEGT), 10–

Participants in this Inquiry emphasised that learning opportunities must be personalised for each student, drawing from a broad range of strategies. For example, Ms Michelle Whitby, a primary school teacher who is also the parent of three gifted children, wrote:

No one approach, no one strategy is going to effectively cater for the educational needs of all gifted students, and as such, teachers should equip themselves with a range of techniques in an attempt to be as effective as possible ...⁴¹⁶

Personalised learning also provides a platform for nurturing the individual gifts of students across all domains. The submission of the Department of Education and Early Childhood Development (DEECD) noted that, while students can be gifted across a broad range of domains, 'Traditionally, many gifted education programs in schools have focused on a limited range of curriculum areas.'⁴¹⁷ One parent, quoted in the submission of Parents Victoria, the peak body representing parent associations, stated:

I am the parent of a practical learner who has a creative gift but no motivation or interest in academic subjects ... These students too need to be identified and given equivalent opportunities.⁴¹⁸

Ms Lynn Redley, the Manager of Curriculum at the Australian Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting Authority, which is charged with developing the new national curriculum, told the Committee that it is through providing personalised learning that teachers and schools will implement the Australian Curriculum to ensure it meets the needs of gifted learners.⁴¹⁹

The Committee recognises that the most appropriate method for educating a gifted student will depend on that student's individual learning needs and behaviours. Personalised learning must therefore form the foundation of gifted education in this state. In chapter three, the Committee recommended the development of a state policy on gifted education, as well as a model school policy to guide schools in catering for gifted students. The Committee considers that both these documents should emphasise the importance of personalised learning for gifted students.

There are many different strategies and approaches that can be used as part of a personalised approach to education. These are discussed throughout the remainder of this chapter. However, input to this Inquiry suggests that many teachers are not aware of these strategies, the evidence of their effectiveness or how to implement them in their classrooms and schools.

The Committee considers it vital that teachers and schools are provided with information about the range of strategies they can use to individualise learning for their gifted students. Beyond this, teachers and schools require access to advice and support to aide the implementation of personalised learning in every Victorian classroom. The

11. See also Sandra Kaplan, 'Myth 9: There is a single curriculum for the gifted' 53(4) *Gifted Child Quarterly* 257, 258.

⁴¹⁶ Mrs Michele Whitby, *Submission 114*, 9. See also Melissa, parent, *Transcript of evidence*, Melbourne, 19 September 2011, 18; Ms Barbara Black, *Transcript of evidence*, Melbourne, 19 September 2011, 5; Ms Maree Germech, Victorian Affiliated Network of Gifted Support Groups, *Transcript of evidence*, Melbourne, 10 October 2011, 4; Mr Phil Brown, Executive Officer, Country Education Project, *Transcript of evidence*, Melbourne, 10 October 2011, 5; Carolyn Ferguson, 'What educational options are available for gifted and talented students within Australia? Is it best to accelerate, use enrichment, curriculum differentiation, or employ a combination of methods?', included in *Submission 55 Appendix A*, 8–9.

⁴¹⁷ Department of Education and Early Childhood Development (DEECD), *Submission 58*, 10.

⁴¹⁸ Parents Victoria, *Submission 82*, 4. See also Dr John Munro, Associate Professor Exceptional Learning and Gifted Education, Melbourne Graduate School of Education, The University of Melbourne, *Submission 96*, 6.

⁴¹⁹ Ms Lynn Redley, Manager, Curriculum, Australian Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting Authority, *Transcript of evidence*, Canberra, 20 March 2012, 6.

Committee considers that that the Gifted Education Unit within DEECD recommended in chapter three should play a proactive role in informing, supporting and advising Victorian teachers and schools about strategies to cater for gifted students. The Committee discusses this support role more fully in chapter nine.

The Committee also considers that teachers need increased access to education and training about personalised learning and the array of strategies that can be used to implement it. This issue is explored in chapter eight.

Recommendation 17: Policy support for personalised learning

That the Victorian Government, through the Victorian policy and the model school policy on the education of gifted students, emphasise the importance of providing personalised learning for gifted students in all Victorian schools.

Recommendation 18: Information for teachers and schools about strategies for educating gifted students

That the Victorian Government provide information and support for teachers and schools about strategies for educating gifted students, including:

- individual learning plans
- curriculum differentiation
- acceleration, particularly year level acceleration
- ability grouping, including vertical timetabling
- enrichment and enhancement.

Individual learning plans

Individual learning plans are a vehicle for providing personalised learning. An individual learning plan is a document that set out strategies or goals for a student's education based on that student's strengths and weaknesses. Several Inquiry participants observed that individual learning plans are used extensively to cater for students with learning difficulties. DEECD guidelines currently recommend that individual learning plans be developed for students with disabilities and additional learning needs.⁴²⁰ Participants suggested that, similarly, individual learning plans should be utilised, or even mandated, in order to provide tailored educational responses for gifted students.⁴²¹

Some gifted students currently have individual learning plans but parents reported that they are often not implemented in a meaningful way. Heike, a parent who participated in the Committee's Parents' Forum, felt that individual learning plans are often 'useless'

⁴²⁰ DEECD, *Student support group guidelines 2013* (1998) DEECD (VIC), 1. Available at <<http://www.education.vic.gov.au/healthwellbeing/wellbeing/disability/handbook/default.htm>> viewed 30 May 2012.

⁴²¹ Names withheld, *Submission 9*, 5; Ms Moragh Tyler on behalf of Wonthaggi interest group for gifted and talented children, *Submission 64*, 2; Goldfields Local Learning and Employment Network (LLEN), *Submission 86*, 10; Belgrave Parent Support Group for Gifted and Talented Students, *Submission 60*, 4; Dr Gail Byrne, Psychologist, Exceptional Children, *Submission 63*, 6; Ms Kim Steere, *Submission 61*, 3; CHIP Foundation, *Submission 77*, 4; Catholic Education Office Melbourne, *Submission 87*, 7; Ms Henriette Boonen-Hackett, *Supplementary submission 26B*, 3. See also AAEGT, 'AAEGT information statement', included in *Submission 28 Appendix A*, 3.

and are 'really just there to appease the parents who are all seen as pushy parents'.⁴²² The Gifted Support Network, a support group for parents with gifted children, reported that a survey of its members found that few parents had a positive experience with the implementation of an individual learning plan.⁴²³ One parent, Karen, shared her story:

our son's teacher provided us with a copy of the ILP [individual learning plan] in place for our son ... but the plan read more like a behavioural plan with little commitment to an extension programme.

After a meeting with the teacher, our new principal and the school guidance counsellor at the end of the term, a new ILP was implemented. This was an improvement on the original but there was still the attitude that our son "was well ahead in the academic area so there needs to be a focus on the social and emotional side". We would argue that addressing his academic needs would improve his social and emotional well-being.⁴²⁴

Despite negative experiences with individual learning plans, many participants supported the wider use of these plans, suggesting that the issues lie not so much with the tool, but rather with how the documents are currently written and implemented. For example, Mr David Huggins, Assistant Director of Student Services at the Catholic Education Office Melbourne, expressed the view that the individual learning plan process 'is very useful as long as people explicitly know what they are seeking to achieve'.⁴²⁵

Nathan, a Year 9 student at Nossal High School, a selective entry school, explained the benefits associated with having an individual learning plan:

I have been in meetings with the teachers. I have been asked what I want to do. We have gone through my entire VCE plan, checking it over and over again to be able to best suit the course to me instead of trying to suit me to the courses. I must admit, feeling like I am a part of my own future is definitely a good feeling.⁴²⁶

The Committee considers that individual learning plans offer significant potential as an avenue for personalising learning for gifted students. It notes that there have been some difficulties with the use of these plans for gifted students to date. The Committee considers that these issues can be overcome, and individual learning plans more widely implemented for gifted students, if teachers and schools have a better understanding of these plans and their use. In particular, the Committee believes that the value of these plans for meeting the needs of gifted students, and the need to use the plans to build on a gifted student's areas of strength, should be highlighted.

The Committee concludes that teachers and schools should be provided with information about the effective use of individual learning plans as part of the broader information about strategies to educate gifted students that the Committee recommended in recommendation 18. In addition, teachers and schools should have access to support and advice to ensure they can meaningfully develop an individual learning plan for every gifted student under their tutelage.

⁴²² Heike, parent, *Transcript of evidence*, Melbourne, 19 September 2011, 9.

⁴²³ Gifted Support Network, *Submission 49*, 14.

⁴²⁴ Names withheld, *Supplementary submission 9A*, 1.

⁴²⁵ Mr David Huggins, Assistant Director, Student Services, Catholic Education Office Melbourne, *Transcript of evidence*, Melbourne, 12 September 2011, 5. See also Mr David Southwick MP, Chair, Education and Training Committee, *Transcript of evidence*, Melbourne, 19 September 2011, 10; Ms Louise Broadbent, President, Gifted Support Network, *Transcript of evidence*, Melbourne, 12 September 2011, 10; Heike, *Transcript of evidence*, above n 422, 10.

⁴²⁶ Nathan, Year 9 student, Nossal High School, *Transcript of evidence*, Berwick, 26 July 2011, 4.

5.1.2 Foundation approaches to gifted education

This section outlines the approaches that both the literature and the evidence to this Inquiry highlight as the foundations for providing for gifted students: curriculum differentiation; acceleration; ability grouping; as well as extension and enrichment.

Curriculum differentiation

Curriculum differentiation refers to adapting the usual curriculum in order to meet an individual student's specific learning needs. It has been defined as 'the process by which curriculum objectives, teaching methods, assessment methods, resources and learning activities are planned to cater for the needs of individual pupils'.⁴²⁷

Research has highlighted curriculum differentiation as a key strategy for providing for gifted students. For example, Monash University gifted education experts, Dr Leonie Kronborg and Dr Margaret Plunkett, have found:

While a number of requirements appear to be vital to any successful programmatic response to meeting the needs of high ability students, curriculum differentiation inevitably emerges as perhaps the most important of all.⁴²⁸

Consistent with this, many Inquiry participants highlighted curriculum differentiation as one of the most successful ways of catering for gifted students.⁴²⁹ In particular, as most gifted students are educated within mainstream classrooms, curriculum differentiation was viewed as essential in meeting their needs. As teacher, Ms Carolyn Ferguson, stated, the key strength of curriculum differentiation is that 'students of all abilities can work within the same class and to their individual level'.⁴³⁰ Ms Pam Lyons, Coordinator of the Able Learners' Enrichment Program at La Trobe University, went so far as to suggest that if the curriculum is appropriately differentiated, there will be no need for specialised gifted programs.⁴³¹

Many Inquiry participants suggested that pre-testing is an important precursor to delivering a differentiated curriculum.⁴³² Pre-testing is where a student's knowledge level in a subject area is tested prior to commencing studying that area to ascertain how much

⁴²⁷ David George, *Gifted education: Identification and provision* (2nd edition, 2003) David Fulton Publishers Ltd, 76.

⁴²⁸ Leonie Kronborg and Margaret Plunkett, 'Curriculum differentiation: An innovative Australian secondary school program to extend academic talent' 17(1) *The Australasian Journal of Gifted Education* 19, 19. See also Wilma Vialle and Karen Rogers, *Gifted, talented or educationally disadvantaged?*, in Chris Forlin (ed) *Future directions for inclusive teacher education: An international perspective* (2012) Routledge, included in *Submission 28 Appendix C*, 9–10.

⁴²⁹ Humanist Society of Victoria, *Submission 4*, 2; Ms Moragh Tyler on behalf of Wonthaggi interest group for gifted and talented children, *Submission 64*, 3; Methodist Ladies' College, *Submission 84*, 6; Goldfields LLEN, *Submission 86*, 10; Australian Science Innovations, *Submission 102*, 8; Names withheld, *Submission 29*, 6; Mr Ian Burrage, General Manager, Education and Policy Research Division, Department of Education and Early Childhood Development (Victoria), *Transcript of evidence*, Melbourne, 25 July 2011, 3; Ms Bronwyn Stubbs, Principal, Distance Education Centre Victoria, *Transcript of evidence*, Melbourne, 10 October 2011, 5; Dr Karen Ward, *Transcript of evidence*, Bendigo, 20 September 2011, 2; Associate Professor John Munro, Exceptional Learning and Gifted Education, Graduate School of Education, The University of Melbourne, *Transcript of evidence*, Melbourne, 19 September 2011, 10.

⁴³⁰ Carolyn Ferguson, *Submission 55 Appendix A*, above n 416, 9.

⁴³¹ Ms Pam Lyons, Coordinator, Able Learners' Enrichment Program, La Trobe University, *Transcript of evidence*, Bendigo, 20 September 2011, 3–4.

⁴³² Ms Sonia Fullerton, *Submission 33*, 3; Ms Kathy Harrison, Compass Centre Coordinator, Methodist Ladies' College, *Transcript of evidence*, Melbourne, 19 September 2011, 4; Miss Natalie Sellick, Grade 4 Teacher, Kennington Primary School, *Transcript of evidence*, Bendigo, 20 September 2011, 2.

they already know about that subject. Teacher, Ms Michelle Desaulniers, explained how she uses pre-testing in her maths classes at Nossal High School:

We do individual tests and we give them a printout of exactly where they are at for that topic. If they have completed five of the six areas, then they do not need to do any work in that area, but they would need to finish any areas that they are weak in ... So every kid is working on an individual program ...⁴³³

A number of participants expressed disappointment that curriculum differentiation is not used more widely in Victorian schools.⁴³⁴ The lack of teacher ability to differentiate curricula was cited as the main reason for its current low level of use.⁴³⁵

The Committee heard that implementing curriculum differentiation may be challenging for teachers. The Victorian Independent Education Union, which represents staff in Catholic and independent schools, highlighted the huge range of abilities within most classrooms and contented:

Ensuring that every student is presented with the maximum challenging learning opportunity appropriate to their current level in classes of 25 to 30 students is a mammoth and ... impossible task.⁴³⁶

Curriculum differentiation can be very time-consuming for teachers. Mr Stuart Fankhauser, a teacher at Nossal High School, told the Committee:

Having the time to differentiate a course ... is one of the hardest and time-consuming things. When I go home, on the weekend or when I am working at 10.30 or 11.00 o'clock at night, that is what I am focused on; I am creating podcasts or different ways the students can approach understanding the concepts I am covering in class. That just takes up an enormous amount of time ...⁴³⁷

The Committee recognises that curriculum differentiation is an effective strategy to meet the needs of every gifted student. While this approach is onerous for teachers, the Committee considers that it essential that all Victorian teachers differentiate the curriculum in their classrooms.

The Committee is of the view that Victorian teachers need to be supported to implement curriculum differentiation in their classrooms. In particular, The Committee considers that Victorian teachers and schools should be provided with information, advice and support to help them to understand, devise and implement differentiated curricula (see recommendation 18). In addition, the Committee acknowledges that teachers may need further education and training in this area. This is discussed in chapter eight.

⁴³³ Ms Michelle Desaulniers, Teacher, Nossal High School, *Transcript of evidence*, Berwick, 26 July 2011, 4. See also Ms Barbara Black, *Transcript of evidence*, above n 416, 5–6.

⁴³⁴ Victorian Affiliated Network of Gifted Support Groups, *Submission 100*, 1; Dr Karen Ward, *Transcript of evidence*, above n 429, 2; Dr Leonie Kronborg, Coordinator of Gifted Education Assessment Clinic, Krongold Centre, Faculty of Education, Monash University, *Submission 104*, 8.

⁴³⁵ Ms Rhonda Collins, *Submission 110*, 2–3; Ms Jill Lawrence, Director, G.A.T.E.WAYS, *Transcript of evidence*, Melbourne, 25 July 2011, 5. See also Joyce Van Tassel-Baska and Tamra Stambaugh, 'Challenges and possibilities for serving gifted learners in the regular classroom' 44(3) *Theory into Practice* 211, 212–213; Wilma Vialle and Karen Rogers, *Gifted, talented or educationally disadvantaged?*, in Chris Forlin (ed) *Future directions for inclusive teacher education: An international perspective* (2012) Routledge, included in *Submission 28 Appendix C*, 10.

⁴³⁶ Victorian Independent Education Union, *Submission 22*, 3.

⁴³⁷ Mr Stuart Fankhauser, Teacher, Nossal High School, *Transcript of evidence*, Berwick, 26 July 2011, 3. See also Principals' Association of Victorian Catholic Secondary Schools (PAVCSS), *Submission 74*, 5.

Acceleration

Acceleration is an intervention that moves students through an educational program at a faster than usual rate or younger than typical age.⁴³⁸ Accelerated learning can take different forms as illustrated in figure eleven.

Accelerated learning practices can be categorised in two ways: acceleration that groups students with older peers such as year and subject level acceleration, and accelerated learning that takes place in a student’s usual classroom. Most of the evidence to this Inquiry focused on year and subject level acceleration.

Figure 11: Key types of acceleration

Early entry to primary school	Subject acceleration
A student enters primary school at a younger age than the prescribed age. This is discussed in chapter six.	A student moves up a grade (or more) in one subject but stays with their regular class for their other subjects.
Year level acceleration	Curriculum compacting
A student skips an entire grade (or more than one grade).	Pre-testing is used to ascertain a student’s current level of knowledge and understanding in a subject. Following this, the areas of curriculum where the student demonstrates mastery are replaced by curricula that suit the student’s learning needs.
Telescoping	Early entry to tertiary education
A student completes several years of the school’s curriculum in less time. The Select Entry Accelerated Learning (SEAL) Program is an example of telescoping (see chapter seven).	A student enters tertiary education at a younger age than their peers. This is explored in chapter seven.

A number of participants in the Inquiry emphatically supported the use of acceleration for gifted students. The Maroondah Gifted Children’s Parents’ Association, a voluntary parents’ organisation, informed the Committee, ‘Many of our members’ children have benefited enormously from subject or whole year acceleration.’⁴³⁹ Similarly, WiseOnes, a private provider of educational withdrawal programs for gifted students in schools, submitted:

Acceleration should be promoted in schools as it is the No1 best response to significant difference in potential in children. It has proven to be emotionally, socially and intellectually beneficial ...⁴⁴⁰

The academic literature in this area supports these views. For instance, the Templeton National Report on Acceleration, a comprehensive work on the use acceleration in the United States, identifies acceleration as ‘the most effective curriculum intervention for gifted children’.⁴⁴¹ The report further opines that ‘acceleration has long-term beneficial effects, both academically and socially’.

⁴³⁸ Nicholas Colangelo, Susan Assouline and Miraca Gross (eds) *A nation deceived: How schools hold back America’s brightest students, volume II* (2004) The Connie Belin & Jacqueline N. Blank International Center for Gifted Education and Talent Development, 5.

⁴³⁹ Maroondah Gifted Children’s Parents’ Association, *Submission 98*, 11.

⁴⁴⁰ WiseOnes Australia, *Submission 18*, 11.

⁴⁴¹ Nicholas Colangelo, Susan Assouline and Miraca Gross (eds) *A nation deceived: How schools hold back America’s brightest students, volume I* (2004) The Connie Belin & Jacqueline N. Blank International Center for Gifted Education and Talent Development, 2. See also John Hattie, *Visible learning: A synthesis of over 800 meta-analyses relating to achievement* (2009) Routledge, 100–101.

Many participants were frustrated that acceleration, particularly year and subject level acceleration, is not used more frequently in Victorian schools. Several parents told the Committee they had experienced difficulty obtaining acceleration for their children. For example, Phil, a participant in the Committee's Parents' Forum, stated:

when our eldest daughter was in Grade 4 we tried to get her accelerated to Grade 6. The Principal did not want to have anything to do with it.⁴⁴²

There are currently no clear guidelines in Victoria about when year level acceleration is an appropriate intervention, with decisions made by school principals on a discretionary basis. The 2001 report of the Senate Employment, Workplace Relations, Small Business and Education References Committee recommended the development of a consistent national policy on acceleration for gifted students.⁴⁴³ While that recommendation has never been implemented, New South Wales, Tasmania, Queensland and the Northern Territory have all developed guidelines on year level acceleration.⁴⁴⁴ In New South Wales there is also extensive support material to help schools implement acceleration in appropriate cases.⁴⁴⁵

There was strong support among Inquiry participants for the development of Victorian guidelines on year level acceleration to provide a clear basis for determining when this intervention is appropriate.⁴⁴⁶ Some participants also stressed that teachers need increased education about acceleration, particularly its benefits.⁴⁴⁷

One of the main arguments against year level acceleration as an intervention for gifted students is its perceived impact on a student's social and emotional development. A handful of participants reported negative experiences of their own or their child's acceleration. For example, parent, Ms Kim Steere, told the Committee that, while her son's skipping Year 3 had academic benefits, 'socially it was a disaster'.⁴⁴⁸ Particularly strong concerns about the impact of year level acceleration on a child's social and emotional development were voiced by educators. Mr Greg Lacey, Principal at Lyndhurst Primary School, expressed a view that appears to be common among teachers and school leaders:

I am not sure that acceleration is really what these kids are on about and what we should be doing with them—certainly not accelerating them into working with kids at a higher age level, because I think there are real social impacts from that that are undesirable.⁴⁴⁹

⁴⁴² Phil, parent, *Transcript of evidence*, Melbourne, 19 September 2011, 19. See also Names withheld, *Submission 45*, 2; Ms Larelle Parker, *Submission 11*, 1.

⁴⁴³ Senate Employment, Workplace Relations, Small Business and Education References Committee, *The education of gifted children* (2001) Commonwealth of Australia, 62.

⁴⁴⁴ Board of Studies (New South Wales), *Guidelines for accelerated progression* (2000) Board of Studies NSW; Department of Education (Tasmania), *Guidelines for accelerated progression for students who are gifted* (2002) DoE (TAS); Department of Education and Training (Northern Territory), *Gifted education guidelines to support the implementation of the Policy for the education of gifted students in the Northern Territory* (2006) DET (NT), 106–115; Department of Education, Training and the Arts (Queensland), *Framework for gifted education* (n.d.) DETA (QLD), 5. Available at <<http://education.qld.gov.au>> viewed 22 March 2012.

⁴⁴⁵ Department of Education and Training (New South Wales), *Policy and implementation strategies for the education of gifted and talented students. Support package: Acceleration* (2004) DET (NSW).

⁴⁴⁶ Dr Gail Byrne, *Submission 63*, above n 421, 6; Names withheld, *Submission 45*, 5; Gifted Support Network, *Submission 49*, 13; Parents Victoria, *Submission 82*, 5.

⁴⁴⁷ Ms Katherine Pomeroy and Mr Nigel Cunningham, *Submission 59*, 3; Phil, *Transcript of evidence*, above n 442, 19; Ms Caelli Greenbank, student, *Transcript of evidence*, Melbourne, 19 September 2011, 7; Name withheld, *Submission 90*, 4.

⁴⁴⁸ Ms Kim Steere, *Submission 61*, 1. See also Mr Greg Lacey, Principal, Lyndhurst Primary School, *Transcript of evidence*, Melbourne, 12 September 2011, 8; Ms Henriette Boonen-Hackett, *Submission 26*, 1.

⁴⁴⁹ Mr Greg Lacey, *Transcript of evidence*, above n 448, 8. See also Mr John Forsythe, Principal, Red Hill Consolidated School, *Transcript of evidence*, Melbourne, 12 September 2011, 9; Victorian Association of State

However, many participants in this Inquiry strongly refuted the suggestion that year level acceleration has negative social consequences for students. The Committee heard several examples of positive social outcomes from acceleration.⁴⁵⁰ Susan, a parent who participated in the Parents' Forum, told the Committee:

We believe that they [teachers] look at kids and say that they have social difficulties, they are not ready for acceleration; but acceleration will fix those social difficulties. The kids cannot get on with their age peers because they have nothing in common with them.⁴⁵¹

Research in this area is conflicting, although largely supportive of acceleration. Some research suggests that acceleration can have a positive impact on the social development of gifted and talented students,⁴⁵² however, the predominant view is that acceleration does not have any measurable positive or negative impact on the social and emotional development of gifted students.⁴⁵³

The Committee notes that acceleration, particularly subject and year level acceleration, enjoys strong support among the parents of gifted students. The Committee considers that educators' concerns about the impact of year level acceleration on a child's social and emotional development are not borne out by the literature in this area. Therefore, the Committee suggests that teachers and schools need to be provided with evidence-based information about this intervention, as well as support to implement it when warranted (see recommendation 18).

The Committee notes that year level acceleration may not be suitable for all students. Each student's case needs to be considered separately based on his or her individual circumstances and needs, although these decisions should not be ad hoc as is currently the case. The Committee considers that guidelines should be developed to provide a clear framework and process for year level acceleration.

Recommendation 19: Guidelines for year level acceleration

That the Victorian Government develop and promote guidelines for year level acceleration.

Ability grouping

Ability grouping can be broadly defined as the grouping of students together according to ability instead of age. There are many different forms of ability grouping:

- within-class grouping: students are grouped with like-ability peers in classroom of mixed ability students

Secondary Principals (VASSP), *Submission 27*, 3; Mrs Deborah Patterson, Principal, Mill Park Heights Primary School, *Transcript of evidence*, Melbourne, 12 September 2011, 9; Humanist Society of Victoria, *Submission 4*, 2.

⁴⁵⁰ Names withheld, *Submission 29*, 5; Names withheld, *Submission 45*, 2–3, 5; Name withheld, *Submission 90*, 4–5; Ms Colleen Carapetis, Past committee member, Gifted Support Network, *Transcript of evidence*, Melbourne, 12 September 2011, 2.

⁴⁵¹ Susan, parent, *Transcript of evidence*, Melbourne, 19 September 2011, 14. See also Ms Rhonda Collins, *Submission 110*, 3.

⁴⁵² Karen Rogers, 'Lessons learned about educating the gifted and talented: A synthesis of the research and educational practice' 51(4) *Gifted Child Quarterly* 382, 389.

⁴⁵³ Maureen Neihart, 'The socioaffective impact of acceleration and ability grouping: Recommendations for best practice' 51(4) *Gifted Child Quarterly* 330, 338.

- between-class grouping: students at a single year level are put into classrooms that are distinguished according to ability
- cross-grade grouping: students from different ages and grade levels are grouped together because they have similar abilities
- pull-out programs: students of like ability are grouped together for special instruction outside of the usual classroom.⁴⁵⁴

Evidence received by the Committee suggests that ability grouping is not widely used in Victorian schools.⁴⁵⁵ Many participants in the Inquiry called for an increase in the use of the grouping of students based on ability. For instance, Mr Phil Brown, Executive Officer of the Country Education Project, a community organisation that works to support and develop education in rural Victoria, argued 'we also need to start challenging this notion that age based learning is the way of the future'.⁴⁵⁶ Similarly, Ruby, a gifted eight-year-old who made a submission to the Inquiry, wrote, 'What I would like to happen is that I can learn at the level I am at. Not the level of other kids my age.'⁴⁵⁷

Research in this area has identified ability grouping as one of the most effective ways of educating gifted students.⁴⁵⁸ Participants in this Inquiry agreed, citing a range of benefits associated with this intervention. Ms Patricia Pace, Leading Teacher at Mill Park Heights Primary School, highlighted that ability grouping can encourage students with hidden gifts to show their abilities.⁴⁵⁹ Psychologist, Dr Glenison Alsop, asserted, 'When grouped with children of similar learning ability they share the experience of knowing and not knowing, of a more normalised acquisition of skills that are challenging and engaging.'⁴⁶⁰

Inquiry participants were especially supportive of vertical timetabling as a way of implementing ability grouping easily and efficiently in Victorian schools, particularly primary schools.⁴⁶¹ Vertical timetabling is where a subject is taught at the same time at every year level thereby allowing students to attend the class that matches their ability. Ms Lyons of La Trobe University told the Committee 'if you could bring in vertical timetabling at secondary schools and primary schools, you would then be catering for each student's individual needs'.⁴⁶² Psychologist, Dr Gail Byrne suggested that vertical timetabling avoids the stigma that sometimes attaches to pull-out programs as all students move to attend the appropriate class, not just the gifted students.⁴⁶³

⁴⁵⁴ Katherine Gavin and Jill Adelson, 'Mathematics, elementary' in Jonathan Plucker and Carolyn Callahan (eds) *Critical issues and practices in gifted education: What the research says* (2008) Prufrock Press, 383–4.

⁴⁵⁵ Belgrave Parent Support Group for Gifted and Talented Students, *Submission 60*, 3; Jocelyn, parent, *Transcript of evidence*, Melbourne, 19 September 2011, 11; Heike, *Transcript of evidence*, above n 422, 9; Henriette, parent, *Transcript of evidence*, Melbourne, 19 September 2011, 7.

⁴⁵⁶ Mr Phil Brown, *Transcript of evidence*, above n 416, 5. See also Mr Marcus L'Estrange, *Supplementary submission 19A*, 1.

⁴⁵⁷ Ms Ruby Hackett, *Submission 25*, 1.

⁴⁵⁸ Camilla Persson Benbow, 'Grouping intellectually advanced students for instruction' in Joyce Van Tassel-Baska (ed) *Excellence in educating gifted and talented learners* (3rd edition, 1998) Love Publishing Company, 269.

⁴⁵⁹ Ms Patricia Pace, Leading Teacher, Mill Park Heights Primary School, *Transcript of evidence*, Melbourne, 12 September 2011, 8.

⁴⁶⁰ Dr Glenison Alsop, Psychologist and Counsellor, *Submission 54*, 5. See also Mr Wayne and Mrs Meredith Burton, *Submission 17*, 6.

⁴⁶¹ Ms Susan Wight, *Submission 93*, 6; Gifted Support Network, *Submission 49*, 13; Mr Wayne and Mrs Meredith Burton, *Submission 17*, 6.

⁴⁶² Ms Pam Lyons, *Transcript of evidence*, above n 431, 4.

⁴⁶³ Dr Gail Byrne, Chair, CHIP Foundation, *Transcript of evidence*, Melbourne, 25 July 2011, 7.

The 2001 Senate Committee report recommended the development of a consistent national policy on ability grouping.⁴⁶⁴ However, this recommendation has not been implemented.

The Committee is of the opinion that ability grouping can be an effective way of educating gifted students. The Committee considers that there is no real reason, other than historic, to group students on age rather than ability. The Committee recognises that ability grouping can be relatively inexpensive and straightforward to implement because it requires only changes to existing class structures, rather than the introduction of new programs. The Committee suggests that the wider use of vertical timetabling could be useful in this regard.

The Committee has found that the major impediments to the wider implementation of ability grouping in Victorian schools are lack of understanding about the benefits of this approach and how to implement it. The Committee considers that teachers and schools should be provided with information and support to enable them to effectively introduce ability grouping (see recommendation 18).

Extension and enrichment

There is some confusion over the terms extension and enrichment, and they were often used interchangeably in evidence to this Inquiry.

For the purpose of this Inquiry, the Committee defines extension as any activity that extends classroom learning and deepens students' knowledge, understanding and skills.⁴⁶⁵ Examples of extended learning opportunities include external programs such as Tournament of Minds, the Maths and Science Olympiads.

The Committee defines enrichment as activities and learning opportunities that supplement the curriculum. Examples of enrichment activities are chess clubs, music lessons, expert incursions and visits to art galleries and theatres.

There was support among participants for the use of both enrichment and extension to provide additional learning opportunities for gifted students.⁴⁶⁶ However, there are some barriers to schools offering and students accessing extension and enrichment activities including cost and geographic location.⁴⁶⁷ In addition, Ms Trudi Jacobson, Assistant Principal of Kennington Primary School in Bendigo, told the Committee:

What might be really useful is ... a database linked to the DEECD website that says, 'These are all the things that are on offer'. ... I know there are metropolitan spell-a-thons and competitions that are on, but often we do not know about them.⁴⁶⁸

⁴⁶⁴ Senate Employment, Workplace Relations, Small Business and Education References Committee, above n 443, 67.

⁴⁶⁵ Department of Education and Training (New South Wales), *Policy and implementation strategies for the education of gifted and talented students. Support package: Curriculum differentiation* (2004) DET (NSW), 3.

⁴⁶⁶ Mr Paul Double, *Submission 15*, 2; PAVCSS, *Submission 74*, 3; Ms Moragh Tyler on behalf of Wonthaggi interest group for gifted and talented children, *Submission 64*, 3; Ms Carmel Meehan, President, Victorian Association for Gifted and Talented Children (VAGTC), *Transcript of evidence*, Melbourne, 25 July 2011, 3; Dr Leonie Kronborg, *Submission 104*, above n 434, 5; Mr Frank Sal, President, VASSP, *Transcript of evidence*, Melbourne, 25 July 2011, 3.

⁴⁶⁷ Mr Ross Huggard, Senior School Leader, Cranbourne Secondary College, *Submission 42*, 1; VASSP, *Submission 27*, 2; Tournament of Minds (Vic), *Submission 43*, 5.

⁴⁶⁸ Ms Trudi Jacobson, Assistant Principal, Kennington Primary School, *Transcript of evidence*, Bendigo, 20 September 2011, 6.

The Committee acknowledges that having access to a variety of enrichment and extension activities can be extremely beneficial for gifted students. Teachers and schools should have access to information about the value of these interventions, as well as information about available programs (see recommendation 18).

The Committee notes that cost and geographic location may be barriers to students or schools participating in external extension and enrichment activities. This issue is discussed further in section 5.3.1 below. In addition, increased links between schools and external organisations, which are considered in the next section, may also improve extension and enrichment offerings in schools.

Case study 5: '[M]y teacher at school never made me do anything I didn't already know'⁴⁶⁹

'My son is eight years old and has an IQ of around 140 (formally tested). He also has autism. He attended school for one year, grade one, at which time his testing was equivalent to about an 18 year old intellect. During his time at school he became emotionally labile and withdrawn. A large part contributing to this was that even though he has high intelligence, he has all the problems of other children with autism. He finds it extremely hard to concentrate in a classroom setting, his organisational skills are very immature and his social abilities with peer aged children are also immature. Despite all these problems my son is unable to have an aide because he is 'too intelligent'. We have now been home schooling him for around eighteen months. He is a much happier boy, and is learning at a much faster rate than when at school. This year he has been attending a small state school one day a week. The feedback is that he doesn't engage and the only time he does any work is if either the teacher or an aide assigned to another child is assisting him ...

He was reading at aged 15 level when he went to school and could understand year 7 maths concepts. He was able to skip prep because he turned 6 in February, but even most of grade one was totally boring. One of the things I had to overcome when he started schooling at home was the complaints 'my teacher at school never made me do anything I didn't already know'. His teacher was a very good one with over 20 years experience, but because his organisational skills were limited, it was very hard to extend him in the classroom setting. Six years of a child never doing anything they didn't already know, is not going to help them become people of excellence in their studies.'

5.1.3 New strategies for educating gifted and talented students

Many participants in the Inquiry offered ideas for new approaches to educating gifted students. While some of these strategies may already being used to a limited degree in some schools, the Committee heard that there is scope for these approaches to play a much greater role in educating gifted students in Victoria.

⁴⁶⁹ Ms Pieta McLean, *Submission 44*, 1–2.

Utilising technology

A significant number of participants in this Inquiry felt that technology has great and largely untapped potential to contribute to gifted education in Victoria. The focus in this section is on the use of technology to enhance the delivery of educational programs to gifted students. The Committee acknowledges that technology may be usefully applied for other relevant purposes and these are considered elsewhere in this report, namely:

- to deliver teacher professional development (see chapter eight)
- to support and link teachers and schools (see chapter nine)
- to support and link gifted students (see chapter ten)
- to support and link the parents and carers of gifted students (see chapter ten).

What are the benefits of using technology to cater for gifted students?

Participants in this Inquiry viewed technology as having a number of benefits for delivering educational experiences to gifted students.

First, technology allows for students' learning to be personalised, enabling them to explore topics in greater depth and/or move faster in areas where they need challenge, while still allowing them to be supported in areas where they are not so strong.⁴⁷⁰ Ms Kathy Harrison, the Coordinator of the Compass Centre at independent school, Methodist Ladies' College (MLC), described how technology can be used to extend students:

Technology is really important for gifted kids because it challenges and stretches them beyond the limits. If you do not give them a direct answer straightaway and make them struggle with something for a while, it helps them to get into things in greater depth.⁴⁷¹

Second, technology offers students the opportunity to extend their learning by linking with expert teachers in other schools, as well as experts outside the school system. Ms Bronwyn Stubbs, the Principal of the Distance Education Centre Victoria, which provides distance education to students throughout Victoria, told the Committee that it is important to harness teacher ability, particularly in rural areas where it may be difficult to attract specialist teachers:

We need teachers who can provide that diversity. What the online environment enables you to do is to work as a team of teachers ... You can pool the capacities of teachers by using the online environment, and make sure you have a broader base of provision for students within the school.⁴⁷²

Ms Kim Kirkpatrick, a Grade 5 teacher at Kennington Primary School in Bendigo, provided an example of technology being used to link with an external expert to enhance students' learning experiences:

⁴⁷⁰ DEECD, *Submission 58*, 10; VASSP, *Submission 27*, 3; Ms Meredith Fetting, Assistant Principal, Bendigo Senior Secondary College, *Transcript of evidence*, Bendigo, 20 September 2011, 6–7; Ms Bronwyn Stubbs, *Transcript of evidence*, above n 429, 2; Dr John Munro, *Submission 96*, above n 418, 13–14.

⁴⁷¹ Ms Kathy Harrison, *Transcript of evidence*, above n 432, 1.

⁴⁷² Ms Bronwyn Stubbs, *Transcript of evidence*, above n 429, 5. See also Mr Dale Pearce, Principal, Bendigo Senior Secondary College, *Transcript of evidence*, Bendigo, 20 September 2011, 6.

We are doing weather, so some students from La Trobe Uni are coming in to work with the kids in science. They have access to a meteorologist ... he will be on Skype. That will be really good.⁴⁷³

Participants also suggested that technology could be used to link gifted students with mentors in their specific field of interest.⁴⁷⁴ Mentoring is discussed further below.

Third, the Committee heard that technology can help gifted students overcome social issues or pressures. As noted in chapter three, despite their abilities, many gifted students have low self-esteem. Several participants commented that the online environment provides a safe platform for students who may lack the confidence to actively contribute in the normal classroom. Ms Stubbs commented:

One of the things I found with the online environment is that students are a lot more confident at all different levels within there because if we have a classroom discussion we have to feel confident enough and articulate enough to put up our hands and then make our comment. Not every child is in that emotional space at an appropriate time and also it is like those occasions when somebody says something and you give a response and then as you walk away you wish you had said something different ... the online environment enables you to put your idea down, to edit until you are confident with it and then you submit it.⁴⁷⁵

It is well established that many gifted students mask their abilities in order to fit in at school (see chapters three and four). The Committee was told that such students may feel more comfortable in an online learning environment. The Distance Education Centre Victoria submitted:

Being 'smart' can be seen as socially 'uncool' by peers in many schools. The use of the online environment can free students from the boundary of these social constraints.⁴⁷⁶

Finally, many participants emphasised that technology provides an avenue for delivering gifted education programs, including all the benefits highlighted above, to all Victorian students regardless of where they live.⁴⁷⁷ At present, a student's geographic location significantly affects his or her access to gifted education opportunities as will be considered in detail in section 5.3.1.

How is technology currently being used to cater for gifted students?

Some Victorian schools are already utilising technology to enhance the learning experiences of their gifted and high-achieving students. Three of the many examples the Committee heard about are outlined in this section.

⁴⁷³ Ms Kim Kirkpatrick, Grade 5 Teacher, Kennington Primary School, *Transcript of evidence*, Bendigo, 20 September 2011, 8–9. See also VASSP, *Submission 27*, 4; Catholic Education Office Melbourne, *Submission 87*, 9; Dr John Munro, *Submission 96*, above n 418, 7; Dr Karen Ward, *Transcript of evidence*, above n 429, 4; Mr Phil Brown, *Transcript of evidence*, above n 416, 3; DEECD, *Submission 58*, 10.

⁴⁷⁴ Faculty of Education, Australian Catholic University, *Submission 13*, 12; Dr Gail Byrne, *Transcript of evidence*, above n 463, 8; Ms Meredith Fettling, *Transcript of evidence*, above n 470, 7; Ms Claire McInerney, Principal, Plenty Parklands Primary School, *Transcript of evidence*, Melbourne, 12 September 2011, 16.

⁴⁷⁵ Ms Bronwyn Stubbs, *Transcript of evidence*, above n 429, 5.

⁴⁷⁶ Distance Education Centre Victoria, *Submission 24*, 2.

⁴⁷⁷ Mr Wayne and Mrs Meredith Burton, *Submission 17*, 6; Faculty of Education, Australian Catholic University, *Submission 13*, 11; Country Education Project, *Submission 79*, 8; Mr Mark Smith, Committee member, VAGTC, *Transcript of evidence*, Melbourne, 25 July 2011, 8; Dr Michael Faulkner, Lecturer, School of Education, La Trobe University, *Transcript of evidence*, Bendigo, 20 September 2011, 4; Ms Moragh Tyler, Wonthaggi interest group for gifted and talented children, *Transcript of evidence*, Melbourne, 19 September 2011, 3; Australian Council of State School Organisations, *Submission 32*, 4.

Independent school, MLC, currently uses information technology extensively to cater for its gifted students. The school's students have access to wikis, discussion forums and email with teachers and mentors. Ms Harrison told the Committee that such an approach contributes to the depth of students' learning:

They can also have shared learning spaces, where they will engage with a particular issue and will all be able to discuss it, contribute to ideas and modify one another's understandings as they go. They are very effective for gifted learners, because they can think quite deeply and put up their shared understandings there.⁴⁷⁸

The Distance Education Centre Victoria is a leader in the innovative use of technology for educational purposes. For instance, the school used a secure space within the virtual world Second Life to provide a platform for students to explore issues around street art. The program included a live link up between students in three states and a Queensland street artist. Ms Stubbs, the school's Principal, commented, 'the feedback from the students is that there is a level of engagement that they have not had in any of the other programs'.⁴⁷⁹

Another example of a successful online program run by the Distance Education Centre Victoria is the school's philosophy program. Ms Stubbs told the Committee:

The structure that we have around the online philosophy is perhaps the best demonstration of what the online environment can do. It has big picture tasks that students engage with, and when they submit work, they do not actually submit it to the teacher, they submit it for other students to discuss.⁴⁸⁰

Box Hill High School, a SEAL school, also utilises technology to provide for its high-achieving students. Tina, a Year 9 student, told the Committee:

We have really good blogs at our school, especially the biology blog. When exam time comes we are living on the blog. All your questions are posted ... the blog is like a phone. We say something and he [the teacher] replies.⁴⁸¹

The above examples show that technology is currently being used by some Victorian schools to provide enriching educational experience for gifted students. However, the current use of technology is very much on a school-by-school basis. In contrast, several other Australian states have implemented central programs that utilise technology to provide extended learning experiences to gifted students across a broad geographic area. Some of the key interstate initiatives are described in figure twelve.

⁴⁷⁸ Ms Kathy Harrison, *Transcript of evidence*, above n 432, 4. See also Methodist Ladies' College, *Submission 84*, 3.

⁴⁷⁹ Ms Bronwyn Stubbs, *Transcript of evidence*, above n 429, 6.

⁴⁸⁰ *ibid.*, 5.

⁴⁸¹ Tina, Year 9 student, Box Hill High School, *Transcript of evidence*, Box Hill, 29 August 2011, 8. See also Mr Martin Jellinek, Science Teacher, specialising in SEAL classes, Box Hill High School, *Transcript of evidence*, Box Hill, 29 August 2011, 7.

Figure 12: Key Australian online gifted education programs

xsel (New South Wales)⁴⁸²	Differentiated Science and Technology programs (Queensland)⁴⁸³
<p>xsel is a virtual selective entry school high school for Year 7 to 10 students in western New South Wales, which commenced operation in 2010. The school uses technology to provide learning opportunities for students in English, maths and science. Students participate in live online lessons in these subjects and also pursue independent learning using online materials. Students attend their local secondary school and attend classes in all other subjects in the usual classes at that school. Admission to the program is through the central test used for admission to all selective entry schools in New South Wales.</p>	<p>The Brisbane School of Distance Education, which provides distance education to students resident in Queensland, runs ten week extension booster programs in science and technology. Students enrolled in distance education or mainstream schools are selected to participate by their school leaders. The programs are currently offered for students in Years 4 to 9 and involve a weekly web-conference lesson, collaborative learning, as well as an optional face-to-face component in some subjects.</p>
Online Entry Selective Academic Program (Western Australia)⁴⁸⁴	PEAC (Western Australia)⁴⁸⁵
<p>The Online Entry Selective Academic Program provides for gifted students in Years 8 to 10 living in rural and regional areas. Two courses are offered: English and society & environment (humanities); and maths and science. Students usually participate in one of these courses and take their other core subjects at school. Students participate in online classes, as well as working on learning activities and research tasks. Admission to the program is through a selective entrance test.</p>	<p>The Primary Extension and Challenge Program (PEAC) is a supplementary withdrawal program for gifted students in Years 5 to 7. While the program is primarily delivered face-to-face, it is offered in an online format for students who cannot physically access one of the centres. Admission to PEAC is predominantly by testing, although teachers may also nominate students who miss the test. The PEAC program is discussed in further detail in chapter six.</p>
Tasmanian eSchool (Tasmania)⁴⁸⁶	
<p>The Tasmanian eSchool, which provides distance education in that state, operates a Centre for Extended Learning Opportunities, which provides extended learning activities for highly able or gifted students from kindergarten to Year 10. Students are selected by their school to participate and may access only one program at a time. Programs are offered across a range of areas including arts, maths and technology.</p>	

The Committee did come across one example of technology being used to deliver a cross-school extension program in Victoria. The eKids Rural Express Program, run by the Country Education Project in 2007 and 2008, was an online program to provide learning opportunities for rural students in upper primary school, predominantly around literacy and numeracy.⁴⁸⁷ Mr Brown of the Country Education Project told the Committee

⁴⁸² Department of Education and Communities (New South Wales), *Submission 99*, 3; Department of Education and Communities (New South Wales), *Virtual selective class provision*, <http://www.schools.nsw.edu.au/learning/k-6assessments/shsplacement/ss_virtual.php> viewed 14 February 2012; Western NSW Region Virtual Selective High School xsel, *Our school*, <<http://www.xsel.schools.nsw.edu.au/our-school>> viewed 21 March 2012.

⁴⁸³ Email from Executive Principal, Brisbane School of Distance Education, to Executive Officer, Victorian Parliament Education and Training Committee, 26 March 2011.

⁴⁸⁴ Letter from Minister for Education (Western Australia), to Chair, Victorian Parliament Education and Training Committee, 10 November 2011.

⁴⁸⁵ *ibid.*

⁴⁸⁶ Department of Education (Tasmania), *Submission 10*, 2; Tasmanian eSchool, *CELO online programs (Primary and secondary)*, <<http://education.tas.edu.au/tasmanianeschool/sitepages/celo.aspx>> viewed 21 March 2012.

⁴⁸⁷ Country Education Project, *Submission 79*, 8.

that the program was based on a blended learning model incorporating face-to-face contact, online extension and social networking.⁴⁸⁸

An evaluation of the program found:

- a web-based learning environment for primary school students in rural areas was greatly needed and there was high demand for the program
- participating students accessed the program regularly and students reported that they found the extra work in the program interesting
- the program enabled parents and students to network with other gifted students and their parents in rural areas.⁴⁸⁹

Despite its success, the program was discontinued due to funding constraints.⁴⁹⁰

How should technology be used to cater for gifted students?

Participants in this Inquiry made a number of specific suggestions about how technology should be used to provide for gifted students in Victoria.

First, the Committee heard that online extension programs alone are not enough to meet the needs of gifted students. Mr Brown emphasised the importance of a blended approach as was used in the eKids Rural Express Project:

there is some face-to-face contact, there is online contact and there is a social networking component to it. With those three, research is now telling us across the globe that that has the most powerful outcome for young people.⁴⁹¹

Second, some participants emphasised that the Ultranet, the online learning system provided by DEECD, which is accessible to students, teachers and parents, should be utilised as the basis for delivering online gifted education programs. For example, Mr Ian Burrage, General Manager of the Education and Policy Research Division at DEECD, told the Committee:

the nature of the Ultranet provides a virtual learning environment which could very effectively connect up an entire network of teachers and kids to get particular forms of instruction connected to the Victorian curriculum and future Australian curriculum ... For areas, particularly rural areas, that do not have immediate access to SEAL or other programs you could quite effectively create a network through which people were experiencing targeted programs across the state ... with a stimulus from external providers.⁴⁹²

Other participants suggested that Distance Education Centre Victoria would be well placed to implement any special online program for gifted students.⁴⁹³

Finally, some participants, while generally positive about the potential of technology to meet the educational needs of gifted students, did flag several possible issues with its

⁴⁸⁸ Mr Phil Brown, *Transcript of evidence*, above n 416, 2–3.

⁴⁸⁹ Country Education Project, *eKids rural express: Evaluation of pilot project—September 2007*, supplementary evidence received 22 June 2011, 9–10.

⁴⁹⁰ Mr Phil Brown, *Transcript of evidence*, above n 416, 3.

⁴⁹¹ *ibid.* See also VASSP, 'Position paper: Specialist schools', included in *Submission 27 Appendix A*, 2.

⁴⁹² Mr Ian Burrage, *Transcript of evidence*, above n 429, 12. See also Australian Education Union (Victorian Branch), *Submission 106*, 2; DEECD, *Submission 58*, 10; Ms Lynette Sudholz, *Submission 107*, 1; Ms Henriette Boonen-Hackett, *Supplementary submission 26B*, 4.

⁴⁹³ Dr John Munro, *Submission 96*, above n 418, 14; Ms Bronwyn Stubbs, *Transcript of evidence*, above n 429, 6.

use. Psychologist Dr Glenison Alsop cautioned that some gifted young people may retreat into the virtual world as an escape from real life.⁴⁹⁴ Two participants were concerned about the need to ensure cyber safety.⁴⁹⁵ Last, several participants highlighted that technology is only helpful if schools have appropriate access to the internet.⁴⁹⁶

Utilising technology to provide for gifted students—The Committee’s view

The Committee believes that technology offers a number of potential advantages in providing gifted education programs, including allowing for personalised learning, overcoming geographic isolation and facilitating greater connection with both peers and experts. Importantly, technology-based learning opportunities allow gifted students to pursue extension activities while remaining in their local schools.

While some individual schools are using technology to provide enriching learning experiences for their gifted students, the Committee considers that much more needs to be done to harness the opportunities provided by technology. Victoria lags behind many other Australian states in this regard.

The Committee believes the Victorian Government should establish a virtual school to provide a range of extension and learning opportunities for gifted students in all year levels. In developing a model for the online provision of gifted education, the Victorian Government should closely examine the models already operating in Australia, as well as internationally.

Recommendation 20: Virtual school for gifted students

That the Victorian Government utilise technology to establish a virtual school to provide extended learning opportunities for gifted students throughout the state.

Links between schools

Several participants in this Inquiry emphasised that there is considerable potential for schools to work together to cater for their gifted students. Ms Moragh Tyler, who represented an interest group for parents and educators based in Wonthaggi, told the Committee that networks were especially important for schools in rural areas:

It is too big a problem for one school to deal with. If we all joined collaboratively, I think we could supply amazing resources for children in the area, but it is very hard to do it in a one-school setting.⁴⁹⁷

This linking of schools for the purpose of sharing information and resources is commonly called clustering. Mr Brown told the Committee that there were two levels of clustering. The first one is clustering on a geographic basis, where schools in an area join to share resources. The second is clustering around a particular issue, such as gifted education,

⁴⁹⁴ Dr Glenison Alsop, Committee member, CHIP Foundation, *Transcript of evidence*, Melbourne, 25 July 2011, 8. See also Dr Karen Ward, *Transcript of evidence*, above n 429, 4.

⁴⁹⁵ Dr Gail Byrne, *Transcript of evidence*, above n 463, 8; Ms Claire McInerney, *Transcript of evidence*, above n 474, 16.

⁴⁹⁶ Ms Claire McInerney, *Transcript of evidence*, above n 474, 3; Mr John Geary, Director of Teaching and Learning, Catholic College Bendigo, *Transcript of evidence*, Bendigo, 20 September 2011, 4–5; Mr Phil Brown, *Transcript of evidence*, above n 416, 4; Lucy Edwards, *Report on gifted and talented* (2012) Masters thesis, unpublished, 18.

⁴⁹⁷ Ms Moragh Tyler, *Transcript of evidence*, above n 477, 3.

where schools that are not necessarily in the same region join to share knowledge and experience on that issue.⁴⁹⁸

The Committee heard that a cluster approach is currently being utilised by schools in the Boroondara area of Melbourne. The Boroondara Gifted Network involves 15 secondary schools from across all three school sectors. Ms Harrison of MLC, a school that is involved in the Network, told the Committee:

I particularly value, in our local area, the Boroondara Network, that we link very closely with other schools and that we each provide different workshops that we share across the schools.⁴⁹⁹

Examples of the workshops provided to students in participating schools in 2011 are:

- a moot session of the United Nations Security Council
- a British parliamentary training day
- a computer simulation day to build the world's best airline.⁵⁰⁰

Clustering was viewed very positively in the evidence. In particular, some participants suggested this was because it can provide access to facilities that schools might not otherwise have. For example, Mr Paul Double, a teacher who is on the committee of the Victorian Association for Gifted and Talented Children, a voluntary organisation that supports educators and parents in relation to gifted students, told the Committee that the workshops allow participating schools to access state-of-the-art facilities at other schools and multiplies the available educational offerings for students:

If each of these schools—one, two, three, four, five, six schools—offers one half-day or whole-day unit, there is economy of effort. If one school organises one, you get the benefit of six other options at least for your group ...⁵⁰¹

Mr Double expressed the view that the Boroondara Gifted Network is an effective model that could be used more widely throughout the state.⁵⁰²

Clusters were viewed as a particularly important vehicle for sharing information, resources and support in rural and regional areas. Mr Brown told the Committee, 'I think clustering is the way to go in terms of rural education, full stop.'⁵⁰³

The Boroondara Gifted Network also provides a platform for teachers to share professional practice. That aspect of links between schools is considered in chapter nine.

The Committee agrees that the use of school clusters has significant potential to enhance provision for gifted students, especially in rural and regional areas. In particular, a cluster approach ensures efficiency in providing gifted education, making

⁴⁹⁸ Mr Phil Brown, *Transcript of evidence*, above n 416, 6.

⁴⁹⁹ Ms Kathy Harrison, *Transcript of evidence*, above n 432, 2.

⁵⁰⁰ Email from Cluster Convenor, Camberwell Grammar School, to Executive Officer, Victorian Parliament Education and Training Committee, 11 August 2011.

⁵⁰¹ Mr Paul Double, Committee member, VAGTC, *Transcript of evidence*, Melbourne, 25 July 2011, 5. See also Ms Kathy Harrison, *Transcript of evidence*, above n 432, 5; Dr Danuta Chessor, Lecturer, School of Psychology, University of Western Sydney, *Submission 76*, 3; Parents Victoria, *Submission 82*, 5.

⁵⁰² Mr Paul Double, *Transcript of evidence*, above n 501, 5.

⁵⁰³ Mr Phil Brown, *Transcript of evidence*, above n 416, 6.

the best use of available resources and facilities and providing students with access to learning opportunities they may not otherwise have.

The Committee notes that the Minister for Education has recently signalled a commitment to increased resource sharing by Victorian schools.⁵⁰⁴ However, at the time this report was written, details of this resource sharing proposal were not yet available. In relation to the provision of gifted education, the Committee considers that the Victorian Government should play an active role in facilitating links between schools across all three school sectors. In addition, a cluster approach to gifted education should be embedded in both the state and school-level gifted education policies recommended in chapter three.

Recommendation 21: Policy support for links between schools

That the Victorian Government, through the Victorian policy and the model school policy on the education of gifted students, emphasise the importance of schools forming links with other schools to enhance provision for gifted students.

Recommendation 22: Supporting schools to establish links

That the Victorian Government encourage and support schools to establish links with other schools to enhance provision for gifted students.

Opportunities to collaborate with community, business and industry partners

The terms of reference for this Inquiry required the Committee to specifically consider opportunities for improved educational offerings for gifted and talented students through collaboration with community, business and industry.

Mentoring

Mentoring was the major vehicle for cross-sectorial collaboration identified by participants in this Inquiry. The evidence suggests that there are a range of benefits associated with the use of mentoring for gifted students.

First, the Committee heard mentoring can provide academic benefits for students. For example, the Australian Catholic University suggested that mentoring relationships are 'very successful in supporting gifted students' learning and keeping them motivated and engaged with learning'.⁵⁰⁵ Senior students at Rosebud Secondary College, a SEAL school, are given the opportunity to be mentored by subject teachers. The College informed the Committee that 'mentored students achieve higher ATAR [Australian Tertiary Admission Rank] scores than those who are not'.⁵⁰⁶

Second, mentoring was seen as providing students with role models and supportive allies. Dr John Munro, Associate Professor Exceptional Learning and Gifted Education at Melbourne University's Graduate School of Education, told the Committee that a mentor shows a gifted student 'that someone else has gone down this path, that they

⁵⁰⁴ Jane Lee, 'Radical sharing plan for schools', *The Age*, 5 May 2012, 1.

⁵⁰⁵ Faculty of Education, Australian Catholic University, *Submission 13*, 12–13. See also VAGTC, *Submission 34*, 10.

⁵⁰⁶ Rosebud Secondary College, *Submission 50*, 6.

have survived and survived well'.⁵⁰⁷ Similarly, Mr Mark Smith, a member of the Victorian Association for Gifted and Talented Children's committee stated that mentoring 'enables the children to have someone who understands them, who can set goals for them and help them to understand themselves'.⁵⁰⁸

Participants suggested that there are a range of people who would be suitable mentors for gifted students including academics, researchers, doctors, scientists, artists, teachers, university students, older school students and retired professionals.⁵⁰⁹ Ms Tyler contended that schools need to be more proactive in initiating mentoring arrangements:

There are a huge number of retired or semiretired people with a lot of expertise who are willing to share it, but they are not invited into the schools, and schools do not set up things for them ...⁵¹⁰

The Victorian Association for Gifted and Talented Children argued that all primary and secondary schools should be resourced to provide mentoring programs.⁵¹¹

Many participants also flagged the potential for technology to be used to connect gifted students with appropriate mentors.⁵¹² This approach was viewed as particularly useful for students in rural and regional areas.

The Committee considers there is great potential to provide extended learning opportunities, as well as encouragement and support, to gifted students through mentoring. The evidence suggests that there are many people from a broad range of spheres who would be enthusiastic about mentoring gifted school students. This valuable resource is currently largely untapped. Therefore, the Committee recommends that a mentoring program should be established for gifted students in Victoria. The program should include online opportunities to make it accessible to all gifted students and mentors, wherever they are located.

Recommendation 23: Mentoring program for gifted students

That the Victorian Government, in consultation with students, parents, schools, teachers, community, business and industry, establish a mentoring program for gifted students that includes opportunities for virtual mentoring.

Other opportunities for cross-sector collaboration

Research has identified that collaboration between schools and community, business and industry partners can have a range of advantages, including social, intellectual, financial and psychological benefits.⁵¹³ Most participants in this Inquiry supported

⁵⁰⁷ Associate Professor John Munro, *Transcript of evidence*, above n 429, 12.

⁵⁰⁸ Mr Mark Smith, *Transcript of evidence*, above n 477, 13.

⁵⁰⁹ Dr Danuta Chessor, *Submission 76*, above n 501, 3; Mr Wayne and Mrs Meredith Burton, *Submission 17*, 7; Gifted Resources, *Submission 113*, 12; Ms Henriette Boonen-Hackett, *Submission 26*, 3; Ms Sonia Fullerton, *Submission 33*, 3; Belgrave Parent Support Group for Gifted and Talented Students, *Submission 60*, 4; Dr John Munro, *Submission 96*, above n 418, 17; Mrs Deborah DeBuhr, *Submission 46*, 4–5; Tournament of Minds (Vic), *Submission 43*, 11; Dr Michael Faulkner, *Transcript of evidence*, above n 477, 6; Ms Pat Slattery, Director, WiseOnes Australia, *Transcript of evidence*, Melbourne, 25 July 2011, 6.

⁵¹⁰ Ms Moragh Tyler, *Transcript of evidence*, above n 477, 3.

⁵¹¹ VAGTC, *Submission 34*, 17–18.

⁵¹² Faculty of Education, Australian Catholic University, *Submission 13*, 12–13; *ibid.*, 18; Mr Chris Earl, *Submission 23*, 6–7.

⁵¹³ Michele Lonsdale and Michelle Anderson, *Preparing 21st century learners: The case for school-community collaborations* (2012) ACER Occasional Essays—March 2012, 2. Available at

increased collaboration with community, business and industry partners for the purposes of providing for gifted students. For example, the Catholic Education Office, Diocese of Sale submitted:

the development of community partnerships to support these children is also essential. Wider community involvement would provide the range of activities and opportunities required that individual schools could not muster.⁵¹⁴

However, despite widespread general support for increased collaboration, apart from mentoring, there were very few concrete suggestions for how this could be achieved.

A survey of schools conducted on behalf of DEECD found that very few schools had partnered with external groups organisations to provide learning opportunities for gifted students.⁵¹⁵ However, two parents participating in the Committee's Parents' Forum did provide examples of successful collaborations at their children's schools. Maria told the Committee:

The BASF company did some chemistry labs for children, where they got together and did chemistry experiments ... For most of the children who were doing it, it was just a little craft thing, but our son wanted to know the basis behind it and what was happening with the chemical reaction. I think that is one instance where companies that do have a few things in place could be expanded a little bit into a gifted area as well.⁵¹⁶

Similarly, Felicity stated:

At my primary school we have a program set up that deals with Monash University engineering. They have a number of engineering students come in and run programs with groups of gifted kids. They have done robotics earlier this year, and they have just started doing the solar car challenge. The kids in the school benefit because they get access to programs that they possibly would not have elsewhere—I know my daughter absolutely loves it because it is so stimulating—but it is really good for the engineering students as well, because they then have to take their knowledge and teach someone; they have to apply it in the real world. It is a really beneficial relationship in both directions.⁵¹⁷

Opportunities for increased collaboration that were identified by Inquiry participants are:

- partnerships with tertiary institutions⁵¹⁸
- use of external facilities⁵¹⁹

<<http://www.acer.edu.au/media/preparing-21st-century-learners-the-case-for-school-community-collaboration/>> viewed 3 April 2012.

⁵¹⁴ Catholic Education Office, Diocese of Sale, *Submission 66*, 3. See also Mr Ian Burrage, *Transcript of evidence*, above n 429, 13–14; Mr Frank Sal, *Transcript of evidence*, above n 466, 9–10.

⁵¹⁵ Jane Stewart et al, *Research report: Current provision and opportunities for further central coordination of support for schools to address the educational needs of gifted and talented students in Victoria*, report for DEECD, unpublished, supplementary evidence received 6 September 2011, 17–18.

⁵¹⁶ Maria, parent, *Transcript of evidence*, Melbourne, 19 September 2011, 21.

⁵¹⁷ Felicity, parent, *Transcript of evidence*, Melbourne, 19 September 2011, 21.

⁵¹⁸ VASSP, *Submission 27*, 5; Mr Frank Sal, *Transcript of evidence*, above n 466, 9; Mr Chris Earl, *Submission 23*, 7; Australian College of Educators (Victorian Branch), *Submission 21*, 5; Ms Henriette Boonen-Hackett, *Supplementary submission 26B*, 4; Dr Michael Faulkner, *Transcript of evidence*, above n 477, 5.

⁵¹⁹ Box Hill High School, *Submission 81*, 12.

- expert incursions into schools⁵²⁰
- work experience⁵²¹
- links with libraries, museums, theatres and galleries.⁵²²

However, the Committee was not provided with details about how these collaborations could be implemented in practice.

A small number of participants also identified barriers to increased cross-sector collaboration. These included the amount of organisational effort that such programs entail for schools⁵²³ and administrative barriers such as insurance and security issues.⁵²⁴ Mr Burrage of DEECD acknowledged that the Department could play a greater role in facilitating links between schools and community, business and industry:

I think we could invite potential external partners in to work on smart programs that do not present a huge overhead for the partners and could be provided in practical terms or facilitated in practical terms by the Department.⁵²⁵

The Committee believes that increased partnerships with community, business and industry could greatly enhance educational opportunities for Victoria's gifted students. The Committee has not received sufficient evidence to make detailed recommendations in this regard and suggests that the Victorian Government do further work in this area. In particular, the Committee considers that DEECD should play a brokering role in terms of bringing schools and potential external partners together.

Recommendation 24: Increased collaboration with community, business and industry

That the Victorian Government facilitate links between schools and community, business and industry to provide opportunities for gifted students.

The role of music and languages other than English

A small number of participants emphasised the benefits that gifted students glean from studying music and languages other than English.

The Modern Language Teachers' Association of Victoria drew the Committee's attention to research showing that language learning can play a vital role in gifted students' cognitive development.⁵²⁶ This view was supported by some parents participating in this Inquiry. The parents of a gifted child detailed how attending a primary school with a language immersion program has provided a challenge that is a 'blessing' for their son.

⁵²⁰ Gifted Support Network, *Submission 49*, 20.

⁵²¹ *ibid.*; VASSP, *Submission 27*, 5.

⁵²² Ms Henriette Boonen-Hackett, *Supplementary submission 26B*, 4.

⁵²³ Felicity, *Transcript of evidence*, above n 517, 21. See also Michele Lonsdale and Michelle Anderson, above n 513, 3.

⁵²⁴ Box Hill High School, *Submission 81*, 12.

⁵²⁵ Mr Ian Burrage, *Transcript of evidence*, above n 429, 13.

⁵²⁶ Modern Language Teachers' Association of Victoria, *Submission 72*, 1. See also Walter Bartz, 'The role of foreign language education for the gifted and talented student: A position paper' 15(5) *Foreign Language Annals* 329, 332.

They argued language programs provide ‘fantastic opportunities for extension work’ and should be available at more schools.⁵²⁷

Musician, Mr Chris Earl, cited research linking music study to increased academic achievement, and called for music to be taught more extensively in Victorian schools, with special programs for gifted students.⁵²⁸ Ms Carolyn Priest, Secretary of the Gifted Support Network, told the Committee that she advises other parents to enrol their children in music or language study to provide additional stimulation.⁵²⁹

While the Committee received limited evidence about the role of music and languages other than English in the education of gifted students, the Committee agrees they have the potential to challenge and stimulate gifted students, both inside and outside of school. The Committee notes that music and language programs are not specifically aimed at gifted students, but may be of broader benefit for all students.

Case study 6: ‘I find school boring’⁵³⁰

‘I find school boring because I already know most things that are meant to be taught to me. I find that hard because most other people are at the expected level and we are always doing things that I have done in my earlier years at school. I want to learn, but I hardly ever get to ...

In some subjects, school is fun. But in others it is not very fun. The effectiveness of extension group is not enough. Some solutions are: maths projects, learning about percentages%, extension homework, harder books to read ...

Since I’m in a grade 3/4 this year, I play with lots of grade 4’s. This year wouldn’t be bad if I went to grade 5 next year because I’ve started making friends with lots of grade 4 friends in my class.’

5.2 Improving the evidence base

Some participants in this Inquiry highlighted that Australia lags behind other jurisdictions in relation to research on gifted education. Dr Kronborg and Dr Plunkett from the Faculty of Education at Monash University submitted:

The development of a field of research in regard to the educational and psychological needs of gifted and talented students in Australia is extremely important if we are going to be able to improve our knowledge and understanding of gifted and talented individuals and also to improve on their educational provision.⁵³¹

The Committee was informed about a range of research activities presently underway, particularly research partnerships that have been forged between the two new selective

⁵²⁷ Names withheld, *Submission 9*, 3.

⁵²⁸ Mr Chris Earl, *Submission 23*, 2–3.

⁵²⁹ Ms Carolyn Priest, Secretary, Gifted Support Network, *Transcript of evidence*, Melbourne, 12 September 2011, 7.

⁵³⁰ Ms Ruby Hackett, *Submission 25*, 1–2.

⁵³¹ Dr Leonie Kronborg, Senior Lecturer, Coordinator of Postgraduate Studies in Gifted Education and Dr Margaret Plunkett, Senior Lecturer, Faculty of Education, Monash University, *Submission 92*, 7. See also Dr Margaret Plunkett, Senior Lecturer, Faculty of Education, Monash University, *Transcript of evidence*, Melbourne, 12 September 2011, 8; CHIP Foundation, *Submission 77*, 4, 5; Box Hill High School, *Submission 81*, 11.

entry schools, Suzanne Cory High School and Nossal High School, and Victoria University and Monash University respectively.⁵³²

Notwithstanding current research activities in this area, Inquiry participants identified a number of significant gaps in the current evidence base, including:

- best practice strategies for educating gifted students⁵³³
- the effectiveness of current programs and interventions⁵³⁴
- strategies for identifying and catering for students from backgrounds of educational disadvantage.⁵³⁵

Some contributors also emphasised the need to establish mechanisms to ensure that the findings of relevant research are distributed widely. Dr Leonie Kronborg told the Committee:

We need more funding for research projects to take place so that we can actually get evidence out there. There is a lot of opinion out there and limited access to what the research actually says.⁵³⁶

The 2001 Senate Committee report recommended the establishment of a national research and resource centre on giftedness to both conduct research and publicise research findings.⁵³⁷ This recommendation has not been implemented. One submission supported the establishment of such a centre,⁵³⁸ while others thought that DEECD could play a greater role in promoting research and disseminating information.⁵³⁹

The Committee acknowledges that there are some significant gaps in the evidence base in relation to gifted education. In chapter three the Committee emphasised the importance of regular program evaluation and the implementation of the Committee's recommendations in this regard will significantly contribute to the evidence base (see recommendation three). Also in that chapter the Committee recommended specific research to help better understand the factors influencing underachievement by gifted students (see recommendation one).

The Committee considers that the Victorian Government should play a leadership role in promoting robust and independent research in the field of gifted education through close collaboration with universities. However, the value of increased research in this field is

⁵³² Suzanne Cory High School, *Submission 85*, 6; Dr Leonie Kronborg, *Submission 104*, above n 434, 7; Dr Leonie Kronborg, Senior Lecturer, Coordinator of Postgraduate Studies in Gifted Education, Faculty of Education, Monash University, *Transcript of evidence*, Berwick, 26 July 2011, 6; Mr Roger Page, Principal, Nossal High School, *Transcript of evidence*, Berwick, 26 July 2011, 5.

⁵³³ Gifted Support Network, *Submission 49*, 20; Australian College of Educators (Victorian Branch), *Submission 21*, 5.

⁵³⁴ Goldfields LLEN, *Submission 86*, 11; Dr John Munro, *Submission 96*, above n 418, 6–7.

⁵³⁵ Methodist Ladies' College, *Submission 84*, 5; Dr John Munro, *Submission 96*, above n 418, 6–7; Ms Barbara Black, *Transcript of evidence*, above n 416, 7.

⁵³⁶ Dr Leonie Kronborg, Senior Lecturer, Coordinator of Post Graduate Studies in Gifted Education, Faculty of Education, Monash University, *Transcript of evidence*, Melbourne, 12 September 2011, 3. See also Associate Professor John Munro, *Transcript of evidence*, above n 429, 6; Gifted Resources, *Submission 113*, 12.

⁵³⁷ Senate Employment, Workplace Relations, Small Business and Education References Committee, above n 443, 101.

⁵³⁸ CHIP Foundation, *Submission 77*, 5.

⁵³⁹ Box Hill High School, *Submission 81*, 8, 11; Country Education Project, *Submission 79*, 5; Gifted Support Network, *Submission 49*, 18; Australian Mathematics Trust, *Submission 7*, 4; Mr Paul Double, *Submission 15*, 1; Faculty of Education, Australian Catholic University, *Submission 13*, 9–10; Names withheld, *Submission 9*, 7; Forum participant 2, parent, *Transcript of evidence*, Melbourne, 19 September 2011, 16–17.

limited unless the research findings are effectively communicated to interested parties, particularly parents, schools, teachers and students. The Committee believes that DEECD should play a key role in this regard and makes specific recommendations about this in chapters nine (in relation to teachers and schools) and ten (in relation to parents and students).

Recommendation 25: Improving the evidence base

That the Victorian Government play a leadership role in promoting research in the field of gifted education, including through collaboration with universities.

5.3 Ensuring equitable access to gifted education opportunities

In the previous chapter the Committee highlighted that students from some backgrounds are less likely to have their giftedness identified. Even if such students are identified as gifted, they may face significant barriers to accessing educational opportunities that meet their needs. Ms Annette Spence, High Potential Learning Coordinator at Lalor Secondary College, told the Committee, ‘If gifted students are identified, what happens to them then is dependent upon where they live, and/or their socio-economic backgrounds.’⁵⁴⁰

This section considers the barriers that limit access to gifted education opportunities for students from backgrounds of educational disadvantage, such as low socioeconomic, Indigenous or culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds, as well as students who live in rural and regional areas and students with disabilities. In addition to the general obstacles facing groups from backgrounds of educational disadvantage, the further bars faced by two groups, Indigenous students and gifted students with disabilities, are considered in greater detail.

5.3.1 Barriers to access

The main impediments to students from backgrounds of educational disadvantage accessing gifted education opportunities identified by participants in this Inquiry are cost and geographic location.

Cost

The cost of accessing gifted education opportunities both at school and externally is a significant barrier for gifted students from backgrounds of educational disadvantage.

As was noted in chapter three, many of the extension programs offered in government schools in Victoria are user-pays. Felicity, a parent participating in the Committee’s Parents’ Forum stated, ‘My experience has been virtually everything I have ever been offered for my kids I have had to pay for.’⁵⁴¹ Many participants in this Inquiry acknowledged that not all parents are in a position to pay for their offspring to access

⁵⁴⁰ Ms Annette Spence, High Potential Learning Coordinator, Lalor Secondary College, *Submission 41*, 1.

⁵⁴¹ Felicity, *Transcript of evidence*, above n 517, 20. See also Heike, *Transcript of evidence*, above n 422, 20; Gifted Support Network, *Submission 49*, 19; Maroondah Gifted Children’s Parents’ Association, *Submission 98*, 7; Kim, parent, *Transcript of evidence*, Melbourne, 19 September 2011, 20; Victorian Principals Association (VPA), *Submission 105*, 2; VAGTC, *Submission 34*, 16–17.

such programs in schools.⁵⁴² The main external providers of gifted education in Victorian schools, G.A.T.E.WAYS and WiseOnes, recognise that the cost of their programs impedes some students' participation. Both organisations offer scholarships for a limited number of students.⁵⁴³

Many of the parents who participated in this Inquiry indicated that, in the absence of gifted education programs in schools, they seek to challenge and stimulate their gifted children by accessing extension and enrichment opportunities outside of school. The Committee heard that parents pay for their gifted children to access a whole gamut of extracurricular activities, with music lessons particularly popular.⁵⁴⁴ While this financial burden is felt by all parents of gifted children (see chapters three and ten), for those from low socioeconomic backgrounds, it may be prohibitive. DEECD's submission acknowledged this:

Gifted and talented children from high socioeconomic backgrounds often have greater capacity to access extension and enrichment outside their school through a range of private providers, while educationally disadvantaged children tend to depend largely on their school to offer sufficient challenging and stimulating learning experiences to meet their needs.⁵⁴⁵

Several participants also noted that the cost of travel to and from extracurricular activities is additional burden for families.⁵⁴⁶

Geographic location

A significant number of participants in this Inquiry highlighted that where a gifted student lives significantly impacts that student's ability to access suitable educational opportunities. Lack of access to appropriate learning activities was seen as an issue for students living in rural and regional Victoria, as well as those living in outer suburbs and parts of Melbourne with low socioeconomic status.

The Committee heard that very few schools in rural and regional Victoria specifically provide for gifted students. Mr Brown of the Country Education Project described gifted education in rural and regional areas as 'very spasmodic',⁵⁴⁷ while the Victorian Association of State Secondary Principals has dubbed the current provision 'urban-centric'.⁵⁴⁸ Many other participants in this Inquiry agreed, highlighting that while there are some schools offering the SEAL Program in regional Victoria, most of the tailored gifted education opportunities such as selective entry schools and specialist

⁵⁴² Names withheld, *Submission 45*, 5; Forum participant 1, parent, *Transcript of evidence*, Melbourne, 19 September 2011, 20–21; Gifted Support Network, *Submission 49*, 19; Ms Katherine Pomeroy and Mr Nigel Cunningham, *Submission 59*, 3; Ms Gabrielle Leigh, President, VPA, *Transcript of evidence*, Melbourne, 12 September 2011, 22; Ms Carolyn Priest, *Transcript of evidence*, above n 529, 4; Ms Louise Broadbent, *Transcript of evidence*, above n 425, 4.

⁵⁴³ Ms Pat Slattery, *Transcript of evidence*, above n 509, 5; Ms Win Smith, Director, G.A.T.E.WAYS, *Transcript of evidence*, Melbourne, 25 July 2011, 5.

⁵⁴⁴ Forum participant 1, *Transcript of evidence*, above n 542, 20; Name withheld, *Submission 90*, 3; Ms Carolyn Priest, *Transcript of evidence*, above n 529, 4; Jocelyn, *Transcript of evidence*, above n 455, 20.

⁵⁴⁵ DEECD, *Submission 58*, 9. See also WiseOnes Australia, *Submission 18*, 11.

⁵⁴⁶ Distance Education Centre Victoria, *Submission 24*, 1–2; Mr Ross Huggard, *Submission 42*, above n 467, 21; Ms Moragh Tyler, *Transcript of evidence*, above n 477, 5; Pieta, parent, *Transcript of evidence*, Bendigo, 20 September 2011, 5; Julie S, parent, *Transcript of evidence*, Melbourne, 19 September 2011, 19.

⁵⁴⁷ Mr Phil Brown, *Transcript of evidence*, above n 416, 5. See also Ms Moragh Tyler on behalf of Wonthaggi interest group for gifted and talented children, *Submission 64*, 2.

⁵⁴⁸ VASSP, 'Position paper: Specialist schools', included in *Submission 27 Appendix A*, 2. See also Michael Faulkner and Pam Lyons, 'La Trobe University's Able Learners' Enrichment Programme: An innovation in regional Australia', included in *Submission 71 Appendix A*, 2–3.

schools are located in the Melbourne metropolitan area.⁵⁴⁹ In particular, participants from Bairnsdale, Bendigo and Ballarat lamented the lack of access to gifted education opportunities in their regions.⁵⁵⁰

Neither G.A.T.E.WAYS nor WiseOnes offer programs outside the Melbourne metropolitan area. WiseOnes' Director, Ms Pat Slattery, told the Committee there was no demand for WiseOnes' programs in rural and regional areas.⁵⁵¹ In contrast, Ms Win Smith, a G.A.T.E.WAYS Director, suggested there was a large demand in rural and regional Victoria, which G.A.T.E.WAYS does not have the capacity to meet.⁵⁵²

The Committee was told that some families move their gifted children out of their local school, or even relocate the whole family to a metropolitan area in order to access suitable education opportunities. Ms Tyler who made a submission on behalf of an interest group for gifted and talented children based in Wonthaggi commented, 'These are very difficult decisions for families to make and should not be necessary as there should be quality educational choices for gifted children in their local communities.'⁵⁵³

Several participants highlighted the negative consequences of children and families having to travel or relocate to access gifted education. Ms Stubbs of the Distance Education Centre Victoria emphasised the impact of a community losing high-achieving role models: 'All of that aspiration and modelling and those things that can go with that are pulled out of a community.'⁵⁵⁴ The submission of a regional SEAL school included the story of a set of parents who have chosen to send their son to school in a town 20 kilometres away from his home town. The parents wrote 'we have had to take a child out of his community. In the city this may not seem like a big deal but when you live in a small country town (population around 3,700) it is a very big deal.'⁵⁵⁵ Year 12 student, Lara, who commutes daily from Echuca to attend Bendigo Senior Secondary College, told the Committee, 'I get on the train at 7:00 a.m. and get home at 6:30 every night. I would say that it has affected me a lot, just travel-wise with the exhaustion'.⁵⁵⁶

As noted in the previous section, many parents feel compelled to supplement their gifted child's schooling with extracurricular activities. However, parents living in rural and regional areas commented that, even if they are able to afford for such activities, there are often limited offerings outside of Melbourne.⁵⁵⁷ In fact, the Committee received evidence about only one program for high-ability students operating outside the school environment in regional Victoria, the Able Learners' Enrichment Program. The Program is an annual school holiday program for students aged from five to fourteen held at La

⁵⁴⁹ Ms Moragh Tyler, *Transcript of evidence*, above n 477, 2, 5; VAGTC, *Submission 34*, 4; PAVCSS, *Submission 74*, 4; Names withheld, *Submission 45*, 5; Ms Pam Lyons, Coordinator, Able Learners' Enrichment Program, La Trobe University, *Submission 71*, 5.

⁵⁵⁰ Ms Ruby Hackett, *Submission 25*, 1; Ms Pieta McLean, *Submission 44*, 2; Goldfields LLEN, *Submission 86*, 5; Mrs Deborah DeBuhr, *Submission 46*, 4; Mr Wayne and Mrs Meredith Burton, *Submission 17*, 2.

⁵⁵¹ Ms Pat Slattery, *Transcript of evidence*, above n 509, 5.

⁵⁵² Ms Win Smith, *Transcript of evidence*, above n 543, 5.

⁵⁵³ Ms Moragh Tyler on behalf of Wonthaggi interest group for gifted and talented children, *Submission 64*, 2. See also Country Education Project, *Submission 79*, 4; Distance Education Centre Victoria, *Submission 24*, 1-2,4; Bella, Member, Student Representative Council, Year 11 dance student, Victorian College of the Arts Secondary School, *Transcript of evidence*, Southbank, 15 August 2011, 3.

⁵⁵⁴ Ms Bronwyn Stubbs, *Transcript of evidence*, above n 429, 4. See also Mr Phil Brown, *Transcript of evidence*, above n 416, 9.

⁵⁵⁵ Ms Debbi Daff, SEAL and Enhancement Coordinator, Sale College, *Submission 70*, 5-6.

⁵⁵⁶ Lara, Year 12 student, Bendigo Senior Secondary College, *Transcript of evidence*, Bendigo, 4.

⁵⁵⁷ Ms Moragh Tyler on behalf of Wonthaggi interest group for gifted and talented children, *Submission 64*, 2; Australian Council of State School Organisations, *Submission 32*, 5; Ms Pieta McLean, *Submission 44*, 2; Mr Wayne and Mrs Meredith Burton, *Submission 17*, 2.

Trobre University's Bendigo Campus. The Committee heard positive feedback about this program.⁵⁵⁸

The Gifted Support Network submitted, 'Rural children are unable to attend after-school activities that stimulate them, visit museums, libraries etc to which their city counterparts have easy access.'⁵⁵⁹ Year 12 student, Lara, told the Committee:

I feel like we miss a lot of opportunities. People in Melbourne can go to lectures all the time, but we have to weigh up our options—'Should I go to this lecture? How much time will I lose if I go?'. For example, during the holidays I would like to go to a lot of the Year 12 revision lectures, but it would take a day for me with the travel time. I would have to leave at 5 o'clock in the morning, and I would get home late at night.⁵⁶⁰

Similarly, musician, Mr Earl, expressed concern about the lack of enrichment opportunities for gifted young musicians living in rural and regional Victoria, stating, 'For musicians in the non-metropolitan areas of Victoria—country, rural, regional—there are certainly fewer opportunities to experience and to be inspired.'⁵⁶¹

The Committee also heard that similar barriers may prevent students in some parts of metropolitan Melbourne, particularly those living in outer suburbs and in areas of low socioeconomic status, accessing gifted education opportunities. For example, academic, Dr Deborah Lipson highlighted Melbourne's western suburbs as being 'poorly serviced in regard to programs and facilities for gifted children'.⁵⁶²

Educators who contributed to this Inquiry highlighted that smaller schools and schools in disadvantaged areas often struggle to resource or access gifted education programs. Mr Ross Huggard, Senior School Leader at Cranbourne Secondary College, submitted:

for the last two years at my own school in a struggling area in SE Melbourne, we have been obliged to allocated funds from several budgetary areas to be able to subsidise the participation of 25 high achieving Yr 10 students in an outstanding week long city-based initiative run by the Foundation for Young Australians (Worlds of Work). This program has been instrumental in encouraging our best students to strive to excel ... Given that our funding sources are already so stretched, without a special grant system, it remains unclear if we can continue to support such key initiatives for our most able students in the future.⁵⁶³

Mr Huggard also argued that rising transport costs are a significant barrier to schools in outer suburban areas accessing extension programs and opportunities that are generally located in the city.⁵⁶⁴

Participants in this Inquiry made a number of suggestions for increasing the access of students to gifted education opportunities wherever they are located in Victoria. Many viewed some of the interventions outlined earlier in this chapter as having very real

⁵⁵⁸ Ms Trudi Jacobson, *Transcript of evidence*, above n 468, 4–5.

⁵⁵⁹ Gifted Support Network, *Submission 49*, 15. See also Mr Chris Earl, *Submission 23*, 5–7; Pieta, *Transcript of evidence*, above n 546, 5–6.

⁵⁶⁰ Lara, *Transcript of evidence*, above n 556, 4. See also Patrick Leader, Student Council, Year 12 student, Bendigo Senior Secondary College, *Transcript of evidence*, Bendigo, 20 September 2011, 4.

⁵⁶¹ Mr Chris Earl, *Submission 23*, 6.

⁵⁶² Dr Debora Lipson, *Transcript of evidence*, Melbourne, 19 September 2011, 8.

⁵⁶³ Mr Ross Huggard, *Submission 42*, above n 467, 1. See also VPA, *Submission 105*, 2; Mr David Huggins, *Transcript of evidence*, above n 425, 5; Ms Gabrielle Leigh, *Transcript of evidence*, above n 542, 5; Mrs Deborah Patterson, *Transcript of evidence*, above n 449, 3.

⁵⁶⁴ Mr Ross Huggard, *Submission 42*, above n 467, 1. See also Ms Trudi Jacobson, *Transcript of evidence*, above n 468, 6.

potential to overcome the tyranny of distance in relation to gifted education. Strategies that were seen as being particularly useful are:

- curriculum differentiation⁵⁶⁵
- use of technology⁵⁶⁶
- links between schools⁵⁶⁷
- mentor programs.⁵⁶⁸

Overcoming barriers to access—The Committee’s view

The Committee is concerned that, at present, gifted students from backgrounds of educational disadvantage do not enjoy equitable access to educational opportunities that meet their needs.

The Committee’s fundamental approach to catering for gifted students in Victoria involves ensuring that gifted education is provided in every classroom in every Victorian school (see chapter three). The Committee considers that this approach will help overcome some of the inequities that currently exist, ensuring that gifted education opportunities are available throughout the state, including in schools in low socioeconomic and rural and regional areas. Providing gifted education opportunities in such schools is vitally important, as the families of gifted students in these areas often cannot afford to access user-pays extension or extracurricular activities, even if these are available.

Throughout this chapter the Committee has identified a range of strategies that are effective for catering for gifted students and made specific recommendations to support their wider use. The Committee wishes to highlight the importance of several particular strategies in terms of overcoming barriers to access based on where a student lives, namely curriculum differentiation, technology, school clusters and mentoring. The Committee urges the Victorian Government to give particular emphasis to those living in rural and regional and low socioeconomic areas when implementing the Committee’s recommendations in these areas. A further approach that may be useful for increasing opportunities for students in rural and regional areas is the implementation of exchange programs. This is discussed further in chapter seven.

In addition to the issues raised in this section, a number of Inquiry participants highlighted that students from backgrounds of educational disadvantage lack access to programs such as SEAL, selective entry and specialist schools. This issue is explored in chapter seven, which discusses those programs in more detail.

⁵⁶⁵ Mr Ian Burrage, *Transcript of evidence*, above n 429, 9; Ms Pam Lyons, *Transcript of evidence*, above n 431, 4.

⁵⁶⁶ Dr Karen Ward, *Transcript of evidence*, above n 429, 4; Mr Mark Smith, *Transcript of evidence*, above n 477, 8; Mr Dale Pearce, *Transcript of evidence*, above n 472, 6; Ms Meredith Fetting, *Transcript of evidence*, above n 470, 6–7; Ms Bronwyn Stubbs, *Transcript of evidence*, above n, 429, 4; Mr Phil Brown, *Transcript of evidence*, above n 416, 3.

⁵⁶⁷ Mr Phil Brown, *Transcript of evidence*, above n 416, 6; Ms Moragh Tyler, *Transcript of evidence*, above n 477, 3; Mr Paul Double, *Transcript of evidence*, above n 501, 5; Wayne, parent, *Transcript of evidence*, Melbourne, 19 September 2011, 18.

⁵⁶⁸ Mr Chris Earl, *Submission 23*, 6; Ms Moragh Tyler, *Transcript of evidence*, above n 477, 3; Mrs Deborah DeBuhr, *Submission 46*, 4.

This section has explored the two most significant obstacles preventing students from backgrounds of educational disadvantage accessing gifted education opportunities. The Committee considers that two groups face significant additional barriers in accessing gifted education opportunities. Thus in the remainder of this chapter the Committee explores strategies for increasing access to gifted education opportunities for Indigenous and twice exceptional students.

5.3.2 Increasing access for gifted Indigenous students

As noted in the previous chapter, gifted Indigenous students are especially unlikely to have their giftedness identified, with low expectations of Indigenous student achievement one of the primary causes of this. The culture of low expectations also significantly impacts on the ability of gifted Indigenous students to access challenging and stimulating educational programs. Mr Richard Potok, Director of the Aurora Project, an organisation that delivers programs and services in relation to Indigenous education, told the Committee:

the vast majority of resources for [Indigenous] state school kids ... go to attendance and are really for the low achievers. There is really nothing for the gifted and talented end of the spectrum, certainly not in Victoria so far as we are aware, but really there is nothing across the country.⁵⁶⁹

Similarly, Dr Graham Chaffey, Honorary Fellow, School of Education, University of New England, has observed that underachievement among gifted Indigenous students is rife:

The fact is that academically gifted Indigenous children have been a major part of the overall academic underachievement of Indigenous children. Gifted Indigenous children have been grossly under-represented in programs for the gifted ... while evidence is emerging that the gifted cohort are underachieving to a far greater degree than the rest of the Indigenous population.⁵⁷⁰

However, the Committee did receive evidence about several initiatives aimed at enhancing educational aspiration and achievement among Indigenous students.

Current Victorian Government initiatives

The Victorian Aboriginal Education Association, an organisation that represents Victoria's Indigenous community in relation to education, was critical of most government Indigenous education policies on the basis that they are largely based on remediation.⁵⁷¹ However, it identified DEECD's 2008 Indigenous education strategy, Wannik, as an exception to this. Under Wannik the Victorian Government commits to support and encourage high-achieving students by:

- providing scholarships for high-performing Koorie students
- allocating places for high-achieving Koorie students at selective entry schools

⁵⁶⁹ Mr Richard Potok, Director, The Aurora Project, *Transcript of evidence*, Melbourne, 19 September 2011, 3. See also Mr Lionel Bamblett, General Manager, Victorian Aboriginal Education Association Incorporated (VAEAI), *Transcript of evidence*, Melbourne, 12 September 2011, 3.

⁵⁷⁰ Graham Chaffey, 'Is gifted education a necessary ingredient in creating a level playing field for Indigenous children in education?' 17(1) *Australasian Journal of Gifted Education* 38, 38.

⁵⁷¹ VAEAI, *Submission 116*, 4; Mr Lionel Bamblett, *Transcript of evidence*, above n 569, 3.

- providing mentoring programs to support students with the pressures of higher level study.⁵⁷²

DEECD informed the Committee that it also supports a number of other relevant initiatives for Indigenous students, including:

- providing scholarships for Indigenous secondary school students to attend the Trinity College summer school at the University of Melbourne. This two week residential program provides an opportunity to develop skills in a range of areas including teamwork, communication and critical thinking.
- funding students to attend the ASSETS Program, a seven day science and cultural program for Indigenous students in Year 10. Entry to the program is academically selective, with 30 students from throughout Australia chosen to participate each year.
- funding university scholarships for high-performing Indigenous students in conjunction with other Victorian Government departments and the Balwyn Rotary Club.
- providing scholarships to all Indigenous students selected to attend the School for Student Leadership residential program.⁵⁷³

The Aspiration Initiative

The Aurora Project and the Castan Centre for Human Rights Law at Monash University are currently working with the Charlie Perkins Trust for Children and Students and the Roberta Sykes Indigenous Education Foundation on a number of education initiatives collectively known as The Aspiration Initiative. The Aspiration Initiative aims to help Indigenous students to realise their potential in education.⁵⁷⁴

Current projects under The Aspiration Initiative include providing information about scholarship opportunities, as well as providing scholarships. Of particular relevance to this Inquiry, an academic enrichment program for Indigenous secondary school students was launched as part of The Aspiration Initiative in October 2011.

The academic enrichment program will involve concurrent pilot programs in Victoria, New South Wales and Western Australia. In Victoria, 30 students from eight schools have been selected to take part in the program.⁵⁷⁵ These students will participate in more than 200 contact hours over in excess of 20 days each year for five and a half years, commencing in Year 8. The aim is for every participant to successfully complete high school and be eligible to attend university.⁵⁷⁶

Participating students will be provided with a range of support such as tutoring, mentoring, work experience and personal guidance. Parents and schools will also be

⁵⁷² DEECD, *Wannik: Learning together—Journey to our future. Education strategy for Koorie students* (2008) DEECD (VIC), 16.

⁵⁷³ Ian Burrage, General Manager, Education Policy and Research Division, DEECD, *Initiatives to promote access*, supplementary evidence received 6 September 2011; Letter from Minister for Education (Victoria), to Chair, Victorian Parliament Education and Training Committee, 7 February 2012, 9–10.

⁵⁷⁴ The Aurora Project, *Submission 89*, 1.

⁵⁷⁵ Mr Richard Potok, *Transcript of evidence*, above n 569, 4.

⁵⁷⁶ The Aurora Project, *Submission 89*, 6.

actively involved in the program. Ms Jirra Harvey, The Aspiration Initiative's Victorian State Coordinator, stressed the importance of parental involvement in the program:

a lot of parents want their kids to have equal opportunities, but they are not 100 per cent sure about how to support them to do that. For me, I have a non-indigenous mother who went to university, and my father has worked in Aboriginal education, so I was very much raised with an expectation that I would go to university. But I know that was not the same for a lot of my cousins and a lot of my peers. When I got to VCE I was at home with parents going, 'Okay, you need to set this amount of time away for study ...' That kind of support is not always available, and it is not because parents do not want to give it but just because they are not sure how.⁵⁷⁷

The Aspiration Initiative's model was designed taking into account extensive international research. Mr Potok told the Committee that the evidence shows that there are three essential elements for a high-achievement program aimed at students from backgrounds of educational disadvantage, including Indigenous students:

- support must start at an early age (before students are 15 years of age)
- support must be sustained (over a period of at least three years)
- support must involve a significant number of contact hours (a minimum of 200 hours per year).⁵⁷⁸

Representatives of the Aurora Project told the Committee that the initiative aims to reverse low expectations of achievement. Ms Harvey explained:

the students are told over and over again, 'We expect you to achieve. We know that you have the ability. We expect you to be successful. We expect you to have all the choices that non-indigenous kids can have'. I think just hearing that repeatedly for the next five years will make a big difference.⁵⁷⁹

While The Aspiration Initiative has only recently commenced, some participants, including the Victorian Aboriginal Education Association, were very supportive of it.⁵⁸⁰ DEECD advised that it has provided seed funding for the program, as well as other practical assistance and support.⁵⁸¹

Koorie Academy of Excellence

DEECD and the Victorian Aboriginal Education Association have developed a draft proposal to establish a Koorie Academy of Excellence in the Northern Metropolitan Region of Melbourne. The aim of the academy would be to 'increase recognition of the achievements of talented Koorie young people and promote their education and employment success'.⁵⁸²

The proposed academy would be a virtual institution. Participating students will be drawn from schools across the region. While they will remain in their home schools, they will have the opportunity to participate in academy activities and events. The intention is

⁵⁷⁷ Ms Jirra Harvey, Victorian State Coordinator, The Aspiration Initiative, *Transcript of evidence*, Melbourne, 19 September 2011, 5. See also Mr Richard Potok, *Transcript of evidence*, above n 569, 6; VAEAI, *Submission 116*, 3.

⁵⁷⁸ Mr Richard Potok, *Transcript of evidence*, above n 569, 3–4. See also The Aurora Project, *Submission 89*, 5.

⁵⁷⁹ Ms Jirra Harvey, *Transcript of evidence*, above n 577, 5.

⁵⁸⁰ VAEAI, *Submission 116*, 7; Minerals Council of Australia (Victorian Division), *Submission 35*, 1.

⁵⁸¹ Letter from Minister for Education (Victoria), above n 573, 9.

⁵⁸² VAEAI, *Submission 116*, 5.

that each academy student will be provided with a ‘tailored set of support programs and enrichment opportunities to assist them to achieve their potential’.⁵⁸³

The proposed pilot program would be available to a total of thirty students, fifteen from Year 7 and another fifteen from Year 10.⁵⁸⁴

The Victorian Aboriginal Education Association informed the Committee that its preliminary consultations have shown that there is strong support for the proposed academy among the Indigenous community, as well as other key stakeholder groups.⁵⁸⁵

Increasing access for gifted Indigenous students—The Committee’s view

The Committee is concerned that Indigenous students are significantly underrepresented in gifted education programs. The Committee notes that there are low expectations of achievement among Indigenous students, which impacts firstly on their identification and secondly on their access to appropriate educational opportunities.

The Committee is pleased that some recent initiatives are starting to foster a culture of achievement among Indigenous students. First, it notes that the Wannik strategy, unlike many other Indigenous education policies throughout the nation, has a strong focus on promoting high performance. The Committee recommends that the Victorian Government continue this emphasis on achievement in all Indigenous education policies and strategies.

The Committee is impressed by two initiatives specifically aimed at promoting high expectations and nurturing and supporting achievement among Indigenous students. The Committee views The Aspiration Initiative and the proposed Koorie Academy as important steps towards an education system that focuses on excellence for Indigenous students. The Committee notes that the Victorian Government has already provided seed funding for The Aspiration Initiative. It recommends that the Victorian Government monitor the progress of this Initiative, with a view to further supporting it. The Committee also considers that the Victorian Government should support the creation of a Koorie academy.

Recommendation 26: Indigenous education policies that promote high achievement

That the Victorian Government continue to support high achievement among Indigenous students through targeted education policies.

Recommendation 27: Supporting The Aspiration Initiative

That the Victorian Government monitor The Aspiration Initiative, with a view to further supporting this program.

Recommendation 28: Supporting a Koorie academy

That the Victorian Government support the creation of a Koorie academy.

⁵⁸³ *ibid.*, 6.

⁵⁸⁴ Letter from Minister for Education (Victoria), above n 573, 8.

⁵⁸⁵ VAEAI, *Submission 116*, 6.

5.3.3 Increasing access for twice exceptional students

The previous chapter highlighted that gifted students who have disabilities face particular challenges in having their gifts identified. Once identified, there are significant barriers to these twice exceptional students accessing appropriate gifted education opportunities.

The Committee was told that many teachers tend to focus on a twice exceptional student's disability, rather than his or her giftedness.⁵⁸⁶ The impact of the disability, and thus teacher attention to it, may increase as a child progresses through the education system. Associate Professor Munro of Melbourne University explained:

These children obviously have great difficulty displaying their knowledge in literacy-type ways. In the primary years their gifted knowledge is often masked by their reading and writing difficulty. As they move through the primary years the demands on learning by both reading and writing increases, so they increasingly become alienated from the regular learning situation.⁵⁸⁷

Some participants in this Inquiry highlighted that a twice exceptional student's high abilities in some areas may mean that he or she does not qualify for much-needed support in the area of his or her disability. The Gifted Support Network told the Committee in relation to gifted students who have Asperger's, 'No matter how severe the disability ... if they also have a high IQ, they do not qualify for the aid to which other Aspergers children are entitled.'⁵⁸⁸

The Committee heard that twice exceptional students need to be both supported and challenged. Ms Jo Freitag, Coordinator of Gifted Resources, a not-for-profit information service for parents and teachers, stated:

They need to be challenged at an appropriate level in their areas of strength at the same time as they are being supported in the areas they are not as strong. Sometimes this may involve a particular program. For instance, if they are visual-spatial learners, there might be a different way of teaching them which will make it very clear for them ... At the same time as the problem is being addressed they need to have encouragement and to be challenged at the level they are at in their strong area.⁵⁸⁹

Ms Maxine Cowie the Director of Starjump, an organisation that works with children with learning disabilities, emphasised that the support must be specifically tailored to meet each child's individual needs. She commented, 'The most effective response to GLD/2e [twice exceptional] children is to find out what the problem is. Without finding out what the problem is generic responses are damaging.'⁵⁹⁰

Some participants in this Inquiry stressed the importance of teacher training in ensuring that teachers are well equipped to deal with special needs of twice exceptional students. Ms Harrison of MLC told the Committee:

⁵⁸⁶ Ms Maxine Cowie, Director, Starjump, *Transcript of evidence*, Melbourne, 10 October 2011, 3; Catholic Education Office Melbourne, *Submission 87*, 7.

⁵⁸⁷ Associate Professor John Munro, *Transcript of evidence*, above n 429, 11. See also Dr Karen Ward, *Transcript of evidence*, above n 429, 2.

⁵⁸⁸ Gifted Support Network, *Submission 49*, 6. See also Pieta, *Transcript of evidence*, above n 546, 3.

⁵⁸⁹ Mrs Jo Freitag, Coordinator, Gifted Resources, *Transcript of evidence*, Melbourne, 19 September 2011, 4. See also Gifted Resources, *Submission 113*, 12. Ms Maxine Cowie, *Transcript of evidence*, above n 586, 3; Box Hill High School, *Submission 81*, 7.

⁵⁹⁰ Ms Maxine Cowie, *Transcript of evidence*, above n 586, 2–3.

Staff at MLC have undertaken extensive professional development in these areas but necessary expertise is developed over years and there needs to be intentional development of such staff.⁵⁹¹

The Committee acknowledges that twice exceptional students face particular barriers to accessing learning opportunities in their sphere of giftedness. The evidence is clear that twice exceptional students need to be provided with tailored learning opportunities that support them in their area of disability, while simultaneously challenging them in their area or areas of strength.

The Committee notes that teachers and schools are often unsure about the nature of twice exceptionality and how to cater for these students. The Committee therefore recommends that teachers and schools be provided with targeted information and support about how to meet the particular needs of these children. Training in this area will also be of benefit for teachers charged with educating twice exceptional children. Teacher education and training is discussed in more detail in chapter eight.

Recommendation 29: Information for teachers and schools about catering for twice exceptional students

That the Victorian Government provide targeted information and support to teachers and schools about catering for twice exceptional students.

⁵⁹¹ Methodist Ladies' College, *Submission 84*, 3. See also Dr Karen Ward, *Transcript of evidence*, above n 429, 3.

Chapter 6: Improving early childhood and primary school education for gifted students

Key findings

- Gifted students are not currently being adequately catered for in early childhood education. At this early age, gifted children are best provided for through an appropriately differentiated curriculum.
- Early entry to primary school can be an effective intervention for some gifted young children. At present very few students successfully access early entry to school. Clear guidelines are required to provide a transparent process for determining early school entry.
- While some individual primary schools are providing quality educational experiences for gifted students, most Victorian primary schools are not catering adequately for these students.
- Strategies such as curriculum differentiation, ability grouping and individual learning plans need to be used in every primary school classroom to provide appropriate individualised learning opportunities for gifted students. Teachers require access to increased information and training to enable them to utilise these strategies.
- There is considerable potential to use technology to provide all gifted primary school students throughout Victoria with extended learning experiences and opportunities to connect with similarly advanced students.
- Gifted students and their parents often struggle to find information about appropriate secondary school options. Increased information about available options is required to enable gifted students and their families to make informed choices about suitable secondary schools.

Improving early childhood and primary school education for gifted students

This chapter examines the education of gifted students at the start of their journey through the educational system. It discusses current provision for gifted children at the early childhood and primary school levels and considers opportunities to enhance provision for gifted students at these stages.

6.1 Early childhood education

This section looks at gifted education offerings for children prior to entering primary school and considers how to better cater for gifted children at this young age.

6.1.1 How are gifted children currently catered for in early childhood education?

As outlined in chapter two, the Committee received almost no evidence of targeted programs for gifted students at the early childhood education stage. However, information provided by the Minister for Education emphasised that the Victorian Early Years Learning and Development Framework, which provides a platform for advancing the learning and development of all Victorian children from birth to eight years of age, incorporates sufficient flexibility to allow the needs of gifted students to be met:

The structure of Victoria's curriculum frameworks provides the platform for early childhood services and schools to develop challenging learning opportunities for their gifted and talented children and students ... early childhood services would aim to provide a responsive curriculum to nurture and further extend their thinking, learning and development.⁵⁹²

A very small amount of evidence suggested that appropriate learning experiences are currently provided for gifted children in some individual kindergartens.⁵⁹³ However, overall the evidence highlighted that gifted students are not adequately catered for at the early childhood education stage. In fact, most participants who commented on this issue

⁵⁹² Letter from Minister for Education (Victoria), to Chair, Victorian Parliament Education and Training Committee, 7 February 2012, 3. See also Mr Ian Burrage, General Manager, Education and Policy Research Division, Department of Education and Early Childhood Development (DEECD), *Transcript of evidence*, Melbourne, 25 July 2011, 7.

⁵⁹³ Ms Carmel Meehan, President, Victorian Association for Gifted and Talented Children (VAGTC), *Transcript of evidence*, Melbourne, 25 July 2011, 11; Ms Kim Steere, *Submission 61*, 1; Ms Rhonda Allen, *Submission 14*, 1; Melissa, parent, *Transcript of evidence*, Melbourne, 19 September 2011, 6.

emphasised the total absence of provision for gifted children at this stage.⁵⁹⁴ For example, one parent described her gifted daughter's experience at preschool:

While my daughter enjoyed running around with the other children in the playground, she was not however given activities appropriate to her developmental stage and capacity to learn. For example, the teacher held sessions where she read aloud to the children from books which were of a lower reading standard than those my daughter could then read by herself. The jigsaw puzzles were of the 6 to 12 piece kind although my daughter had been doing 200 and 300 piece puzzles at 3 years old!⁵⁹⁵

Another parent stated:

The plethora of enrichment activities for preschoolers (Gymbaroo, Mini Maestros, Letterland etc) belies the fact that there are no early learning programs specifically designed for gifted children. A handful of parent-organised playgroups for gifted children exist; however, these have no endorsement from government, schools or a gifted and talented association.⁵⁹⁶

Ms Louise Broadbent, President of the Gifted Support Network, a support group for parents with gifted children, told the Committee that parents of young children are desperate for information and support, 'That is our number 1 thing. People phone us and say, "My child is 3 or 4, what can we do?"'.⁵⁹⁷

6.1.2 Improving early childhood education for gifted children

While there was widespread discontent among Inquiry participants about current early childhood education opportunities for gifted children, the Committee received very few specific suggestions for improving provision at this stage.

Two participants in this Inquiry argued for the establishment of centres for advanced child development or selective entry kindergartens.⁵⁹⁸ However, other participants suggested that there is significant scope to better cater for gifted young children within existing early childhood education structures. Ms Carmel Meehan, President of the Victorian Association for Gifted and Talented Children, a voluntary organisation that supports educators and parents in relation to gifted students, told the Committee:

It is very easy in kindergartens for children to be given strength because the program is fluid, and it is a quite good framework for how children can flourish as they go along ... The asynchronous development of a gifted child is well and truly catered for in a good kindergarten that has a broad, differentiated curriculum for them.⁵⁹⁹

Dr John Munro, Associate Professor Exceptional Learning and Gifted Education at Melbourne University's Graduate School of Education, emphasised the importance of interactive learning for young children:

⁵⁹⁴ Ms Carolyn Priest, Secretary, Gifted Support Network, *Transcript of evidence*, Melbourne, 12 September 2011, 7; Sonia, parent, *Transcript of evidence*, Melbourne, 19 September 2011, 5; Name withheld, *Submission 108*, 2.

⁵⁹⁵ Name withheld, *Submission 91*, 1.

⁵⁹⁶ Name withheld, *Submission 75*, 1.

⁵⁹⁷ Ms Louise Broadbent, President, Gifted Support Network, *Transcript of evidence*, Melbourne, 12 September 2011, 6.

⁵⁹⁸ Name withheld, *Submission 75*, 2; Name withheld, *Submission 94*, 2.

⁵⁹⁹ Ms Carmel Meehan, *Transcript of evidence*, above n 593, 11.

they need to have in place opportunities for encouraging play, exploratory activities and situations where children are encouraged to build their knowledge, learn through analogy and link ideas across situations.⁶⁰⁰

In New South Wales a much more proactive approach is taken to catering for children who show early signs of giftedness. As noted in chapter four, the Best Start Gifted and Talented Kindergarten Resources Package aims to equip teachers with the skills to identify and appropriately cater for gifted learners at an early age. The New South Wales Department of Education and Communities advised that kindergarten teachers have been provided with professional learning in curriculum differentiation to improve their capacity to cater for the individual needs of gifted children.⁶⁰¹

In chapter four the Committee emphasised the importance of early identification and made recommendations for enhancing the capacity of early childhood educators to identify gifted children. Once gifted young children have been identified, it is imperative that they are appropriately stimulated and challenged. The Committee is satisfied that the current early learning framework provides sufficient flexibility for gifted students to be catered for through provision of tailored learning experiences. However, the Committee recognises that early childhood educators need education and support in order to provide an appropriately differentiated curriculum. This is discussed in chapter eight.

In addition to curriculum differentiation at the early childhood education stage, some gifted young children may benefit from entering primary school early. This is discussed in the next section.

6.2 Early entry to primary school

This section considers the current mechanism for early entry to primary school and examines the issues and benefits associated with this intervention. It also looks at how the process for early entry to primary school can be streamlined.

6.2.1 When is early entry available?

Current regulations provide that students must be aged at least five years by April of the year they start school.⁶⁰² However, a student may be admitted earlier than this if it is established that the student is academically capable of starting school and that attending school is in the student's best interests.⁶⁰³ The Minister for Education advised the Committee that:

Early entry is only granted in exceptional circumstances when there are strong grounds for believing long-term educational disadvantage would otherwise occur.

There are no set criteria and each request is considered on a case-by-case basis taking into account the child's cognitive, emotional and social abilities.⁶⁰⁴

⁶⁰⁰ Associate Professor John Munro, Exceptional Learning and Gifted Education, Graduate School of Education, The University of Melbourne, *Transcript of evidence*, Melbourne, 19 September 2011, 9.

⁶⁰¹ Letter from Learning and Development R/General Manager, Department of Education and Communities (New South Wales), to Chair, Victorian Parliament Education and Training Committee, 15 November 2011, 5.

⁶⁰² *Education and Training Reform Regulations 2007* (Vic) reg 12B.

⁶⁰³ *Education and Training Reform Regulations 2007* (Vic) reg 12E.

⁶⁰⁴ Letter from Minister for Education (Victoria), above n 592, 4. See also DEECD, *Student participation: Admission*,

<<http://www.education.vic.gov.au/management/governance/spag/participation/intake/admission.htm>> viewed 16 April 2012.

Parents seeking to enrol their child at school early must apply in writing to the director of the relevant Department of Education and Early Childhood Education (DEECD) region. The regional director will determine each application based on advice from the region's Student Wellbeing Manager and, if necessary, a Departmental psychologist.⁶⁰⁵

Data provided by the Minister demonstrates that only a small number of students are enrolled early in government primary schools in Victoria each year. This is set out in figure 13.

Figure 13: Victorian government school students aged less than 5 years at 30 April

Year	Victorian government school students aged less than 5 years at 30 April ⁶⁰⁶	Total number of prep students in Victorian government schools ⁶⁰⁷
2011	38	46 956
2010	34	44 944
2009	22	45 037
2008	32	43 967
2007	29	43 490

*Note: these figures are derived from the School Census and may include young students who have transferred from interstate, as well as those granted early school entry.

6.2.2 Early entry to primary school—Benefits and issues

Many participants in this Inquiry argued that early entry to primary school is a very effective intervention for children who show early signs of giftedness. For example, Melissa, a participant in the Committee's Parents' Forum, shared her daughter's positive experience of early admission to primary school:

It has been a fabulous intervention for her. It has been the easiest, lowest cost way for the education system to meet her needs. She has gone in and developed very well.⁶⁰⁸

The Tasmanian Department of Education, which has developed a policy on early school entry, advised the Committee that the monitoring of the progress of students admitted early to kindergarten 'indicates very positive development through the grade levels'.⁶⁰⁹

The literature in this area also supports the use of early school entry for gifted students. For instance, leading Canadian gifted education expert, Professor Francoys Gagné has heralded early entry to primary school as the 'cornerstone' of an effective system for meeting the needs of gifted students.⁶¹⁰

A number of participants in this Inquiry expressed frustration that early entry is not more widely available. Some parents told the Committee that they found it difficult to obtain

⁶⁰⁵ Letter from Minister for Education (Victoria), above n 592, 4.

⁶⁰⁶ *ibid*, 5.

⁶⁰⁷ DEECD, *Summary statistics Victorian schools, February 2011* (2011) DEECD (VIC), 13. Available at <<http://www.education.vic.gov.au/about/publications/newsinfo/factsandfigures.htm>> viewed 21 December 2011.

⁶⁰⁸ Melissa, *Transcript of evidence*, above n 593, 6. See also Mr David Huggins, Assistant Director, Student Services, Catholic Education Office Melbourne, *Transcript of evidence*, Melbourne, 12 September 2011, 5.

⁶⁰⁹ Department of Education (Tasmania), *Submission 10*, 2.

⁶¹⁰ François Gagné, 'Ten commandments for academic talent development' 51(2) *Gifted Child Quarterly* 93, 103.

information about early entry.⁶¹¹ Even once parents access information about how to apply, the Committee heard that the current application process is cumbersome and rarely results in success. Ms Broadbent of the Gifted Support Network told the Committee that parents must 'jump through hoops' to get their gifted child enrolled early into primary school.⁶¹² Ms Sonia Fullerton, the parent of three gifted children, submitted:

In my area, early entry is only available under extremely limited circumstances and after a huge fight—you must be at 99th centile on IQ testing and your birthday must be between 1st May and 30th June. Very few children can take advantage of this.⁶¹³

The experience of one parent seeking early entry for her gifted daughter is set out in case study seven.

However, not all participants in this Inquiry supported early entry to primary school. A number of teachers and school leaders voiced reservations about the potential impact of this intervention on a child's social and emotional wellbeing. Miss Natalie Sellick, a Grade 4 teacher at Kennington Primary School in Bendigo, told the Committee:

It is a lot to ask of them at four, even though academically they are ready. I have had younger students in a prep class as well, and they are the ones that typically tire out a lot quicker. Their social skills are not quite up there yet. It is actually asking quite a lot of them to stay the whole day, participate and behave like a five or six-year-old.⁶¹⁴

Similarly, Mr Bruce Cunningham, Principal of Camelot Rise Primary School in Glen Waverly, told the Committee he is concerned about the long term implications of early entry, and advises parents to consider whether 'in 13 years' time when your child is turning 16 is he or she going to be mature enough to deal with the rigours of VCE'.⁶¹⁵

6.2.3 Improving processes for early entry to primary school

Inquiry participants called for the development of a clear, consistent and unambiguous process for early entry to primary school in Victoria.⁶¹⁶ Some even suggested there should be a uniform national policy on early school entry.⁶¹⁷

A number of other Australian jurisdictions have developed specific policies and guidelines for early school entry. For example, in New South Wales, school principals determine applications for early entry.⁶¹⁸ A number of resources have been developed to assist principals consider these applications, including guidelines that recommend:

⁶¹¹ Henriette, parent, *Transcript of evidence*, Melbourne, 19 September 2011, 7; Name withheld, *Submission 108*, 1–2; CHIP Foundation, *Submission 77*, 5.

⁶¹² Ms Louise Broadbent, *Transcript of evidence*, above n 597, 8. See also Mr Wayne and Mrs Meredith Burton, *Submission 17*, 2; Name withheld, *Submission 108*, 2–3; Ms Carolyn Priest, *Transcript of evidence*, above n 594, 7–8.

⁶¹³ Ms Sonia Fullerton, *Submission 33*, 2.

⁶¹⁴ Miss Natalie Sellick, Grade 4 Teacher, Kennington Primary School, *Transcript of evidence*, Bendigo, 20 September 2011, 5. See also Ms Patricia Pace, Leading Teacher, Mill Park Heights Primary School, *Transcript of evidence*, Melbourne, 12 September 2011, 9.

⁶¹⁵ Mr Bruce Cunningham, Principal, Camelot Rise Primary School, *Transcript of evidence*, Glen Waverley, 15 August 2011, 8.

⁶¹⁶ Ms Sonia Fullerton, *Submission 33*, 2; CHIP Foundation, *Submission 77*, 5, 9; Name withheld, *Submission 108*, 3; Dr Gail Byrne, Psychologist, Exceptional Children, *Submission 63*, 6.

⁶¹⁷ CHIP Foundation, *Submission 77*, 9; Dr Gail Byrne, *Submission 63*, above n 616, 4, 6.

⁶¹⁸ Department of Education and Training (New South Wales), *Policy and implementation strategies for the education of gifted and talented students* (2004) DET (NSW), 10. See also Department of Education and

- principals consider children aged four or older (at 31 January of the year of enrolment) as appropriate for early entry.
- a comprehensive, culturally fair psychological evaluation of the child's intellectual functioning, academic readiness and social-emotional maturity should be conducted. Decisions should be made collaboratively and should involve the principal, parents/caregivers, school counselor and receiving teacher ...
- screening should involve the use of culturally appropriate measures of performance and potential. These may include anecdotal records, interviews, standardised tests of cognitive ability and behavioural checklists ...⁶¹⁹

As outlined in section 6.2.1, in Victoria decisions about early entry are currently made by the relevant DEECD regional director. School leaders who participated in the Committee's Primary School Principals' Forum all agreed that individual school principals should have authority to determine applications for early entry as is the case in New South Wales.⁶²⁰ However, Mr Cunningham of Camelot Rise Primary School expressed a contrary view, commenting, 'I think it is a big decision to start early and I think there really does need to be an overruling governing body rather than the decision being made on an individual school basis'.⁶²¹

The Committee considers that early entry to primary school can be an effective intervention for gifted young children. The Committee believes that clear guidelines on early entry should be developed to ensure that there is a well-articulated and transparent process for determining early entry to primary school. These guidelines should reflect the fact that decisions for early entry must be made on a case-by-case basis, taking into account the needs and circumstances of each individual child.

The Committee notes there are differing views about who is the appropriate decision-maker in relation to early entry, school principals or a DEECD officer. The Committee does not consider it has sufficient evidence to make a determination on this issue and suggests that this be considered further as part of the development of the proposed guidelines.

Recommendation 30: Guidelines for early entry to primary school

That the Victorian Government develop and promote a clear, consistent and unambiguous set of guidelines for early entry to primary school.

Training (Australian Capital Territory), *Gifted and talented students* (GAT200808, 2008) DET (ACT), 5; Department of Education (Tasmania), *Early entry into kindergarten for young children who are gifted* (n.d.) DoE (TAS). Available at <<http://www.education.tas.gov.au/dept/legislation/admission>> viewed 16 April 2012.

⁶¹⁹ Department of Education and Training (New South Wales), *Policy and implementation strategies for the education of gifted and talented students. Guidelines for the use of strategies to support gifted and talented students* (2004) DET (NSW), 6. See also Department of Education and Training (New South Wales), *Policy and implementation strategies for the education of gifted and talented students. Support package: Acceleration* (2004) DET (NSW), 15–16.

⁶²⁰ Mrs Deborah Patterson, Principal, Mill Park Heights Primary School, *Transcript of evidence*, Melbourne, 12 September 2011, 9; Ms Patricia Pace, *Transcript of evidence*, above n 614, 10; Ms Claire McInerney, Principal, Plenty Parklands Primary School, *Transcript of evidence*, Melbourne, 12 September 2011, 10; Mr Greg Lacey, Principal, Lyndhurst Primary School, *Transcript of evidence*, Melbourne, 12 September 2011, 10; Mr John Forsythe, Principal, Red Hill Consolidated School, *Transcript of evidence*, Melbourne, 12 September 2011, 10; Ms Marlene Laurent, Principal, Glenferrie Primary School, *Transcript of evidence*, Melbourne, 12 September 2011, 10.

⁶²¹ Mr Bruce Cunningham, *Transcript of evidence*, above n 615, 8.

Case study 7: 'This was a stressful and upsetting process'⁶²²

'I commenced the process in June 2006 when my daughter's kindergarten advised me to look at the possibility of early school entry (this was put forcefully in terms that she really shouldn't return back to kinder the following year!). At that point I couldn't find any guidance on the procedure for early entry on the Department's website.

I went to meet the principal of the local primary school to get her advice on any options or enrichment activities she might be aware of. After meeting my daughter, the principal suggested that early school entry should be pursued. I also had an informal assessment from an educational psychologist recommending that early school entry [should be] explored given that my daughter was performing at up to three years ahead of her age level.

I thus wrote to the Department (Northern Metropolitan Region) to inquire about the procedure for seeking early entry, specifically asking the Department to review an independent psychologist's assessment in Term 4 to see what would be the best course of action for my daughter.

The response I received was a letter stating that requests for early age entry to school would only be considered for children who turned five before 30 June (which my daughter didn't).

I followed up with a letter expressing concern that such an inflexible application of policy was not fulfilling the Department's duty to consider each individual child and asking the Department to consider an independent psychologist's report. I also expressed our desperation at the lack of options (by that time I'd contacted eight other pre-schools in the area and none of them seemed likely to be able to meet my daughter's needs, even if she could get a place).

Again I received a rejection from the Department stating that there was no evidence of long-term educational disadvantage.

If I'd had any other options I probably would have given up then, but I went ahead and obtained an independent psychologist's report and sent it to the Department. It contained an unequivocal recommendation that not allowing early school entry would result in my daughter suffering long-term educational disadvantage. In November the Department granted approval for her to start school.

This was a stressful and upsetting process that could have been avoided by a clear procedure made available to parents.

Thankfully the story has a happy ending. My daughter fitted into school extremely well—despite her young age—and is now a happy, well-adjusted student ...'

⁶²² Name withheld, *Submission 108*, 2–3.

6.3 Gifted education in primary schools

This section looks at gifted education in Victorian primary schools and considers how gifted students can be better catered for at this level.

6.3.1 How are gifted children currently catered for in primary schools?

In chapter two the Committee noted that the provision for gifted students in Victorian primary schools varies significantly between schools. That chapter provided a snapshot of some of the educational opportunities available for gifted students in primary schools, including curriculum differentiation, ability grouping and extension activities, as well as opportunities to participate in external programs such as WiseOnes withdrawal programs and competitions like Tournament of Minds.

The Committee assessed the adequacy of current gifted educational opportunities in Victorian schools, including primary schools, in chapter three. There the Committee highlighted that some individual primary schools are effectively catering for gifted students and parents are often willing to travel long distances so that their children can attend one of these schools.⁶²³ Figure 14 describes some of the provisions for gifted students available at Camelot Rise Primary School in Glen Waverly, a school that participants in this Inquiry lauded as exemplary in catering for gifted students.

Figure 14: Gifted education opportunities at Camelot Rise Primary School

Ms Cris Stavrou Martyn, Year 2 Teacher
<p>'We have a whole school approach to catering for all students and gifted students but everyone's included in that and that is the way we differentiate our curriculum. Within that differentiated curriculum you are looking at rich open-ended tasks through all of the disciplines, the development of high-order thinking skills within the planning of curriculum areas, planning inquiry-based units ... There's the vertical maths program which targets all students and helps to extend all students ... There's compacting and acceleration that happens within that program and students are grouped, according to their ability level ...'</p> <p>'In reading programs so much is done in that particular area as well. At the moment my high ability groups are reading material that deals with themes and emotions and within that there's a lot of philosophical thinking and expression of their feelings and looking in depth ... They have a choice of completing a variety of different tasks that match their particular preferred learning style. Their input into the program will reflect their understanding ...'⁶²⁴</p>
Mr Bruce Cunningham, Principal
<p>'We also have a range of extension programs. One we are working on currently with regard to spelling is the school has had a spelling program that we have been following through but we found towards the higher levels the children needed something more challenging so we've introduced what we call our extension spelling program so once the children have finished the school program, which is based on smart words, then they start looking at in more detail Latin roots, Greek roots and more complex spelling strategies so that the children continue to develop but it's also challenging those that are very competent spellers. That's in its early stages at the moment but it certainly is proving a hit with the children. They like the opportunity to take on those extra challenges and the teachers are linking those activities to a lot of current affairs articles. So not only are they developing their spelling strategies and learning a lot more about the roots and bases of words but that is increasing their general knowledge about events happening in Australia and across the world.'⁶²⁵</p>

⁶²³ Ms Maya Panisset, *Submission 31*, 1–2; Sonia, *Transcript of evidence*, above n 594, 5; Mrs Jo Freitag, Coordinator, Gifted Resources, *Transcript of evidence*, Melbourne, 19 September 2011, 4; Felicity, parent, *Transcript of evidence*, Melbourne, 19 September 2011, 20.

⁶²⁴ Ms Cris Stavrou Martyn, Year 2 Teacher, Camelot Rise Primary School, *Transcript of evidence*, Glen Waverly, 15 August 2011, 3, 4.

⁶²⁵ Mr Bruce Cunningham, *Transcript of evidence*, above n 615, 3–4.

Unfortunately the evidence presented to this Inquiry suggests that primary schools that are meeting the needs of gifted students are the exception rather than the norm. The inadequacy of current provisions for gifted students in Victorian primary was one of the most consistent themes in this Inquiry. The Committee heard that many primary schools make minimal provisions for gifted students and that provisions are often only put in place after extensive parental advocacy.⁶²⁶

As highlighted in chapter three, the primary concern about provisions for gifted students in Victorian primary schools is that they are extremely ad hoc. Whether gifted students are catered for usually depends on the energies and attitudes of individual teachers and school leaders, which means that any gifted education offerings are vulnerable to discontinuance when there is staff turnover.⁶²⁷ In addition, frequently the only gifted education offerings available require parents to pay, thus reducing their accessibility to low income families.⁶²⁸

Some of the primary school experiences of gifted students and their parents are set out in figure 15. These comments reflect a deep dissatisfaction with provision for gifted students in Victorian primary schools.

Many participants in this Inquiry highlighted the potential long-term negative consequences of not meeting the needs of gifted students at the primary school stage. For example, the parents of one gifted child submitted:

primary education is the start point for this group of students, their learning experiences in this setting will shape their future education at a secondary level. Habits are formed at a young age and if these gifted students do not receive an education that takes into account their specific needs, real problems can arise ...⁶²⁹

The negative impacts of not meeting the needs of gifted students such as behavioural or emotional problems, underperformance and disengagement from the education were noted in chapter three.

6.3.2 Improving gifted education in Victorian primary schools

This section considers how the educational needs of gifted students could be better met in Victorian primary schools.

⁶²⁶ Names withheld, *Submission 9*, 2; Ms Kim Steere, *Submission 61*, 1–2; Ms Rhonda Allen, *Submission 14*, 2; Australian Association for the Education of the Gifted and Talented, *Submission 28*, 1; Names withheld, *Submission 29*, 4–5; Gifted Support Network, *Submission 49*, 7; Belgrave Parent Support Group for Gifted and Talented Students, *Submission 60*, 1–2; Name withheld, *Submission 75*, 2; Ms Susan Wight, *Submission 93*, 2.

⁶²⁷ Ms Felicity Walker, *Submission 69*, 5; VAGTC, *Submission 34*, 15–17; Belgrave Parent Support Group for Gifted and Talented Students, *Submission 60*, 3; Ms Larelle Parker, *Submission 11*, 1.

⁶²⁸ Felicity, *Transcript of evidence*, above n 623, 20; Heike, parent, *Transcript of evidence*, Melbourne, 19 September 2011, 20; Ms Katherine Pomeroy and Mr Nigel Cunningham, *Submission 59*, 3; Maroondah Gifted Children's Parents' Association, *Submission 98*, 7; Kim, parent, *Transcript of evidence*, Melbourne, 19 September 2011, 20; Victorian Principals Association (VPA), *Submission 105*, 2; VAGTC, *Submission 34*, 17; Names withheld, *Submission 45*, 5; Mr Wayne and Mrs Meredith Burton, *Submission 17*, 4; Forum participant 1, parent, *Transcript of evidence*, Melbourne, 19 September 2011, 20–21; Gifted Support Network, *Submission 49*, 19; Ms Gabrielle Leigh, President, VPA, *Transcript of evidence*, Melbourne, 12 September 2011, 22; Ms Louise Broadbent, *Transcript of evidence*, above n 597, 4; Ms Patricia Pace, *Transcript of evidence*, above n 614, 3.

⁶²⁹ Names withheld, *Submission 29*, 6. See also Ms Pieta McLean, *Submission 44*, 2; Dr Glenison Alsop, Psychologist and Counsellor, *Submission 54*, 4.

Figure 15: Gifted students' experiences at Victorian primary schools

Mr Bruce Verity, parent	Ms Caelli Greenbank, university student	Ms Henriette Boonen-Hackett, parent
'If I look back over my son's schooling—the bit where we got the least support was in primary school ... I think the average primary school is not equipped to handle that [giftedness]. Often in this area a lot of the schools are struggling with kids at the other end. I understand that, and that is appropriate, but that is where I felt really let down—that there was not much for the really inquisitive and curious little kids who want to learn everything. A lot of it was really squashed out of them a bit through primary school.' ⁶³⁰	'By about the age of 10 my teacher had given up trying to use spelling words with me, because I could spell anything she threw at me. I had a lot of that in Grades 3, 4 and 5. They just could not teach me anything more, so there was a lot of sitting in the corner doing nothing, or a lot of silent reading.' ⁶³¹	'My once enthusiastic but now deflated daughter said "What's the point of school, Mum?" And when asked to elaborate she's added, "school is great if you are in the middle, but it's a waste of time for me ... when do I get to do some real learning?"' ⁶³²
Kim, parent	Sonia, parent	Tina, Year 9 student
'I was really hopeful that through primary school he would get some extra help, but that was where it ended—in Prep. In Grade 1 he was sent home with the same work, and I kept having the same discussions with the teachers over and over again, saying, "I think he can do more than this. Is there something else that we can do?". "Oh yes, we will extend him", but nothing happened.' ⁶³³	'I didn't realise what it was like for him at school until one day halfway through year one he said "Today we started to learn to tell the time. That's the first time I've learnt anything at school." That really hit home to me.' ⁶³⁴	'I found there was a lot of compromising in the classroom [at primary school] ... I don't remember learning anything that was sort of given to me in terms of challenging myself. It was more or less individual learning and maths particularly. I was sort of left to my own devices ...' ⁶³⁵

Improving gifted education in mainstream classrooms

Chapter five described a range of educational strategies that can be used to effectively cater for gifted students in mainstream classrooms, including curriculum differentiation, ability grouping and acceleration. That chapter noted that these strategies do not appear to be widely used in Victorian classrooms at present and recommended increased information and support to help teachers implement these approaches.

Inquiry participants particularly emphasised curriculum differentiation as a key method for accommodating gifted children in mainstream primary school classrooms. The use of curriculum differentiation to provide learning to suit individual student needs at one school, Camelot Rise Primary School, has already been highlighted (see figure 14). Many participants called for curriculum differentiation to be used as a matter of course in every Victorian primary school classroom. Dr Munro of Melbourne University stated:

⁶³⁰ Mr Bruce Verity, School Council member and parent, Nossal High School, *Transcript of evidence*, Berwick, 26 July 2011, 4–5.

⁶³¹ Ms Caelli Greenbank, student, *Transcript of evidence*, Melbourne, 19 September 2011, 5.

⁶³² Ms Henriette Boonen-Hackett, *Submission 26*, 1–2.

⁶³³ Kim, *Transcript of evidence*, above n 628, 8.

⁶³⁴ Maroondah Gifted Children's Parents' Association, *Submission 98*, 5.

⁶³⁵ Tina, Year 9 student, Box Hill High School, *Transcript of evidence*, Box Hill, 29 August 2011, 2.

In terms of the primary years I would like to see in place the differentiated curriculum ... where the children are continuing to interact with like-minded peers so when they have a birthday party the children who come are basically chronological age children. The friendships would be there even through these same gifted children could be learning a long way ahead, and they would be valued and respected by their peers for the knowledge that they are acquiring and not be seen as geeks or as someone who is strange and out there and needs to go somewhere else.⁶³⁶

Similarly, Ms Gabrielle Leigh, President of the Victorian Principals Association, which represents primary school principals and leaders, told the Committee that the focus in primary school is on 'students learning together in teams and getting to understand different nationalities, different limitations and just the differentiation of Australian society'.⁶³⁷ She argued that this is best achieved through catering for gifted primary school students through curriculum differentiation in mainstream classrooms, rather isolating them into separate schools or streams.

A SEAL-type program for primary schools?

Many participants argued that a comprehensive gifted education program along the lines of the Select Entry Accelerated Learning (SEAL) Program, which operates in selected Victorian secondary schools, should be implemented at the primary school level. For example, Ms Colleen Carapetis who gave evidence on behalf of the Gifted Support Network, commented:

If you have a SEAL Program at primary school level, it would be coordinated like it is at high school. Doesn't coordination make more sense than just this one-off bandaid solution?⁶³⁸

Several participants referred the Committee to gifted education programs operating in primary schools in other Australian jurisdictions, especially New South Wales and Western Australia, and suggested that Victoria is lagging behind in catering for gifted primary school students.⁶³⁹ Figure 16 sets out the key features of the programs for gifted primary school students in those jurisdictions.

⁶³⁶ Associate Professor John Munro, *Transcript of evidence*, above n 600, 10. See also Names withheld, *Submission 29*, 6; VPA, *Submission 105*, 3; Dr Leonie Kronborg, Coordinator of Gifted Education Assessment Clinic, Krongold Centre, *Transcript of evidence*, Melbourne, 12 September 2011, 6.

⁶³⁷ Ms Gabrielle Leigh, *Transcript of evidence*, above n 628, 8.

⁶³⁸ Ms Colleen Carapetis, Past committee member, Gifted Support Network, *Transcript of evidence*, Melbourne, 12 September 2011, 7. See also Names withheld, *Submission 29*, 7; Gifted Support Network, *Submission 49*, 14; Ms Caelli Greenbank, *Transcript of evidence*, above n 631, 2; Wayne, parent, *Transcript of evidence*, Melbourne, 19 September 2011, 11; Heike, *Transcript of evidence*, above n 628, 8–9; Kim, *Transcript of evidence*, above n 628, 8.

⁶³⁹ Dr Leonie Kronborg, Coordinator of Gifted Education Assessment Clinic, Krongold Centre, Faculty of Education, Monash University, *Submission 104*, 8; Mrs Jo Freitag, *Transcript of evidence*, above n 623, 4; Dr Michael Faulkner, Lecturer, School of Education, La Trobe University, *Transcript of evidence*, Bendigo, 20 September 2011, 5; Ms Maya Panisset, *Submission 31*, 2; Ms Sonia Fullerton, *Submission 33*, 2.

Figure 16: Gifted education programs for primary school students in New South Wales and Western Australia

Opportunity classes (New South Wales)⁶⁴⁰
<p>Opportunity classes cater for highly-achieving, academically talented students in Years 5 and 6 and aim to provide intellectual stimulation and a rich educational environment. Entry to these classes is through a competitive test in Year 4.</p> <p>The opportunity class model varies between participating schools. Schools may choose to have distinct Year 5 and Year 6 opportunity classes, composite Year 5 and 6 classes, or to mix opportunity classes with regular classes.</p> <p>There are currently 117 opportunity classes run across 74 primary schools throughout the state, offering places for 1785 places for Year 5 students.</p>
Primary Extension and Challenge Program (PEAC) (Western Australia)⁶⁴¹
<p>PEAC is a pull-out program for students in Years 5 to 7, which aims to provide gifted students with the chance to meet and work with like-minded peers. Entry is through state-wide testing in Year 4, although teachers may nominate students who miss the test.</p> <p>Participating students travel from their schools to PEAC centres (often primary or secondary schools) where they take part in programs designed to extend their learning.</p> <p>PEAC operates three times a year, offering weekly sessions of 2 to 2.5 hours over a 10 to 12 week period. Students who are unable to attend can participate in the program online. The online component of PEAC is discussed in chapter five.</p> <p>There are 15 PEAC centres across Western Australia, catering for approximately 3600 students.</p>

Selective entry primary schools?

A number of participants called for the establishment of dedicated primary schools for gifted students, similar to the selective entry schools that currently cater for high-achieving secondary students. Kim, a participant in the Committee's Parents' Forum, commented:

I would love to see select-entry schools for primary school ... because at the moment we have to wait for Year 9 to get into select-entry schools. If the children are not extended, encouraged and celebrated for what they can do, many have lost interest by then; it is too late.⁶⁴²

Similarly, a gifted eight-year-old who made a submission to the Inquiry wrote, 'a good way to improve gifted education would be if there were separate schools for gifted children'.⁶⁴³

The role of private programs

There are a number of user-pays programs for gifted students that are run in conjunction with some Victorian primary schools. The Committee received positive feedback about the two main providers, G.A.T.E.WAYS and WiseOnes. For example, Ms Rhonda Allen

⁶⁴⁰ Department of Education and Communities (New South Wales), *Submission 99*, 2; Department of Education and Communities (New South Wales), *Opportunity class placement*, <www.schools.nsw.edu.au/ocplacement> viewed 11 April 2012.

⁶⁴¹ Letter from Minister for Education (Western Australia), to Chair, Victorian Parliament Education and Training Committee, 10 November 2011, 1–3.

⁶⁴² Kim, *Transcript of evidence*, above n 628, 8. See also Name withheld, *Submission 94*, 2; Ms Kim Steere, *Submission 61*, 3; Maroondah Gifted Children's Parents' Association, *Submission 98*, 10; CHIP Foundation, *Submission 77*, 7; Ms Felicity Walker, *Submission 69*, 5.

⁶⁴³ Name withheld, *Submission 109*.

told the Committee that her son would walk out of G.A.T.E.WAYS programs 'buzzing with the excitement of being with like minded peers'.⁶⁴⁴

However, several participants were concerned that some schools are overly reliant on these programs and make no other provision for gifted students. Box Hill High School described externally run withdrawal programs as 'a part-time solution to a full-time need'.⁶⁴⁵ This was acknowledged by the program providers themselves. G.A.T.E.WAYS Director, Ms Jill Lawrence, commented, 'We hope that that we are just a bonus and that we are providing part of their program but not the complete program.'⁶⁴⁶

Some participants highlighted that these programs are not equally accessible to all gifted students as they are not available in all schools and, where they are available, parents must pay for their child to participate.⁶⁴⁷ WiseOnes advocated that DEECD should fund it to offer its programs more broadly, particularly in schools in low socioeconomic areas.⁶⁴⁸ Other participants argued that parents should receive support from their school or DEECD to meet the costs of their child's participation in these programs.⁶⁴⁹

A small number of submissions expressed concern about the quality of external programs offered in Victorian schools. Parents Victoria, the peak body representing parent associations, argued 'the program provided must be thoroughly scrutinised by the school governance body before recommending to parents'.⁶⁵⁰ Mr Burrage of DEECD agreed that some vigilance is required:

We do not want people [schools] making bad decisions. We would encourage them to connect with networks and other people working in the area to have a good sense of the quality of the programs they are getting in.⁶⁵¹

Improving gifted education in primary schools—The Committee's view

Providing appropriate opportunities for gifted students at primary school is vital, laying the foundation for these students to fulfil their potential in later education, as well as in life more generally. As highlighted in chapter three, the Committee considers that, overall, Victorian primary schools are not adequately providing for their gifted pupils at present.

The Committee's fundamental premise is that gifted students must be catered for in every Victorian primary school classroom. The Committee has proposed that this principle lie at the centre of gifted education policy in Victoria (see recommendation four) and be reinforced by a clear requirement for schools to cater for the specific educational needs of any student identified as gifted (see recommendation 16).

⁶⁴⁴ Ms Rhonda Allen, *Submission 14*, 2. See also WiseOnes Australia, *Submission 18*, 4–5.

⁶⁴⁵ Box Hill High School, *Submission 81*, 5. See also Ms Larelle Parker, *Submission 11*, 1; Victorian Association of Catholic Primary School Principals (VACPSP), *Submission 111*, 3; Dr Gail Byrne, *Submission 63*, above n 616, 5.

⁶⁴⁶ Ms Jill Lawrence, Director, G.A.T.E.WAYS, *Transcript of evidence*, Melbourne, 25 July 2011, 5. See also Ms Win Smith, Director, G.A.T.E.WAYS, *Transcript of evidence*, Melbourne, 25 July 2011, 5.

⁶⁴⁷ Ms Katherine Pomeroy and Mr Nigel Cunningham, *Submission 59*, 2; Ms Rhonda Allen, *Submission 14*, 2; Belgrave Parent Support Group for Gifted and Talented Students, *Submission 60*, 2; Box Hill High School, *Submission 81*, 5; Parents Victoria, *Submission 82*, 4; Ms Jennifer Grant, Gifted Education Specialist, WiseOnes Australia teacher, *Submission 97*, 2; VACPSP, *Submission 111*, 3.

⁶⁴⁸ WiseOnes Australia, *Submission 18*, 15.

⁶⁴⁹ Ms Katherine Pomeroy and Mr Nigel Cunningham, *Submission 59*, 3; Name withheld, *Submission 75*, 2.

⁶⁵⁰ Parents Victoria, *Submission 82*, 5. See also Ms Kim Steere, *Submission 61*, 4.

⁶⁵¹ Mr Ian Burrage, *Transcript of evidence*, above n 592, 10.

The previous chapter identified a raft of strategies that can be used to effectively cater for gifted children in mainstream classrooms and schools, including individual learning plans, curriculum differentiation, acceleration and ability grouping. The Committee considers it essential that these strategies, particularly curriculum differentiation, are used extensively to provide personalised learning for every gifted primary school student. The use of these strategies in every primary school classroom as a matter of course is particularly important because of the absence of targeted schools or programs for gifted students at the primary school stage. Therefore, the Committee specifically recommends that both the Victorian and school-level gifted education policies recommended in chapter three should emphasise the importance of using these strategies to cater for gifted students in every Victorian primary school classroom.

To ensure that Victorian primary school teachers have the knowledge and skills to cater for gifted students in their classrooms, the Committee has recommend increased information and support for teachers to implement the most common approaches (see recommendation 18), as well as increased education and training for teachers about educating gifted students more generally (see chapter eight).

The Committee notes considerable support in the evidence for selective entry programs and schools for gifted primary school students. Such programs and schools are currently available at the secondary school level. However, as will be explored in the next chapter, there are significant issues with the accessibility of these schools and programs.

The Committee is concerned that any provisions for gifted primary school students must be equally accessible by all gifted students throughout the state. Therefore, it considers that extended learning opportunities for gifted primary school students are best provided through the virtual school recommended in recommendation 20. This approach will enable gifted students to remain in their local primary school, with a diverse range of peers, while satisfying their need for extended learning and links with similarly advanced students. Using technology to provide extended learning opportunities for primary school students will ensure that these activities are available to gifted students from all backgrounds, and in all parts of the state.

The Committee recognises that a small number of primary schools appear to be very satisfactorily providing for their gifted students. There should be increased opportunities for these schools to share their knowledge, experience and best practice with other schools. This will be explored in chapter nine.

Finally, the Committee acknowledges the contribution of private providers to gifted education in Victorian primary schools. It encourages schools to participate in these activities where appropriate, but emphasises that participation in private withdrawal programs must be just one of a host of extension activities and opportunities available for gifted young students in primary schools. This broad approach will ensure that suitable opportunities are available for all gifted primary school students, regardless of their parents' financial situation.

Recommendation 31: Policy emphasis on catering for gifted students in every Victorian primary school classroom

That the Victorian Government, through the Victorian policy and model school policy on the education of gifted students, emphasise the importance of providing personalised learning for every gifted student in every Victorian primary school classroom.

Case study 8: 'I hope my story may help to illustrate the impact of the current lack of resources for these children'⁶⁵²

'My son is eleven, this year he is in Grade Five.

From a very early age I knew he learned differently to his peers. At age three he was frustrated and angry at himself because he could not read a supermarket catalogue he picked up. Before he turned nine he had read (and understood) the entire Harry Potter series.

I was fortunate in that I was able to send him to a Montessori kindergarten. For three years he blossomed under this philosophy which focused on meeting each individual child's needs, and extending their capabilities. Excellence and high achievement were treated as normal.

I sent my son to the same government primary school his older sister attended. His abilities were quickly recognised by his Prep teacher, and I had high hopes for his education. His teacher could not find any reading material to challenge him. He discovered non-fiction.

Each year after that I found myself having the same conversation with his teachers—he was not being challenged, and was capable of much more than was being asked of him. They assured me they would provide more suitable work for him.

Very little changed. To its credit, the school suggested he skip Grade Three. Academically he was managing easily, but socially it was a disaster. He was not accepted by his new class mates. One commented "What a pity you are so young". He was also missing his friends. After six months of watching my usually exuberant child become a sad little boy, I knew I could not allow the situation to continue. I felt I had to make a choice between his education and his happiness. I chose his happiness and asked for him to be moved back with his original cohort, knowing full well that there would be very little academic stimulation ...

By the following year he had started to "dumb himself down" to fit in with his mates. He didn't want to stand out ... Around this time my child was being sent home with maths homework several years below his ability level. He would ask "Mum do I have to do this?" I was at a loss to justify his teacher's request. I concluded that while the school had gone some way towards identifying my son's abilities, they did not know how to educate him. I feared that if I left him at that school any longer he would end up denying his wonderful abilities ...

I began looking for another school but found the other local primary schools unable to offer any plan of how they would educate my child. I chose an independent school, that while not perfect, my son and I are both very happy with the decision. Within a few weeks he had been invited to join the accelerated maths class, and he learns a language which he acquires at a frightening pace ...'

6.4 Finding out about secondary school options

Several participants in this Inquiry felt that primary schools do not currently do enough to help parents identify an appropriate secondary school for their gifted child. Box Hill High School expressed concern that many students who could benefit from its SEAL Program are not even aware that it exists. The school's submission stated:

⁶⁵² Ms Kim Steere, *Submission 61*, 1–3.

[Parents] wish to be knowledgeably informed by their child's school or teachers as to the range of options if their child is identified as gifted, especially in moving from primary to secondary school. Many parents have felt very let down by their primary schools in this regard.⁶⁵³

Similarly, Heike, a participant in the Committee's Parents' Forum, commented:

There is no information from the [primary] schools about any particular SEAL school that you can go to or any special schools. It is generally expected that you will go to the local high school or to the local Catholic school.⁶⁵⁴

Some participants even claimed that primary schools deliberately withhold information about secondary schools outside the school's zone. One parent who was quoted in a submission from a school's SEAL Program coordinator stated:

I asked the primary school principal would he put some information in their newsletter about the SEAL program ... When the newsletter came out he had put in a one liner! When I phoned and asked why he said that basically it had raised the ire of the powers that be at [the local secondary school] who take most of the students from [the primary school].⁶⁵⁵

Similarly, Box Hill High School was concerned that, 'Many primary schools do not allow or invite secondary schools from out of the immediate geographic area to address their parent information evenings even when that SEAL program is the closest to their school.'⁶⁵⁶

The Committee did hear that some primary schools endeavour to help gifted students find the right secondary school. For example, Ms Marlene Laurent, Principal at Glenferrie Primary School, told the Committee that she works closely with the parents of high-performing students to help them select a suitable secondary school for their child:

We have a meeting in Year 5 with our students, because we believe that Year 6 is way too late to be deciding where your child is going. We actually meet with our parents, and we talk about transition and how important it is, how to work out what is the best school for your child, which schools are their local schools and what they have to do to apply for going to the school they are not zoned for ...⁶⁵⁷

Mr Cunningham, Principal of Camelot Rise Primary School, told the Committee that staff at his school do not make specific recommendations about appropriate secondary schools for gifted students. However, he advised that representatives from the CHIP Foundation, an independent advisory service specialising in the needs of gifted children, presented to the school's Gifted and Talented Parent's Support Group about secondary school options. Mr Cunningham opined that this was 'very informative support to the parents'.⁶⁵⁸

Box Hill High School proposed that primary schools should 'have an obligation to explain to parents their options with regard to an appropriate program or recommended direction when students approach the end of primary school'.⁶⁵⁹ The school suggested that relevant primary school staff should receive specific training so that they can give quality advice to students and parents.

⁶⁵³ Box Hill High School, *Submission 81*, 4. See also Maroondah Gifted Children's Parents' Association, *Submission 98*, 8–9.

⁶⁵⁴ Heike, *Transcript of evidence*, above n 628, 12.

⁶⁵⁵ Ms Debbi Daff, SEAL and Enhancement Coordinator, Sale College, *Submission 70*, 5.

⁶⁵⁶ Box Hill High School, *Submission 81*, 5.

⁶⁵⁷ Ms Marlene Laurent, *Transcript of evidence*, above n 620, 21.

⁶⁵⁸ Mr Bruce Cunningham, *Transcript of evidence*, above n 615, 9.

⁶⁵⁹ Box Hill High School, *Submission 81*, 7.

The Committee recognises that choosing an appropriate secondary school is one of the most momentous decisions parents make throughout their child's educational journey. It is imperative that parents have access to comprehensive information about secondary school options to assist their decision-making at this time. The Committee notes that lack of information about secondary school options for gifted students is part of a broader issue pertaining to lack of information about gifted education programs generally. The Committee considers this wider issue in detail in chapter ten, and makes specific recommendations for improving information about educational options for gifted students at all stages of their education, including their transition to secondary school.

Case study 9: '[A]cceptance and placement with like-abled children made all the difference'⁶⁶⁰

'I am the parent of 2 gifted girls. We are a one-income family and cannot afford private school, nor are we likely to be able to afford it in the future ...

My eldest daughter likes to "fit in" at best and "not stand out" at the least. In preschool (in NSW) she was told that "we don't read in preschool" and so she stopped reading. Thanks to a willing principal and her cousin being Dux, we were able to place her in a Prep/1 composite with 12 highly able prep students and she thrived—jumping immediately from level 6 readers to level 30 readers and then Rainbow Fairies in 2 months. Clearly, for her, identification and acceptance and placement with like-abled children made all the difference.

When we had to leave NSW because of my husband's work we chose Melbourne over Sydney because, as a relocating family, we felt we could afford to live near a "good school" in Melbourne, whereas in Sydney I could not find such a neighborhood. We chose Clifton Hill because of ease of commute for my husband, an interracial community, but mostly because of Clifton Hill Primary School (Gold Street) which has a reputation for accepting and catering for gifted kids.

Both of the girls are now at Clifton Hill and thriving. The quality of the teachers is *key* for the girls. Our Prep teacher is excellent at identifying G & T [gifted and talented] kids (an[d] accepting their quirks) and taking them through the curriculum without losing their interest. Her flexibility is amazing. I'm not a teacher, I don't know how she does it, but I know that she is an outlier herself (singer, actress, nurse and teacher). All prep kids should have such a great start.

My grade 2 daughter has just had pre-testing in maths using an adaptive tool that left her with *such* enthusiasm!! I highly recommend this sort of tool as an identifier. She felt she did her best and she had *fun* doing it, and I know the teacher now knows her level as well as any gaps in her knowledge. Brilliant!'

⁶⁶⁰ Ms Maya Panisset, *Submission 31*, 1–2.

Chapter 7: Improving gifted education programs in secondary schools

Key findings

- Some individual secondary schools have established their own gifted education programs. These programs vary in quality. Parents and students may be confused about these programs, in particular about how they differ from the SEAL Program.
- Selective entry, SEAL and specialist schools play a valuable role in catering for Victoria's gifted and high-achieving students. Demand for places at these schools exceeds supply and these schools are not equally accessible to students in all parts of the state.
- The SEAL Program caters for a significant number of gifted and high-achieving students in Victoria. While experiences of the program are overwhelmingly positive, the number of issues identified with the Program suggests that an evaluation is overdue.
- Victoria's selective entry, SEAL and specialist schools have diverse student populations, although some groups, such as Indigenous students, appear to be underrepresented at these schools.
- There are relative low levels of awareness of Victoria's selective entry, SEAL and specialist schools, particularly among students from backgrounds of educational disadvantage and their families.
- There is significant potential for selective entry and specialist schools to use outreach activities to provide educational opportunities to gifted students throughout Victoria.
- Gifted student athletes in Victorian secondary schools may require special support to balance their sport and school work. Partnerships between individual schools and the Victorian Institute of Sport are an important first step in giving student athletes the support they need.
- It is currently difficult for gifted students to obtain early entry to Victoria's universities. University admission policies need to be flexible enough to allow early entry to gifted students where appropriate.

Improving gifted education programs in secondary schools

This chapter explores strategies for improving gifted education programs in Victorian secondary schools. Firstly, this chapter discusses gifted education programs that have been established by individual secondary schools. It then considers the three initiatives that currently form the cornerstone of gifted education in Victoria: selective entry schools; the Select Entry Accelerated Learning (SEAL) Program; and specialist schools. In particular, strategies for promoting awareness of and access to these programs are explored.

This chapter also considers the support needed by gifted students on Victorian Institute of Sport scholarships studying at Victorian secondary schools and, finally, early entry to university for gifted students.

7.1 School-level programs

The Committee's approach to gifted education centres on ensuring that gifted students are provided for in all Victorian schools. In chapter five the Committee set out a host of approaches that can and should be used by teachers and schools to provide personalised learning for gifted students. In addition to this, some individual secondary schools have established their own gifted education programs.

As noted in chapter two, the absence of any central database of gifted education programs makes it difficult to assess the extent of these in Victoria's secondary schools. However, anecdotal evidence to this Inquiry suggests that such programs are quite common. For example, the Victorian Association of State Secondary Principals claims:

there are many schools who have developed their own select entry program—for example, there are 12 schools which use Edutest [an educational assessment service] to test students for scholarship or advanced program entry.⁶⁶¹

Similarly, Dr Margaret Plunkett, a Senior Lecturer in the Faculty of Education at Monash University, told the Committee that in the Gippsland region where she is based, 'there are three official SEAL programs and many more unofficial ones operating'.⁶⁶² She explained that non-SEAL schools have set up their own extension programs 'as a way of

⁶⁶¹ Victorian Association of State Secondary Principals (VASSP), 'Position paper: Specialist schools', included in *Submission 27 Appendix A*, 1.

⁶⁶² Dr Margaret Plunkett, Senior Lecturer, Faculty of Education, Monash University, *Transcript of evidence*, Melbourne, 12 September 2011, 11.

preventing their students having to leave their school and go to one of the three main schools that offer SEAL programs'.⁶⁶³

As noted in chapter two, while several secondary schools participating in this Inquiry indicated they do run school-based gifted education programs, the Committee did not receive detailed information about these.⁶⁶⁴ Often these programs or provisions are run in addition to other offerings at the school, such as the SEAL Program.

A number of participants in this Inquiry raised concerns about the quality of school-level gifted education programs. In particular, there was frustration about the fact that parents and students did not understand the available options, especially the differences between SEAL and non-SEAL offerings. The Maroondah Gifted Children's Parents' Association submitted:

Other programs (for high achieving students) operate in some government secondary schools and it is excellent to see schools offering these. However, do they really cater for gifted students? In our experience parents are frequently not aware of the difference between these programs and approved SEAL programs.⁶⁶⁵

Box Hill High School, a SEAL school, was concerned that some schools used their gifted education programs as a marketing tool, submitting, 'Schools which offer non-SEAL programs that claim to cater for gifted students mislead parents about the expertise of staff and the suitability of their program to cater for genuinely gifted students'.⁶⁶⁶ The school's Principal, Mr Neil Davis, told the Committee that 'in many cases they're marketing programs, not actually addressing the needs of children and so they will appear under a number of different sorts of banners and titles around the place'.⁶⁶⁷ Box Hill High School suggested that DEECD should audit all non-SEAL programs 'to verify their appropriateness for gifted students'.⁶⁶⁸

The Committee notes concern about the variability quality of some school-level gifted education programs in Victorian schools. This seems an inevitable consequence of Victoria's fundamental educational approach, which, as highlighted in chapter two, emphasises individual school autonomy. The Committee recognises that, on the positive side, this autonomous approach encourages creativity and innovation in schools.

Throughout this report, the Committee makes a number of recommendations that it believes will increase quality and consistency of gifted education programs in Victorian secondary schools, while still respecting the autonomy of each school to determine its own curriculum and pedagogy. These include:

- increased central support for schools in terms of clear policy guidance and readily available information and advice (see chapter three)
- regular evaluation of all gifted education programs (see chapter three)

⁶⁶³ *ibid.*

⁶⁶⁴ Belmont High School, *Submission 5*, 1; Goldfields Local Learning and Employment Network, *Submission 86*, 5; Ms Meredith Fetting, Assistant Principal, Bendigo Senior Secondary College, *Transcript of evidence*, Bendigo, 20 September 2011, 2–3; Lilydale High School, *Submission 47*, 1; Rosebud Secondary College, *Submission 50*, 6; Ms Monica Jago, SEAL Program Coordinator, Wangaratta High School, *Submission 48*, 8.

⁶⁶⁵ Maroondah Gifted Children's Parents' Association, *Submission 98*, 9. See also Lilydale High School, *Submission 47*, 4.

⁶⁶⁶ Box Hill High School, *Submission 81*, 10.

⁶⁶⁷ Mr Neil Davis, Acting Principal, Box Hill High School, *Transcript of evidence*, Box Hill, 29 August 2011, 2.

⁶⁶⁸ Box Hill High School, *Submission 81*, 10.

- improved teacher skills and knowledge in relation to gifted education (see chapter eight)
- increased sharing of best practice between individual teachers and schools (see chapter nine).

The Committee recognises that gifted students and their parents are often confused about the plethora of gifted education offerings in Victorian secondary schools. It considers strategies for better informing students and their families about these options in chapter ten.

7.2 Selective entry schools

The section provides an overview of Victoria's four selective entry schools and identifies the benefits and issues pertaining to these schools highlighted by participants in this Inquiry.

7.2.1 Selective entry schools: An overview

Victoria has four government selective entry schools that cater for students in Years 9 to 12. Two of these schools, The Mac.Robertson Girls' High School and Melbourne High School, have educated highly able students for over a century. The remaining two schools were established recently, with Nossal High School opening in 2010 and Suzanne Cory High School taking its first students in 2011. Key information about the location and size of these four schools is set out in figure 17.

Figure 17: Key information about Victoria's selective entry schools⁶⁶⁹

School	Location	Student base	Number of students
Melbourne High School	South Yarra	Boys	1373
Nossal High School	Berwick	Coeducational	398* (Years 9 & 10 only)
Suzanne Cory High School	Werribee	Coeducational	199* (Year 9 only)
The Mac.Robertson Girls' High School	Melbourne	Girls	921

* Enrolments will increase to 200 students per year level across Years 9–12.

Entry to Victoria's four selective entry schools is based on academic merit. All prospective students must sit a common entrance exam, which is held annually. The exam consists of six tests covering numerical reasoning, verbal reasoning, reading comprehension, maths, creative writing and analytical ability.⁶⁷⁰ The selection processes include mechanisms to promote equitable access and to limit the impact of the Year 9 intake on other Victorian secondary schools. These are outlined in figure 18.

⁶⁶⁹ My School and Australian Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting Authority (ACARA), *Find a school*, <<http://www.myschool.edu.au/>> viewed 29 March 2012.

⁶⁷⁰ Department of Education and Early Childhood Development (DEECD), *Practice tests*, <<http://www.education.vic.gov.au/aboutschool/enrolling/selectentry/tests.htm>> viewed 11 May 2012.

Figure 18: Mechanisms to promote fair and equitable access to selective entry schools⁶⁷¹

Equity consideration
Up to 10% of Year 9 enrolments at each school can be filled by students whose parents have a Commonwealth Health Care Card or Pension Card, or who are of Indigenous descent.
5% rule
A maximum of 5% of Year 8 students from any one school can be selected into a selective entry high school based on exam performance only.
Principal's discretion
The principal of each school has discretion to offer up to 5% of Year 9 enrolments to students who achieved above the cut off score but were not offered a place because of the 5% rule, or students who missed the cut off score by 5 marks. For example, this discretion may be used to enrol students from underrepresented schools, or students who have leadership potential. ⁶⁷²

7.2.2 Benefits of selective entry schools

While Victoria's selective entry schools have never been evaluated,⁶⁷³ evidence to the Inquiry shows that these schools can provide benefits both to their students, as well the wider community.

Benefits for students

Participants in this Inquiry highlighted that selective entry schools provide both academic and social and emotional benefits for students.

Academic benefits

The evidence suggests that selective entry schools can have positive academic outcomes for students. Students from The Mac.Robertson Girls' High School and Melbourne High School are consistently among the top Victorian Certificate of Education (VCE) performers.⁶⁷⁴ Graduates of both schools also have high application rates to university and low dropout rates once they get there.⁶⁷⁵

As Nossal High School and Suzanne Cory High School have only recently opened, they are yet to produce their first VCE graduates. However, the 2011 National Assessment Program—Literacy and Numeracy (NAPLAN) data shows that Year 9 students at both schools are performing above the state average in both literacy and numeracy.⁶⁷⁶

⁶⁷¹ DEECD, *2013 Year 9 entry to selective entry high schools: Information pack* (n.d.) DEECD. Available at <<http://www.education.vic.gov.au/aboutschool/enrolling/selectentry/schools.htm>> viewed 11 May 2012.

⁶⁷² Mr Roger Page, Principal, Nossal High School, *Transcript of evidence*, Berwick, 26 July 2011, 7.

⁶⁷³ Letter from Minister for Education (Victoria), to Chair, Victorian Parliament Education and Training Committee, 7 February 2012, 10.

⁶⁷⁴ Victorian Curriculum and Assessment Authority (VCAA), *Post-compulsory completion and achievement information* (2003–2011) VCAA. Available at <<http://www.vcaa.vic.edu.au/vce/statistics/schoolstats/index.html>> viewed 2 March 2012; The Mac.Robertson Girls' High School, *Submission 83*, 2.

⁶⁷⁵ Ms Amy Porter, Assistant Principal, The Mac.Robertson Girls' High School, *Transcript of evidence*, Melbourne, 26 July 2011, 9.

⁶⁷⁶ My School and ACARA, above n 669.

Students from The Mac.Robertson Girls' High School and Melbourne High School also performed highly in these tests.

Teachers and students at Victoria's selective entry schools emphasised that the environment at these schools can drive strong achievement. For example, Georgina, a Year 12 student at The Mac.Robertson Girls' High School, told the Committee:

I could kind of coast along at my old school. There was nothing to make me keep up or push myself. I could put in minimal effort and still get decent grades, and there was no impetus to make me work any harder, but then you come here and everyone is so intelligent and puts in so much work. It is massive motivation to start working.⁶⁷⁷

Social and emotional benefits

Participants in this Inquiry felt that attending a selective entry school has both social and emotional benefits for high-achieving students. In particular, students spoke of the advantages of being surrounded by peers with similar abilities and motivations. For instance, Kayla, a Year 12 student at The Mac.Robertson Girls' High School, said:

It was really hard to be open and to grow as a person, let alone as a student, in a classroom at my old school. I came from a girls' school as well. The girls at Mac.Rob are completely different to the girls at my old school. It is a relief to get into a classroom and feel that everyone wants you to grow ... It is really nice to go into a classroom and learn, comment, be interactive and not worry that someone is going to think the worst of you.⁶⁷⁸

Likewise, Ms Anne-Marie Hermans, the parent of Nossal High School student, told the Committee about the benefits of her son's move to the school:

When he got in here he totally transformed. I mean, I felt like crying ... He was so different even on the first day of coming here. He was a transformed boy. He walked taller. He was more confident. He was excited about what he was learning. He made friends. He was around other students who he could talk to.⁶⁷⁹

Some of the evidence suggested that students at selective entry schools feel less isolated than those enrolled in a selective entry program or class within a mainstream school. For instance, Nossal High School teacher, Ms Michelle Desaulniers, explained:

Previously I was at a school that had a SEAL Program. Within that program the students felt quite comfortable in their small classroom, but as soon as they left the confines of that classroom they were still looked down upon. They were not included in the school community, whereas here everyone is in the same boat. There is much more of a community here, and it is not just a small group over there that is the SEAL group. It is a whole community here at Nossal.⁶⁸⁰

⁶⁷⁷ Georgina, Year 12 student, The Mac.Robertson Girls' High School, *Transcript of evidence*, Melbourne, 26 July 2011, 6. See also Zoe, Year 12 student, The Mac.Robertson Girls' High School, *Transcript of evidence*, Melbourne, 26 July 2011, 4; Nossal High School, *Submission 57*, 23–24; Mr Roger Page, *Transcript of evidence*, above n 672, 8; Ms Michelle Desaulniers, Teacher, Nossal High School, *Transcript of evidence*, Berwick, 26 July 2011, 5; Mr Murray Jones, parent, Nossal High School, *Transcript of evidence*, Berwick, 26 July 2011, 4.

⁶⁷⁸ Kayla, Year 12 student, The Mac.Robertson Girls' High School, *Transcript of evidence*, Melbourne, 26 July 2011, 2.

⁶⁷⁹ Ms Anne-Marie Hermans, School Council member and parent, Nossal High School, *Transcript of evidence*, Berwick, 26 July 2011, 3.

⁶⁸⁰ Ms Michelle Desaulniers, *Transcript of evidence*, above n 677, 5. See also Emma, Year 10 student, Nossal High School, *Transcript of evidence*, Berwick, 26 July 2011, 3; Mr Bruce Verity, School Council member and parent, Nossal High School, *Transcript of evidence*, Berwick, 26 July 2011, 3.

Finally, the Committee heard that selective entry schools can provide a particularly supportive environment for high-achieving students with disabilities or heightened social and emotional needs. Ms Jane Garvey, the Principal of The Mac.Robertson Girls' High School, told the Committee that both teachers and students at her school provide succour for students with special needs:

I am thinking of one [student] who had panic attacks about twice a day. She had a roster of teachers and places she could go to where she would find support. She would adopt the foetal position on the floor and shake and would then relax slowly and be able to talk through the issue with that particular teacher and be supported to go back into class ... There was one particular girl who found it difficult to cope with even simple things like public transport. The girls would make sure she knew what tram to get on, and they would make sure she got on the right tram.⁶⁸¹

Benefits for the wider community

The evidence to this Inquiry also suggests that selective entry schools provide benefits for neighbouring schools, as well as the surrounding community. For example, the new facilities at Suzanne Cory High School and Nossal High School are being used to provide professional development for teachers from other schools.⁶⁸² In addition, Suzanne Cory High School informed the Committee that local sporting groups and a Chinese language school use the school's facilities.⁶⁸³ These schools are also currently considering opportunities for outreach. This is discussed further in section 7.5.3 below.

7.2.3 Issues with selective entry schools

The evidence received by the Committee demonstrates that selective entry schools play a valuable role in educating gifted and high-achieving students in Victoria. However, Inquiry participants identified a number of issues with these schools.

Demand for places

Demand for places at Victoria's four selective entry schools is extremely competitive. Approximately 3000 students sit the entrance exam each year, but in 2011 only 933 students secured a place at one of the four schools.⁶⁸⁴

Many participants emphasised that the current four schools are a long way from satisfying student demand. Parent, Ms Hermans, told the Committee:

The number of schools for select entry in Victoria seems to me to be extremely limited. If Nossal had not come about, we would have only had the option of Melbourne High. I was very grateful that there was something a little bit closer to home that we could send our child to. I know that it is costly, but I think it is something that the Victorian Government should consider.⁶⁸⁵

⁶⁸¹ Ms Jane Garvey, Principal, The Mac.Robertson Girls' High School, *Transcript of evidence*, Melbourne, 26 July 2011, 7.

⁶⁸² Letter from Principal, Suzanne Cory High School, to Executive Officer, Victorian Parliament Education and Training Committee, 27 February 2012, 1; Nossal High School, *Submission 57*, 18.

⁶⁸³ Letter from Principal, Suzanne Cory High School, above n 682, 2–3.

⁶⁸⁴ DEECD, *Submission 58*, 6.

⁶⁸⁵ Ms Anne-Marie Hermans, *Transcript of evidence*, above n 679, 6. See also Suzanne Cory High School, *Submission 85*, 3; Ms Toni Meath, Assistant Principal, Nossal High School, *Transcript of evidence*, Berwick,

The Committee heard that other Australian jurisdictions provide more selective entry schools.⁶⁸⁶ For instance, New South Wales has 46 partially and fully selective entry schools, providing places for 4126 Year 7 students.⁶⁸⁷

Location of schools

All four selective entry schools are located in metropolitan Melbourne. Some participants in this Inquiry highlighted that this significantly limits their accessibility to students living in rural and regional Victoria.⁶⁸⁸ Students living in some parts Melbourne also may not have ready access to selective entry schools. In particular, two parents complained about the lack of a selective entry school in Melbourne's northern suburbs.⁶⁸⁹

Accessibility to students from backgrounds of educational disadvantage

There was mixed evidence about the accessibility of selective entry schools to students from backgrounds of educational disadvantage.

The evidence suggested that students from some groups traditionally associated with educational disadvantage are well represented at these schools. Approximately 80% of students in all four selective entry schools come from non-English speaking backgrounds.⁶⁹⁰ In addition, the Committee heard that at least a third of students at The Mac.Robertson Girls' High School receive an education maintenance allowance, a benefit provided to low-income families to help with education costs.⁶⁹¹

However, Indigenous students appear to be significantly underrepresented at all four schools. Mr Lionel Bamblett, General Manager of the Victorian Aboriginal Education Association, an organisation which represents Victoria's Indigenous community in relation to education, told the Committee that he was not aware of any Indigenous students enrolled in Victoria's selective entry schools.⁶⁹² Suzanne Cory High School and Nossal High School both reported that they had one student of Indigenous heritage.⁶⁹³

As outlined earlier in this chapter, the current selection processes contain two measures to promote equitable access to Victoria's selective entry schools (see figure 18). Ms Garvey told the Committee that all students offered a position at The Mac.Robertson Girls' High School under the equity consideration in 2010 had received a test score below the cut-off score and would not have otherwise gained a place at the school. However, she expressed concern that sometimes these students do not have the same academic capabilities as other students at the school, commenting, 'Having students come in well below the cut-off point on equity is a concern for us because it is so deleterious to the students themselves.'⁶⁹⁴

26 July 2011, 7; Ms Maya Panisset, *Submission 31*, 2; VASSP, *Submission 27*, 4; Mr Ranasinghe Bandara, *Submission 80*, 1; Faculty of Education, Australian Catholic University, *Submission 13*, 11.

⁶⁸⁶ Dr Leonie Kronborg, Coordinator of Gifted Education Assessment Clinic, Krongold Centre, Faculty of Education, Monash University, *Submission 104*, 7–8; Ms Toni Meath, *Transcript of evidence*, above n 685, 4.

⁶⁸⁷ Department of Education and Communities (New South Wales), *Submission 99*, 2–3.

⁶⁸⁸ Suzanne Cory High School, *Submission 85*, 1; Belmont High School, *Submission 5*, 3.

⁶⁸⁹ Name withheld, *Submission 30*; Ms Maya Panisset, *Submission 31*, 2.

⁶⁹⁰ My School and ACARA, above n 669. See also Caroline Milburn, 'Fears over 'white flight' from selective schools', *The Age*, 17 October 2011, 3.

⁶⁹¹ Ms Jane Garvey, *Transcript of evidence*, above n 681, 2.

⁶⁹² Mr Lionel Bamblett, General Manager, Victorian Aboriginal Education Association Incorporated, *Transcript of evidence*, Melbourne, 12 September 2011, 6.

⁶⁹³ Mr Roger Page, *Transcript of evidence*, above n 672, 7; Suzanne Cory High School, *Submission 85*, 1.

⁶⁹⁴ Ms Jane Garvey, *Transcript of evidence*, above n 681, 7.

In contrast, Mr Roger Page, Principal of Nossal High School, told the Committee in relation to students admitted to his school under the equity consideration 'we do not see a whole lot of difference in their performance'.⁶⁹⁵

Awareness of selective entry schools

Some participants expressed concern that there are low levels of awareness about selective entry schools. The Mac.Robertson Girls' High School suggested there are many gifted students who miss out on the benefits of attending a selective entry school because they and their parents are not aware of these schools.⁶⁹⁶

Participants suggested that word of mouth is one of the most common ways people become aware of selective entry schools. For example, Mr Gavin Swayn, the parent of a student at Nossal High School, told the Committee:

we struggled to find out information about the school. We actually struggled to get the information out of the local school. They were not willing to share that information about the school ... We had parents coming to see us because they knew our daughter had got in here and wanted to know the total experience and what to do. I have met other people who say similar things. They come to us and ask, 'How do you get in there? What do you have to do?'. Because inside the mainstream the school is not really trying to advertise that program.⁶⁹⁷

Suzanne Cory High School submitted that the Department of Education and Early Childhood Development (DEECD) was reluctant to promote selective entry schools.⁶⁹⁸ However, the school did note that, on the suggestion of the four selective entry high schools, DEECD provided a circular to primary school principals encouraging them to ensure that parents are aware of these schools.⁶⁹⁹

Suzanne Cory High School also expressed concerns about awareness of selective entry schools in non-English speaking communities.⁷⁰⁰ The school advised that it undertakes its own advertising and promotion, including in the ethnic media.⁷⁰¹

Year 9 commencement

There was considerable support among Inquiry participants for selective entry secondary schools commencing at Year 7 rather than the current Year 9. It was felt that this would not only ensure that the needs of gifted students are met earlier, but also remove the need for students to change schools mid-way through their secondary schooling, which some participants viewed as quite disruptive for both students and their schools.⁷⁰²

⁶⁹⁵ Mr Roger Page, *Transcript of evidence*, above n 672, 6.

⁶⁹⁶ The Mac.Robertson Girls' High School, *Submission 83*, 1. See also Suzanne Cory High School, *Submission 85*, 2; Dr Leonie Kronborg, Senior Lecturer, Coordinator of Post Graduate Studies in Gifted Education, Faculty of Education, Monash University, *Transcript of evidence*, Melbourne, 12 September 2011, 4.

⁶⁹⁷ Mr Gavin Swayn, School Council President and parent, Nossal High School, *Transcript of evidence*, Berwick, 26 July 2011, 2. See also Mr Murray Jones, *Transcript of evidence*, above n 677, 2.

⁶⁹⁸ Suzanne Cory High School, *Submission 85*, 2.

⁶⁹⁹ Letter from Principal, Suzanne Cory High School, above n 682, 2.

⁷⁰⁰ Suzanne Cory High School, *Submission 85*, 2.

⁷⁰¹ Letter from Principal, Suzanne Cory High School, above n 682, 2.

⁷⁰² Maroondah Gifted Children's Parents' Association, *Submission 98*, 10; Name withheld, *Submission 75*, 3; Box Hill High School, *Submission 81*, 8; Suzanne Cory High School, *Submission 85*, 4.

Competition between schools

The ideological concerns about separate schools for high-achieving students expressed by some Inquiry participants have already been discussed in chapter three. There it was noted that a common argument against selective entry schools is the negative consequences associated with taking the best students out of other government schools. These impacts are felt not just by mainstream schools, but also by other schools offering programs for high achievers. For example, Brunswick Secondary College, a SEAL school, submitted:

having government selective schools, as opposed to programs, substantially increases the number of high achieving students taken out of the government school system and can have a major impact on surrounding schools.⁷⁰³

It is not just government schools that may be impacted by the loss of students to selective entry schools. Approximately 50% of Year 9 enrolments at selective entry schools are drawn from the non-government school sector.⁷⁰⁴

The 5% rule is designed to ensure that students are drawn from a broad range of schools and to minimise the impact on any one school. However, the evidence to this Inquiry shows that some schools are still very concerned about losing their best students to selective entry schools in Year 9. In response to this, Ms Garvey of The Mac.Robertson Girls' High School, argued:

It is not about ownership of the students, it is about providing the best opportunities for students who will actually provide an enormous resource in our community ... They are not adequately provided in most mixed-ability schools, and anything we can do to encourage them to reach their potential, rather than hide their potential out of social embarrassment, is potentially the best thing to do for our society in the future.⁷⁰⁵

Enhancing selective entry schools—The Committee's view

The Committee acknowledges that selective entry schools provide important learning opportunities and a positive learning environment for many gifted and high-achieving students.

The Committee notes that there are a number of issues with selective entry schools, most of which focus on the fact that they cater for only a very small number of Victoria's gifted students. The Committee's fundamental approach to gifted education set out in chapter three involves ensuring that gifted students are catered for in every Victorian school. This approach will mean that selective entry schools are not seen as one of the few options for gifted students. In addition, it will ensure that gifted students are effectively provided for prior to Year 9, even if they choose to enter a selective entry school at that stage. The Committee considers the potential to provide more students to access the specialist resources and opportunities at these schools through outreach programs in section 7.5.3 below.

The Committee also notes concerns about the impact on other schools when their best students leave to attend a selective entry school in Year 9. The Committee reiterates its position stated in chapter three that such considerations are outweighed by the right of

⁷⁰³ Brunswick Secondary College, *Submission 40*, 6. See also Lilydale High School, *Submission 47*, 4.

⁷⁰⁴ Suzanne Cory High School, *Submission 85*, 3; Nossal High School, *Submission 57*, 3.

⁷⁰⁵ Ms Jane Garvey, *Transcript of evidence*, above n 681, 9–10. See also The Mac.Robertson Girls' High School, *Submission 83*, 1.

gifted students to access an education that meets their needs. The 5% rule provides some assurance for other schools, restricting the number of students they can lose to a selective entry school. In addition, improved provision for gifted students in all Victorian schools, may mean that many some students choose to remain in their original school, rather than seeking a place at a selective entry school.

The Committee is extremely concerned that Victoria's selective entry schools may not be equally accessible to gifted students from certain backgrounds. This issue is also relevant for both SEAL and specialist schools and the Committee makes specific recommendations for promoting equitable access and increasing awareness of these schools in communities with high levels of educational disadvantage in section 7.5.

7.3 The Select Entry Accelerated Learning (SEAL) Program

This section explores the scope, effectiveness and opportunities to enhance the SEAL Program.

7.3.1 The SEAL Program: An overview

The SEAL Program runs in 36 government schools throughout Victoria, including 13 schools in rural and regional areas (see figure seven in chapter two). Although there are no official figures on the number of students involved in the SEAL Program, the evidence received by the Committee suggests that the Program is catering for a significant number of gifted students in Victoria. In particular, the Committee notes that some of the 36 SEAL schools have more than one SEAL class per year level.⁷⁰⁶ All SEAL schools also have mainstream classes.

According to DEECD, the SEAL Program is designed to 'address the learning needs of gifted and high potential students who are capable of working at a significantly faster pace and in greater depth than their age peers'.⁷⁰⁷ The SEAL Program is based on a form of accelerated learning, with students completing Years 7 to 10 in three years instead of the usual four.

A school wishing to offer the SEAL Program must apply to DEECD. The Department assesses applications using three key selection criteria: the quality of the proposed program; demographic and access issues; as well as evidence of community support and consultation with neighbouring schools.⁷⁰⁸

Each school devises and implements its own program, although DEECD has developed guidelines to assist schools. The guidelines outline that an effective SEAL Program will have:

- Curriculum that has been designed to ensure it is aligned to the Victorian Essential Learning Standards, with curriculum designed at an appropriately challenging level.
- Incorporated the Principles of Learning and Teaching to ensure that teachers can review and develop their teaching practice and that teaching meets the diverse needs of students.

⁷⁰⁶ For example Lilydale High School, *Submission 47*, 1; Box Hill High School, *Submission 81*, 1.

⁷⁰⁷ DEECD, *Select Entry Acceleration Learning (SEAL) Program guidelines* (2007) DEECD (VIC), 4.

⁷⁰⁸ *ibid.*, 5.

- Rigorous, authentic and diverse assessment processes including assessment for, as and of learning that will inform curriculum planning and development.⁷⁰⁹

The SEAL Program is selective entry. However, in contrast to entry to Victoria's four selective entry schools, there is no central entrance exam and each school determines its own criteria. Entry processes must be in line with the DEECD guidelines, which emphasise the importance of using multiple selection tools.⁷¹⁰

An entrance exam is a key part of the selection processes of all SEAL schools. Of the six SEAL schools that were involved in this Inquiry, four provided information about their selection processes:

- Box Hill High School, Mill Park Secondary College and Wangaratta High School use the Higher Ability Selection Test, which is designed to test a student's ability and academic potential in reading comprehension, mathematical reasoning, abstract reasoning and written expression.⁷¹¹
- Rosebud Secondary College uses the New South Wales Year 6 General Achievement Test, which tests proficiency in mathematics, reading and language and writing.⁷¹²

In addition to the entrance exam, these schools look at a range of other material including information from students' primary school teachers, parents and students themselves. Some schools also conduct interviews with prospective students.⁷¹³

As noted earlier, SEAL students complete Years 7 to 10 in three years. After that they have a range of options for their final years of schooling. Some students may choose to complete secondary school after only five years, leaving them free to enter university early, work for a year or travel, including studying languages overseas.⁷¹⁴ Other students may remain at school for a full six years, choosing to undertake additional VCE units, or complete extension studies such as university subjects.⁷¹⁵

DEECD supports teachers involved in the SEAL Program through the SEAL network. This network is made up of representatives of SEAL schools and meets quarterly. The network provides participating teachers with support, opportunities for sharing resources and professional knowledge as well as professional learning opportunities.⁷¹⁶

7.3.2 Benefits of SEAL Programs

Evidence to the Inquiry suggested that the SEAL Program can provide a raft of benefits for participating students, their schools, as well as their teachers. However, most of this evidence was anecdotal and related to individual schools and students only. The

⁷⁰⁹ *ibid.*, 7.

⁷¹⁰ *ibid.*, 15–16.

⁷¹¹ Ms Vanessa Reynolds, Gifted Education Coordinator, Box Hill High School, *Transcript of evidence*, Box Hill, 29 August 2011, 3; Mill Park Secondary College, *Submission 36*, 5; Ms Monica Jago, *Submission 48*, above n 664, 2.

⁷¹² Rosebud Secondary College, *Submission 50*, 2.

⁷¹³ *ibid.*; Ms Monica Jago, *Submission 48*, above n 664, 2; Mill Park Secondary College, *Submission 36*, 5; Lilydale High School, *Submission 47*, 1.

⁷¹⁴ DEECD, *Submission 58*, 7; Rosebud Secondary College, *Submission 50*, 3.

⁷¹⁵ Mill Park Secondary College, *Submission 36*, 4; Rosebud Secondary College, *Submission 50*, 3; Belmont High School, *Submission 5*, 1; DEECD, *Submission 58*, 7.

⁷¹⁶ DEECD, *Select Entry Acceleration Learning (SEAL) Program guidelines*, above n 707, 18.

Committee received limited evidence showing results and outcomes for the SEAL Program overall.

DEECD commissioned a formal evaluation of the SEAL Program in 2004 but, as noted in chapter three of this report, the results of this evaluation were never made public. Upon request, DEECD provided the Committee with a summary of the evaluation's key findings, which showed that parents, students, teachers and program coordinators felt that the SEAL Program was effective in meeting the needs of participating students.⁷¹⁷

Benefits for students

This section examines the impacts of the SEAL Program on students' academic performance, learning experiences and social and emotional wellbeing.

Academic outcomes

Evidence suggests that the SEAL Program fosters positive academic outcomes. The 2004 evaluation found that SEAL students achieved higher VCE results than their non-SEAL counterparts and that most students continued on to tertiary education.⁷¹⁸ Consistent with this, SEAL schools participating in this Inquiry also reported strong VCE results among their SEAL students.⁷¹⁹

Several SEAL students told the Committee that being involved in the SEAL Program can promote positive learning behaviours. Maighan, a student at Mill Park Secondary College, wrote, 'It is my first year in the program and I have already noticed a great difference in my engagement levels in all areas of the curriculum. I feel enthusiastic, motivated and constantly supported'.⁷²⁰ Similarly, Marley, a Year 11 student at Box Hill High School, commented:

I know for me I probably would be very underachieving because I'm one of those people that if I am not pushed I just sit back and do nothing. So if I had have gone to a mainstream school, I would probably be doing really badly, be failing ... but the SEAL Program has kind of helped me reach my full potential ...⁷²¹

Social and emotional benefits

A prominent theme in the evidence was the social and emotional benefits for students of participating in the SEAL Program. In particular, participants stressed that SEAL students have often been isolated in their primary school years, and benefit from the friends and camaraderie they find among the SEAL cohort.⁷²²

A significant number of participants shared their personal experiences of the social and emotional benefits of the SEAL Program and some of these are quoted in figure 19.

⁷¹⁷ Ian Burrage, General Manager, Education Policy and Research Division, DEECD, *Summary of findings 2004 SEAL research*, supplementary evidence received 6 September 2011, 4.

⁷¹⁸ *ibid.*, 3.

⁷¹⁹ Rosebud Secondary College, *Submission 50*, 9–10; Box Hill High School, *Submission 81*, 2.

⁷²⁰ Mill Park Secondary College, *Submission 36*, 15.

⁷²¹ Marley, Year 11 student, Box Hill High School, *Transcript of evidence*, Box Hill, 29 August 2011, 9.

⁷²² Name withheld, *Submission 94*, 2; Ms Larelle Parker, *Submission 11*, 2; Mill Park Secondary College, *Submission 36*, 17. See also Ian Burrage, *Summary of findings 2004 SEAL research*, above n 717, 3.

Figure 19: Social and emotional benefits of participating in the SEAL Program

Ms Caelli Greenbank, former SEAL student	Ms Felicity Walker, parent	Ms Jennifer Grant, parent
'It was also really good socially ... I was placed with 25 other kids who were all like me, it made it a lot easier to make friends, but it also removed a lot of the stigma of being gifted ...' ⁷²³	'In year 7 [my son] was entered into the SEAL programme ... It's almost impossible to describe the difference in him now. He is so happy, confident and relaxed, it's hard to imagine he's the same boy ...' ⁷²⁴	'My daughter found it a social wonderland here. She has just blossomed and bloomed, you could not believe it. She has friends coming out of her ears. It was not like that at primary school. She is an easy going, sociable kind of girl. Social is important to her.' ⁷²⁵
Mr Neil Hamley, SEAL Engagement, Box Hill High School	Ryan, Year 8 SEAL student, Mill Park Secondary College	Ms Wendy White, parent
'They have friends. It is so important for their whole school life. They don't get bullied, they don't get ridiculed, they have friends and get invited to parties.' ⁷²⁶	'SEAL also offers possible lifelong friends, who are mostly responsible and will always be there for you when you need them. They will assist you with work and give you support through the good times and the bad.' ⁷²⁷	'My daughter was able to stop adjusting. She didn't have to have to adjust to try to fit in anymore ... She didn't have to pretend to be interested in Barbie dolls or hide and seek when she was interested in computers or science.' ⁷²⁸

Benefits for the entire school

The SEAL schools participating in this Inquiry reported that their SEAL Program had a positive impact on the educational culture and aspirations of the entire school. For instance, Lilydale High School submitted:

the inclusion of the SEAL program has been and is beneficial for the culture of the wider school community, as it demonstrates a commitment and expectation of academic excellence. This, in turn has a positive effect on the rest of the school's population.⁷²⁹

Similarly, some participants suggested that running a SEAL Program can encourage all students at the school to participate in extension and extracurricular activities. For example, Brunswick Secondary College explained:

New initiatives and extra-curricular activities have been introduced. These are available to all students and the SEALP students have been the catalyst for other students to become involved.⁷³⁰

A number of schools felt that having a SEAL Program meant the school was more highly regarded within the community. The effects of this were twofold: attracting high calibre

⁷²³ Ms Caelli Greenbank, student, *Transcript of evidence*, Melbourne, 19 September 2011, 3.

⁷²⁴ Ms Felicity Walker, *Submission 69*, 2.

⁷²⁵ Mr Jennifer Grant, parent, Box Hill High School, *Transcript of evidence*, Box Hill, 29 August 2011, 4.

⁷²⁶ Mr Neil Hamley, SEAL Engagement, Box Hill High School, *Transcript of evidence*, Box Hill, 29 August 2011, 8.

⁷²⁷ Mill Park Secondary College, *Submission 36*, 16.

⁷²⁸ Ms Wendy White, parent, Box Hill High School, *Transcript of evidence*, Box Hill, 29 August 2011, 4.

⁷²⁹ Lilydale High School, *Submission 47*, 4. See also Ms Debbi Daff, SEAL and Enhancement Coordinator, Sale College, *Submission 70*, 4.

⁷³⁰ Brunswick Secondary College, *Submission 40*, 2.

students to the school⁷³¹ and fewer students leaving these schools to enrol in selective entry schools or private schools.⁷³² Brunswick Secondary College (BSC) submitted:

the program has helped to make BSC a viable choice for some parents who would otherwise have bypassed the school for the private system ... the SEALP program has brought an academic almost imprimatur to Brunswick ...⁷³³

Benefits for teachers

There is evidence that the SEAL Program has a positive impact on teachers' skill levels. The 2004 evaluation found that teachers in SEAL Programs reported increased confidence in using pedagogical approaches suited to high achievers and modifying the curriculum to suit individual needs.⁷³⁴ Participants in this Inquiry also emphasised the improved knowledge and capacity of SEAL teachers to cater to the needs of gifted students.⁷³⁵

Participants felt that the whole school benefited from SEAL teachers' increased skill levels, particularly through the increased use of curriculum differentiation in mainstream classes.⁷³⁶ The Box Hill High School Council told the Committee, 'At Box Hill, as many staff as possible teach in the SEAL Program so as to spread the benefit of hosting a SEAL Program to mainstream classes.'⁷³⁷ Similarly, Mill Park Secondary College stated, 'These teachers have been able to share this knowledge throughout the school, through their various leadership roles and by running professional development sessions of their own during our workshop weeks.'⁷³⁸

However, some Inquiry participants did raise issues with the knowledge and skill levels of some teachers in SEAL Programs.⁷³⁹ This is explored in the next chapter, which deals specifically with teacher education and training.

7.3.3 Issues with the SEAL Program

Overall, the evidence was supportive of the SEAL Program as a mechanism to cater for high-achieving and gifted students in Victoria. Notwithstanding this, some participants identified concerns with the program and its operation. These are discussed below.

The SEAL Program model

A number of participants in this Inquiry raised issues with the SEAL Program's model.

⁷³¹ *ibid.*; Ms Monica Jago, *Submission 48*, above n 664, 10; Ms Debbi Daff, *Submission 70*, above n 729, 4.

⁷³² Mill Park Secondary College, *Submission 36*, 17; Dr Margaret Plunkett, *Transcript of evidence*, above n 662, 9.

⁷³³ Brunswick Secondary College, *Submission 40*, 2.

⁷³⁴ Ian Burrage, *Summary of findings 2004 SEAL research*, above n 717, 3.

⁷³⁵ Ms Debbi Daff, *Submission 70*, above n 729, 2, 4; Box Hill High School Council, *Submission 73*, 1–2; Mill Park Secondary College, *Submission 36*, 12, 17; Brunswick Secondary College, *Submission 40*, 2.

⁷³⁶ Brunswick Secondary College, *Submission 40*, 2; Ms Monica Jago, *Submission 48*, above n 664, 10.

⁷³⁷ Box Hill High School Council, *Submission 73*, 1.

⁷³⁸ Mill Park Secondary College, *Submission 36*, 17.

⁷³⁹ Dr Debora Lipson and Ms Barbara Black, *Submission 78*, 3; Ms Debbi Daff, *Submission 70*, above n 729, 2; Ms Carmel Meehan, President, Victorian Association for Gifted and Talented Children (VAGTC), *Transcript of evidence*, Melbourne, 25 July 2011, 9–10; Dr Leonie Kronborg, *Transcript of evidence*, above n 696, 10; VAGTC, *Submission 34*, 3; Maroondah Gifted Children's Parents' Association, *Submission 98*, 10; Brunswick Secondary College, *Submission 40*, 5; Dr Leonie Kronborg, *Submission 104*, above n 686, 9–10; Ms Mauren Theobald, *Submission 115*, 1; Mrs Jo Freitag, Coordinator, Gifted Resources, *Transcript of evidence*, Melbourne, 19 September 2011, 5.

Firstly, some participants felt the SEAL model, which involves completing Years 7 to 10 in three years instead of the usual four, places an inappropriate emphasis on accelerated learning rather than on depth or quality of learning. For example, Associate Professor John Munro of the Melbourne Graduate School of Education at the University of Melbourne, told the Committee:

the focus should not be on in Year 7 teaching Year 8 content. I believe it should be on teaching an extended understanding of the Year 7 concepts, taking the ideas further so that we develop what I will call that expert knowledge at Year 7.⁷⁴⁰

However, some SEAL schools stressed that their programs do currently focus on depth and breadth of learning. For example, Lilydale High School informed the Committee that from 2010 SEAL students at the school are required to complete six years of secondary schooling. While students still work at an accelerated rate, there is a focus on completing more VCE subjects and undertaking extension studies, such as university subjects.⁷⁴¹ Likewise, Mr Davis, Principal of Box Hill High School, highlighted the diversity of opportunities for SEAL students at his school:

we talk about the acceleration but we also talk about compaction, enrichment – we also talk about a whole lot of other aspects of this work to provide opportunities for children to explore their passions and their talents.⁷⁴²

A second concern about the SEAL Program model is that it may not be challenging enough for some gifted students. Ms Colleen Carapetis, past committee member of the Gifted Support Network, a support group for parents with gifted children, told the Committee:

My son was double accelerated. He skipped Grade 1, he skipped Grade 6 and went from Grade 5 straight into a SEAL Program. The acceleration itself was okay, but the SEAL Program did not really do it for him. He then had to be accelerated on top of that in maths.⁷⁴³

In contrast, Mrs Kate Mitchell, a member of Box Hill High School Council, commented it was 'fairly rare' for the SEAL Program to not be challenging enough for a student.⁷⁴⁴

Finally, the Committee heard that the SEAL Program may be too challenging for students who do not have high abilities in all areas of the curriculum. This problem was articulated by Evangeline, a Year 8 student at Box Hill High School:

Like science and maths, for me I struggle a lot especially as the school concentrates on that and I feel pushed by the ability of other students in my class to keep up with their standard and then my time for the subjects I actually enjoy is decreased and that is how I struggle.⁷⁴⁵

⁷⁴⁰ Associate Professor John Munro, Exceptional Learning and Gifted Education, Graduate School of Education, The University of Melbourne, *Transcript of evidence*, Melbourne, 19 September 2011, 10. See also Ms Susan Wight, *Submission 93*, 1; Ms Lynette Sudholz, *Submission 107*, 1.

⁷⁴¹ Lilydale High School, *Submission 47*, 1.

⁷⁴² Mr Neil Davis, *Transcript of evidence*, above n 667, 2.

⁷⁴³ Ms Colleen Carapetis, Past committee member, Gifted Support Network, *Transcript of evidence*, Melbourne, 12 September 2011, 2. See also Name withheld, *Submission 91*, 3–4; Names withheld, *Submission 45*, 2–3; Ms Moragh Tyler, Wonthaggi interest group for gifted and talented children, *Transcript of evidence*, Melbourne, 19 September 2011, 2.

⁷⁴⁴ Mrs Kate Mitchell, Regional Network Leader, School Councillor, Box Hill High School, *Transcript of evidence*, Box Hill, 29 August 2011, 5.

⁷⁴⁵ Evangeline, Year 8 student, Box Hill High School, *Transcript of evidence*, Box Hill, 29 August 2011, 6. See also Distance Education Centre Victoria, *Submission 24*, 1.

Several SEAL schools acknowledged that some of their students have struggled with particular subjects such as literature, maths or languages other than English, when their gifts lie in other areas.⁷⁴⁶

Program variability

As noted in section 7.3.1, each SEAL school determines its own entry and curriculum requirements, although some assistance is provided by DEECD guidelines. The Committee heard that this results in considerable variation in how the program is implemented in each of the 36 SEAL schools.

Firstly, the school-by-school approach to selection means that there is inconsistency in the students targeted by SEAL schools. For example, Box Hill High School aims to enrol students in the top 8% to 10% of students, while Rosebud Secondary College expects students to be in the top 20%.⁷⁴⁷

Mr Paul Double, a teacher who is on the committee of the Victorian Association for Gifted and Talented Children, a voluntary organisation that supports educators and parents in relation to gifted students, suggested there should be 'stronger co-ordination and streamlining processes for selection' into the SEAL Program.⁷⁴⁸ Conversely, Ms Vanessa Reynolds, Box Hill High School's Gifted Education Coordinator, felt there was a danger that a centralised selection process for the SEAL Program would 'miss a whole lot of unusual quirky gifted kids who might not do well on centralised tests'.⁷⁴⁹

Secondly, the evidence suggests there is significant variation in how the program is actually delivered. Dr Leonie Kronborg, Senior Lecturer in the Faculty of Education at Monash University, and co-author of the 2004 SEAL Program evaluation, told the Committee that the evaluation found:

There was also variation amongst SEAL schools, depending on teacher education and how informed teachers were. I also know about differences amongst programs from anecdotal evidence from students who come in and have had experience either as parents or as teachers.⁷⁵⁰

A number of participants were highly critical of the variation in program quality between schools.⁷⁵¹ Box Hill High School suggested that this should be addressed through formal accreditation of SEAL Programs and clearer program guidelines.⁷⁵²

Thirdly, several participants emphasised that the size of the school and, in particular, the proportion of SEAL to non-SEAL students, can influence students' learning experiences. Mr Neil Hamley, who works in SEAL Engagement at Box Hill High School told the Committee that the school's ratio of 40% SEAL to 60% mainstream students was 'a fantastic model' and that having large groups of mainstream and SEAL students creates a 'symbiosis'.⁷⁵³ Parents also saw benefit in a large SEAL cohort. For example, the

⁷⁴⁶ Ms Lynette Sudholz, *Submission 107*, 2; Rosebud Secondary College, *Submission 50*, 2–3; Mill Park Secondary College, *Submission 36*, 8.

⁷⁴⁷ Mrs Kate Mitchell, *Transcript of evidence*, above n 744, 5; Rosebud Secondary College, *Submission 50*, 1.

⁷⁴⁸ Mr Paul Double, *Submission 15*, 1.

⁷⁴⁹ Ms Vanessa Reynolds, *Transcript of evidence*, above n 711, 10.

⁷⁵⁰ Dr Leonie Kronborg, *Transcript of evidence*, above n 696, 9. See also Ian Burrage, *Summary of findings 2004 SEAL research*, above n 717, 2.

⁷⁵¹ VAGTC, *Submission 34*, 3; Ms Kim Steere, *Submission 61*, 3; Ms Maya Panisset, *Submission 31*, 2; Ms Sonia Fullerton, *Submission 33*, 2; Mr Gavin Swayn, *Transcript of evidence*, above n 697, 2–3.

⁷⁵² Box Hill High School, *Submission 81*, 8.

⁷⁵³ Mr Neil Hamley, *Transcript of evidence*, above n 726, 8.

parent of three gifted children, told the Committee, 'We didn't just want a SEAL program, we wanted a school where our child would be normal, where his intellect would not set him apart but bring him friends.'⁷⁵⁴ Felicity, a parent who participated in the Committee's Parents' Forum stated that she elected to send her gifted son to Box Hill, rather than her local SEAL school:

Despite the fact that it [the local school] is a SEAL school, the program there is basically failing and less and less people want to send their kids there because of this fact that the kids are so dreadfully outnumbered and that they are targeted so badly and are basically made very unhappy. Just be aware that not all SEAL schools are the same.⁷⁵⁵

In response to concerns about SEAL Program variability, Mr Ian Burrage, General Manager of DEECD's Education and Policy Research Division, told the Committee:

I could not confirm if there is an issue with the consistency of approaches ... Consistency of programs only matters if some things are bad. Variation can breed innovation and improvement. If you get consistency, you want to do that with an upward bias so that people are moving towards the best as opposed to away from it.⁷⁵⁶

Demand for places

The Committee heard that demand for places in the SEAL Program exceeds supply. The 2004 evaluation found that, in that year, 70% of applicants missed out on places in the SEAL Program.⁷⁵⁷

The number of SEAL schools was increased from 29 to the current 36 following the 2004 evaluation.⁷⁵⁸ However, evidence to this Inquiry suggests that supply remains an issue. Box Hill High School informed the Committee that there is 'extremely high demand for enrolments' and that there are long waiting lists.⁷⁵⁹ Mr Greg Hunt, President of the school's school council, stated:

we are bursting at the seams. It is because of the program we are offering. We are turning away parents as it is now. It is not a nice thing to be doing but it is a very successful program.⁷⁶⁰

Some Inquiry participants argued that SEAL Program should be expanded across Victoria to meet this demand.⁷⁶¹

Location of SEAL schools

Several participants in this Inquiry expressed concern that students living in some parts of Victoria do not have access to the SEAL Program. The lack of SEAL schools was

⁷⁵⁴ Name withheld, *Submission 94*, 2.

⁷⁵⁵ Felicity, parent, *Transcript of evidence*, Melbourne, 19 September 2011, 15.

⁷⁵⁶ Mr Ian Burrage, General Manager, Education and Policy Research Division, DEECD, *Transcript of evidence*, Melbourne, 25 July 2011, 9.

⁷⁵⁷ Ian Burrage, *Summary of findings 2004 SEAL research*, above n 717, 3.

⁷⁵⁸ Mr Ian Burrage, *Transcript of evidence*, above n 756, 9; Dr Margaret Plunkett, *Transcript of evidence*, above n 662, 9.

⁷⁵⁹ Box Hill High School, *Submission 81*, 2.

⁷⁶⁰ Mr Greg Hunt, School Council President and parent, Box Hill High School, *Transcript of evidence*, Box Hill, 29 August 2011, 7.

⁷⁶¹ Ms Larelle Parker, *Submission 11*, 2; Dr Michael Faulkner, Lecturer, School of Education, La Trobe University, *Transcript of evidence*, Bendigo, 20 September 2011, 4.

seen as being particularly acute in some parts of rural and regional Victoria, especially the central and northern parts of the state.⁷⁶²

Even in metropolitan areas, some students may not have ready access to a SEAL school. The Committee heard that it is not uncommon for students to travel long distances to attend a SEAL school. For example, Marley, a Year 11 student told the Committee that he travelled an hour each way to attend Box Hill High School.⁷⁶³ Tina, a Year 9 student, told the Committee her family moved house to be closer to Box Hill High School.⁷⁶⁴

Mr Burrage of DEECD expressed the view that it may not be feasible to provide the SEAL Program in all parts of the state. He suggested that strategies such as providing differentiated instruction and learning opportunities through technology may be more appropriate.⁷⁶⁵

Accessibility to students from backgrounds of educational disadvantage

Box Hill High School's submission suggested that factors such as socioeconomic status and cultural background can limit access to the SEAL Program.⁷⁶⁶ However, this issue was not raised by other participants. In fact, the summary of the findings of the 2004 evaluation state:

SEAL classes themselves reflected the diversity of language backgrounds and the ratio of boys to girls of the mainstream school populations. In most schools the socio-economic status (as measured by Education Maintenance Allowance EMA) of the SEAL cohort more or less reflected the mainstream population ...⁷⁶⁷

Ms Reynolds of Box Hill High School told the Committee that, 'we do have a reasonable proportion each year who are EMA recipients so we do know that we are getting a reasonable proportion of the lower income families'.⁷⁶⁸

Awareness of the SEAL Program

The Committee heard that some parents and their gifted children are not aware of the SEAL Program. For example, Box Hill High School's submission noted:

there are gifted students among our mainstream applicants who do not know about our SEAL program ... the parents usually tell us that no-one had ever suggested giftedness to them about their child, nor suggested programs such as SEAL as being appropriate for their child, even when knowledge of the program was common in that primary school.⁷⁶⁹

⁷⁶² Ms Pam Lyons, Coordinator, Able Learners' Enrichment Program, La Trobe University, *Submission 71*, 3; Country Education Project, *Submission 79*, 5; Name withheld, *Submission 91*, 3–4; Dr Michael Faulkner, Lecturer, School of Education, La Trobe University, *Submission 95*, 3; Dr Margaret Plunkett, *Transcript of evidence*, above n 662, 11; Dr Michael Faulkner, *Transcript of evidence*, above n 761, 4.

⁷⁶³ Marley, *Transcript of evidence*, above n 721, 3. See also Ms Vanessa Reynolds, *Transcript of evidence*, above n 711, 4; Name withheld, *Submission 94*, 1; Ms Sonia Fullerton, *Submission 33*, 2.

⁷⁶⁴ Tina, Year 9 student, Box Hill High School, *Transcript of evidence*, Box Hill, 29 August 2011, 3.

⁷⁶⁵ Mr Ian Burrage, *Transcript of evidence*, above n 756, 9.

⁷⁶⁶ Box Hill High School, *Submission 81*, 7.

⁷⁶⁷ Ian Burrage, *Summary of findings 2004 SEAL research*, above n 717, 2. See also Dr Margaret Plunkett, *Transcript of evidence*, above n 662, 10; Dr Leonie Kronborg, *Transcript of evidence*, above n 696, 10.

⁷⁶⁸ Ms Vanessa Reynolds, *Transcript of evidence*, above n 711, 4.

⁷⁶⁹ Box Hill High School, *Submission 81*, 5. See also Maroondah Gifted Children's Parents' Association, *Submission 98*, 8–9.

As was noted in the previous chapter, some parents are concerned that primary schools deliberately do not promote SEAL schools.⁷⁷⁰ Box Hill High School submitted that DEECD should be involved in promoting the SEAL Program.⁷⁷¹ Mr Burrage of DEECD agreed that his Department could play a greater role in increasing awareness of the Program:

SEAL is not ... tightly managed, so I can understand that the awareness of that might be a bit patchy. ... More consistency about raising awareness, more prominence in the information that the Department provides and promotion, I think, would all help in a consolidated, coordinated policy response to the issue.⁷⁷²

Movement of students between SEAL and mainstream classes

A small number of participants pointed out that it is difficult for students to move between mainstream and SEAL classes. Two SEAL schools informed the Committee that sometimes students have difficulty keeping up in the SEAL Program and may need to move to a mainstream class, which can be a difficult transition for the student.⁷⁷³

Conversely, two schools outlined how they are required to maintain numbers in their SEAL classes, so if they lose students—for instance to a selective entry school—the places must be filled by students from the mainstream school program. Both schools commented that it can be difficult for these students to catch up and keep up with the pace in the SEAL class.⁷⁷⁴

Enhancing the SEAL Program—The Committee's view

The evidence presented to this Inquiry shows that the SEAL Program is providing stimulating and challenging learning experiences in a supportive environment for high-achieving and gifted students across the state. However, the Committee is concerned that participants in this Inquiry have identified a large number of issues with the Program. The Committee does not believe it has sufficient evidence to make concrete recommendations about whether and how these issues should be addressed.

In chapter three of this report the Committee highlighted the need for all gifted education programs and provisions in Victoria to be regularly evaluated (see recommendation three). While the recommendation the Committee made in that chapter will implicitly include evaluation of the SEAL Program, the Committee considers the need for a review of this Program to be so critical, that it has chosen to make explicit recommendations in relation to the SEAL Program. The review should include all SEAL schools and their communities, and should cover the full range of issues identified by participants in this Inquiry. In particular, it should have a focus on the issues of quality and consistency, which featured so prominently in evidence to this Inquiry.

Once the initial review has been undertaken, the Committee considers it important that the SEAL Program continue to be regularly evaluated.

⁷⁷⁰ Ms Debbi Daff, *Submission 70*, above n 729, 5; Box Hill High School, *Submission 81*, 5.

⁷⁷¹ Box Hill High School, *Submission 81*, 10.

⁷⁷² Mr Ian Burrage, *Transcript of evidence*, above n 756, 10.

⁷⁷³ Belmont High School, *Submission 5*, 2; Lilydale High School, *Submission 47*, 2.

⁷⁷⁴ Belmont High School, *Submission 5*, 2; Mill Park Secondary College, *Submission 36*, 8.

The Committee notes that concerns about accessibility and awareness are common to other secondary school programs such as selective entry schools and specialist schools and considers these issue further in section 7.5 below.

Recommendation 32: Review of SEAL Program

That the Victorian Government undertake a comprehensive review of the SEAL Program, with a particular focus on the quality and consistency of the Program.

Recommendation 33: Regular evaluations of SEAL Program

That the Victorian Government undertake regular evaluations of the SEAL Program.

7.4 Specialist schools

This section looks at Victoria's three specialist schools, in particular the benefits and issues associated with these schools highlighted by participants in this Inquiry.

7.4.1 Specialist schools: An overview

Victoria has three specialist government schools that provide specialised programs for students with a gift or high ability in a particular field:

- John Monash Science School is a coeducational school for students in Years 10 to 12 that specialises in mathematics, science and associated technologies. The school opened in 2010 and currently caters for 420 students, with an anticipated future student population of 640.⁷⁷⁵ The school is co-located on Monash University's Clayton Campus.
- Maribyrnong College is a coeducational school incorporating Maribyrnong Sports Academy, which caters for student athletes in Years 7 to 12. The school has 430 student athletes, including one athlete with a disability, out of a total school population of 1041.⁷⁷⁶ The school is located in Melbourne's inner west.
- The Victorian College of the Arts Secondary School (VCASS) is a coeducational school for students in Years 7 to 12 with abilities in dance or music. The school currently caters for over 200 young dancers and musicians.⁷⁷⁷ The school is located in Southbank.

Specialist schools provide opportunities for students to develop their abilities in particular areas while concurrently studying the usual school curriculum.

⁷⁷⁵ Mr Peter Corkill, Principal, John Monash Science School, *Transcript of evidence*, Melbourne, 12 September 2011, 2; John Monash Science School, *Our context*, <<http://www.jmss.vic.edu.au/about/our-context>> viewed 11 May 2012.

⁷⁷⁶ Mr Rob Carroll, Director, Sports Academy, Maribyrnong College, *Transcript of evidence*, Maribyrnong, 29 August 2011, 3; My School and ACARA, above n 669.

⁷⁷⁷ VCASS, *Submission 56*, 2.

Case study 10: 'Nathan's primary education was a roller coaster'⁷⁷⁸

'Nathan is my middle child, and at the age of 3 yrs and 3 months he used to throw tantrums if he was not allowed to watch when his sister (who is 21 months older) was doing her Prep readers. By Kindergarten Nathan had started to read all by himself. Nathan only had one friend as I believe he and the other children had little in common ...

Nathan started Prep ... I advised his Teacher that he could read. She paid no attention to this and for months Nathan brought home readers which were far too easy. We had some issues with behaviour through the years like anger, frustration, boredom & attention seeking which may have been due partly to him not being challenged enough ...

Nathan was doing and saying things which to me were not like I had experienced with other children ... As he was so unusual I discussed it with a teacher at his school named Debbie ... Nathan was eventually tested in the middle of Grade 1 and he has an IQ of 99.6 percentile, which is very high. I have never heard of Giftedness before this ...

Debbie knew about Gifted children and was in charge of a Programme at school, which allowed Nathan once or twice to do some GATEWAYS activities with kids at other schools as extension. This was not enough for a child with a thirst for knowledge though. Some think children like this are pushed by parents, this was not the case for us.

I eventually convinced the school that I thought it would be beneficial for Nathan in Grade 2 to be accelerated. This was done half-way through 2003. School didn't like the mix of kids in Grade 3 so he went to Grade 4. Nathan was accelerated for one and a half years. The work was much better suited. He was accepted by classmates but was bullied by kids in the year level he jumped. He still really only had the one original friend from Prep.

By 2005 there was a new Principal at school, Debbie had left and the Gifted Programme was non-existent. I tried to rally other parents who might be interested in Giftedness with no result. School would not allow Nathan to continue to be accelerated so he returned to his original group and repeated Grade 4, and then did Grades 5 & 6 as he would have done originally. Fortunately these later years were a mix of composite ages so Nathan still worked at a higher level. Also some of the teachers when advised of his level of intelligence were able to try and give him extra challenges. He developed a few more friends by this stage. If I had realised school would put him forward and then back I wouldn't have put Nathan through it.

The light at the end of the tunnel during the last few years of primary school was that I became aware of SEAL schools ...

Nathan was accepted to Box Hill High School, and we have been more than happy! He is doing very well with his studies, enjoys himself, has no behavioural issues (other than being a teenager) and has a great group of friends. I have had huge support from the school over the years with dealing with Nathan's Gifted requirements ...'

⁷⁷⁸ Ms Larelle Parker, *Submission 11*, 1–2.

Each of the three specialist schools is responsible for its own entry procedures:

- Entry to John Monash Science School is by way of an exam based on science, mathematical reasoning, numeracy and literacy and a series of activities to test problem solving, creativity and teamwork skills. Each applicant is also interviewed.⁷⁷⁹ The school's Principal, Mr Peter Corkill, told the Committee the selection process tries to 'capture the kids who have a genuine passion for science and can demonstrate that in some tangible way'.⁷⁸⁰
- Entry to Maribyrnong College's Sports Academy is predominantly through selection trials, however students may be interviewed and their school records and academic results are also considered.⁷⁸¹ Selection procedures for the Sports Academy are particularly geared towards identifying students' sporting potential.⁷⁸²
- Entry to VCASS is by way of a competitive audition that takes into account potential as well as talent.⁷⁸³

All three specialist schools have established links with tertiary and professional organisations:

- John Monash Science School has a partnership with Monash University. Under the partnership, students have access to Monash University's facilities and research expertise.⁷⁸⁴ In addition, the University's academics have contributed to curriculum development at the school.
- Maribyrnong College has partnerships with Victorian Institute of Sport, Victoria University and the Western Bulldogs Football Club. These organisations provide financial support, as well as professional development opportunities for teachers.⁷⁸⁵
- VCASS has a memorandum of understanding with the Victorian College of the Arts at the University of Melbourne. Many VCASS students go on to study at the Victorian College of the Arts and the arrangements help them transition to tertiary study.⁷⁸⁶

7.4.2 Accessibility to students from backgrounds of educational disadvantage

The evidence presented to the Committee suggests that students from backgrounds of educational disadvantage are relatively well represented at Victoria's three specialist schools.

⁷⁷⁹ Mr Peter Corkill, *Transcript of evidence*, above n 775, 3.

⁷⁸⁰ *ibid.*

⁷⁸¹ Mrs Maureen Spencer-Gardner, Sports Academy Admissions Officer, US College Pathway Consultant, Maribyrnong College, *Transcript of evidence*, Maribyrnong, 29 August 2011, 3–4.

⁷⁸² Mr Darren Clark, Sporting Pathways Manager, Leading Teacher, Maribyrnong College, *Transcript of evidence*, Maribyrnong, 29 August 2011, 4–5.

⁷⁸³ Mr Colin Simpson, Principal, Victorian College of the Arts Secondary School (VCASS), *Transcript of evidence*, Southbank, 15 August 2011, 3; VCASS, *Submission 56*, 2.

⁷⁸⁴ Mr Peter Corkill, *Transcript of evidence*, above n 775, 6; DEECD, *Submission 58*, 6.

⁷⁸⁵ Mr Rob Carroll, *Transcript of evidence*, above n 776, 8–9.

⁷⁸⁶ Mr Colin Simpson, *Transcript of evidence*, above n 783, 12–13.

Mr Corkill told the Committee that at John Monash Science School, 'There is a very diverse ethnic mix and a roughly 50–50 gender balance, and 40 per cent come out of the non-government system. It is quite a diverse population of kids.'⁷⁸⁷ Like the selective entry schools, John Monash Science School is required to admit up to 10% of students on the basis of equity. Mr Corkill stated, 'Eleven per cent of our Year 10 cohort alone receives the EMA'.⁷⁸⁸

Staff at Maribyrnong College explained that the school endeavors to ensure that students from all backgrounds have access to the Sports Academy. Mr Rob Carroll, Director of the Sports Academy, told the Committee:

we were aware we needed to offer more places, particularly to Asian students, to African students, who were a good proportion of our student population. So we actually identify our own students ... where the criteria weren't strictly applied to make sure there were opportunities for a wide range of students. Boys, girls, non-English speaking backgrounds, CALD [culturally and linguistically diverse] students, Indigenous students—we've had 12 Indigenous students in our programs ...⁷⁸⁹

Mr Carroll also estimated that between 10% and 15% of sports academy students come from a background of educational disadvantage.⁷⁹⁰

VCASS, which is located in Southbank, informed the Committee that it aims to be accessible to music and dance students from all communities. The school currently has three Indigenous students in its music and dance programs.⁷⁹¹ In addition, the school's Principal, Mr Colin Simpson, told the Committee that over 20% of the school's students come from Melbourne's western suburbs, which he said shows that the school is open to students from all backgrounds.⁷⁹²

7.4.3 Benefits of specialist schools

The section considers the benefits specialist schools can offer both to students and the wider community.

Benefits for students

Evidence to this Inquiry demonstrates that specialist schools provide an opportunity for students to develop their skills in their specialist area, as well as encouraging excellence in other domains.

Opportunities to enhance specialist skills

The Committee heard that specialist schools provide students with gifts in a particular area access to facilities and an environment that nurtures those gifts and helps transform them into talents.

Many participants emphasised that specialist schools provide students with access to state-of-the-art facilities and expert training that is not available at other schools. Liam, a

⁷⁸⁷ Mr Peter Corkill, *Transcript of evidence*, above n 775, 2.

⁷⁸⁸ *ibid.*, 5. See also DEECD, *Submission 58*, 6–7.

⁷⁸⁹ Mr Rob Carroll, *Transcript of evidence*, above n 776, 2.

⁷⁹⁰ *ibid.* See also Mr Nick Scott, College Principal, Maribyrnong College, *Transcript of evidence*, Maribyrnong, 29 August 2011, 2.

⁷⁹¹ Mr Colin Simpson, *Transcript of evidence*, above n 783, 5.

⁷⁹² *ibid.*, 3.

Year 11 soccer athlete at Maribyrnong College, remarked, 'I think it's all down to the facilities we have, like the gym downstairs. I've been to a few gyms and that gym totally beats any other gym I've ever been to.'⁷⁹³ Likewise, Genevieve, VCASS School Captain and Year 12 dance student, commented:

You could improve but to get a comparative level of training it is very difficult to do on your own, especially in dance without the facilities, they are not available. Not outside this sort of program.⁷⁹⁴

Inquiry participants also highlighted that the high level specialist skills of many of the teachers at these schools is particularly beneficial for students. Liam told the Committee:

Some of the coaches have been to the Olympics ... They're easy to access. You can go to them and you don't feel like you are wasting their time. They are really approachable and they can tell you about their experiences, which help you.⁷⁹⁵

Similarly, Robbie, a Year 7 music student at VCASS, stated:

The best thing for me about being a student at this school is not only the facilities that you get but the teachers. My teacher is a lecturer at the VCA [Victorian College of the Arts] and he is an amazing guitarist. You get access to people like that that you wouldn't in other places in the music program.⁷⁹⁶

Mr Corkill of John Monash Science School told the Committee how the school's access to Monash University's staff and facilities brings 'the cutting edge of modern science into the classroom'. He described one example of this:

Monash has funding to work with the bacteria on the facial tumours of the Tasmanian devil, and our students in bioinformatics will map the genome of that bacteria. It will take about three years and six successive groups of kids. By 2014, if we have mapped the genome, we will be part of the academic research papers that hopefully could lead to some intervention which might save that species.⁷⁹⁷

Participants from the three specialist schools also emphasised that these schools have high expectations of achievement, which can help students to excel in their chosen discipline. Bella, a Year 11 dance student at VCASS told the Committee, 'It is really good to be around people that make you want to improve'.⁷⁹⁸ Kieran, a Year 10 student and cricketer at Maribyrnong College, said:

we have high expectations of ourselves ... Because we're athletes we always strive to meet these challenges. So I think that being surrounded by these people that have achieved so highly, they bring other people up along with them and make them achieve as well.⁷⁹⁹

⁷⁹³ Liam, Year 11 student, soccer, Maribyrnong College, *Transcript of evidence*, Maribyrnong, 29 August 2011, 5. See also Sarah, Year 12 student, hockey, Maribyrnong College, *Transcript of evidence*, Maribyrnong, 29 August 2011, 6.

⁷⁹⁴ Genevieve, School Captain, Year 12 dance student, VCASS, *Transcript of evidence*, Southbank, 15 August 2011, 7. See also VCASS, *Submission 56*, 2.

⁷⁹⁵ Liam, *Transcript of evidence*, above n 793, 5–6.

⁷⁹⁶ Robbie, Year 8 music student, VCASS, *Transcript of evidence*, Southbank, 15 August 2011, 3. See also VCASS, *Submission 56*, 2; Nicola, Year 9 dance student, VCASS, *Transcript of evidence*, Southbank, 15 August 2011, 4.

⁷⁹⁷ Mr Peter Corkill, *Transcript of evidence*, above n 775, 6.

⁷⁹⁸ Bella, Member, Student Representative Council, Year 11 dance student, VCASS, *Transcript of evidence*, Southbank, 15 August 2011, 6.

⁷⁹⁹ Kieran, Year 10 student, cricket, Maribyrnong College, *Transcript of evidence*, Maribyrnong, 29 August 2011, 3. See also Mr Colin Simpson, *Transcript of evidence*, above n 783, 2.

Broader benefits for students

Participants in this Inquiry suggested that attending a specialist school also benefits students in areas outside their specialty fields. At both Maribyrnong College and VCASS there is a strong emphasis on academic achievement, in addition to achievement in the student's specialty discipline. Sophie, a Year 12 soccer-playing student at Maribyrnong College explained how the school enables students to balance their sport and academic study:

if we didn't get the opportunity to come to this school we may not have made the state or Aussie teams that some of the students here have made. It is the fact that Maribyrnong allows us to have a balance of our school work and our sporting. So at other schools they may not have been so understanding with the sporting so our academic might have dropped behind whereas here we get extra time to do those things.⁸⁰⁰

In addition to its Sports Academy, Maribyrnong College also runs a High Achievers Program, which offers enrichment in core subjects such as maths and English. About 50% of Sports Academy students also participate in that program.⁸⁰¹

VCASS highlighted that its VCE results are strong across the board.⁸⁰² Mr Simpson told the Committee:

What we see from our data is that the grouping together of these young people in this situation massively value-adds. That's proven by our data to the development of those children, not only academically but also in dance and music pathways.⁸⁰³

Both Maribyrnong College and VCASS also place an emphasis on equipping students to pursue other careers if they are unable to have a career in their speciality area. Nabi, a Year 9 student and soccer player at Maribyrnong College, told the Committee:

The good thing about our school is they focus on that [academics] as much as they focus on the sporting side of it. So it is not just like we will focus on how we will make an Australian team or state team. There is what you will do in VCE, what will you do as a back up if sport is your first priority. What will you do when you go to uni? Something you enjoy in life but will also be successful with and make a living out of it if you can't do it in [sport] ...⁸⁰⁴

Benefits to the wider community

All three schools drew the Committee's attention to the benefits specialist schools can provide for other schools, students and the wider community.

VCASS informed the Committee that it also provides its academic program to students from The Australian Ballet School, Gymnastics and Diving Victoria and the National Institute of Circus Arts.⁸⁰⁵

⁸⁰⁰ Sophie, Year 12 student, soccer, Maribyrnong College, *Transcript of evidence*, Maribyrnong, 29 August 2011, 5. See also Libby, Year 7 student, netball/hockey, Maribyrnong College, *Transcript of evidence*, Maribyrnong, 29 August 2011, 5.

⁸⁰¹ Mr Nick Scott, *Transcript of evidence*, above n 790, 7.

⁸⁰² VCASS, *Submission 56*, 7.

⁸⁰³ Mr Colin Simpson, *Transcript of evidence*, above n 783, 5.

⁸⁰⁴ Nabi, Year 9 student, soccer, Maribyrnong College, *Transcript of evidence*, Maribyrnong, 29 August 2011, 5. See also Rebecca, Year 10 student, lacrosse, Maribyrnong College, *Transcript of evidence*, Maribyrnong, 29 August 2011, 5; Mr Neil Adam, Head of Student Services, VCASS, *Transcript of evidence*, Southbank, 15 August 2011, 8.

⁸⁰⁵ VCASS, *Submission 56*, 2.

The state-of-the-art facilities at the Maribyrnong College Sports Academy are widely used by members of the local community. Mr Carroll, Director of the Sports Academy, told the Committee:

we are opening up the facilities to communities. So we currently have about 10 community organisations that come in and use the facilities after hours and there is lots of benefits for them in doing that and there is flow on benefits back to the school. It is really immeasurable.⁸⁰⁶

In addition, John Monash Science School has a strong focus on providing science education outside the school. This is discussed further in section 7.5.3 below.

7.4.4 Issues with specialist schools

The evidence suggests that Victoria's specialist schools are effectively catering for students with interests and abilities in the areas of music, dance, sport and science and technology. Participants in this Inquiry identified only a small number of issues with the current operation of these schools.

Location and demand

Both John Monash Science School and Maribyrnong College Sports Academy reported they receive many more applications than available positions.⁸⁰⁷ On this basis, several Inquiry participants argued that more specialist schools are needed in Victoria.⁸⁰⁸

All three specialist schools are located in metropolitan Melbourne. The Committee heard that many students travel long distances to and from school each day, or that their families have relocated so that they can attend a specialist school. Some of these experiences are described in figure 20.

Awareness of specialist schools

Some Inquiry participants suggested that there were low levels of awareness of specialist schools. Most of the students the Committee spoke to at Maribyrnong College and VCASS said they had found out about the specialist program by word of mouth. For example, Mati, a Year 12 music student and President of VCASS's Student Representative Council, commented, 'I wouldn't have figured out about the school at all apart from friends.'⁸⁰⁹ Mr Corkill described John Monash Science School as 'one of Victoria's best kept secrets'.⁸¹⁰ He suggested there was a need to build awareness about specialist schools, particularly among students from backgrounds of educational disadvantage such as Indigenous students.⁸¹¹

⁸⁰⁶ Mr Rob Carroll, *Transcript of evidence*, above n 776, 8.

⁸⁰⁷ Mr Peter Corkill, *Transcript of evidence*, above n 775, 3; Mrs Maureen Spencer-Gardner, *Transcript of evidence*, above n 781, 3–4.

⁸⁰⁸ Ms Maya Panisset, *Submission 31*, 4; Mr Paul Double, *Submission 15*, 2; VCASS, *Submission 56*, 12.

⁸⁰⁹ Mati, President, Student Representative Council, Year 12 music student, VCASS, *Transcript of evidence*, Southbank, 15 August 2012, 7. See also Jack, Year 7 student, basketball/AFL, Maribyrnong College, *Transcript of evidence*, Maribyrnong, 29 August 2011, 2; Akim, Year 9 student, soccer, Maribyrnong College, *Transcript of evidence*, Maribyrnong, 29 August 2011, 2; Robbie, *Transcript of evidence*, above n 796, 2; Amanda, Year 10 music student, VCASS, *Transcript of evidence*, Southbank, 15 August 2011, 2.

⁸¹⁰ Mr Peter Corkill, *Transcript of evidence*, above n 775, 2.

⁸¹¹ *ibid.*, 4–5.

Figure 20: Experiences accessing Victoria’s specialist schools

<p>Sophie, Year 12 specialising in soccer, Maribyrnong College</p>	<p>Mr Rob Carroll Sports Academy Director, Maribyrnong College</p>
<p>‘I moved down from Shepparton at the beginning of last year ... my mum sort of came down to live here in Melbourne so that I could attend this school.’⁸¹²</p>	<p>‘We probably have around 30 students who relocated from regional Victoria from diverse areas, from Lakes Entrance for volleyball, Kerang for swimming, a number of athletes from Shepparton and Warrnambool for soccer ... Again a large number of metropolitan students from outside the west. In terms of percentage it is probably around 10% travel from as far away as Bentleigh, Mooroolbark ...’⁸¹³</p>
<p>Genevieve, School Captain and Year 12 dance student, VCASS</p>	<p>Bella, Year 11 dance student, VCASS</p>
<p>‘For me, personally, I was in a Tassie isolated community. There is no school remotely like this. There is even no full-time training. So for me there wasn’t the available training, not only at my educational school but outside—external training. I auditioned as sort of the only option. I had to move here—it wasn’t available where I was.’⁸¹⁴</p>	<p>‘I’m quite lucky my parents said they would make a move for me whether it was from Bright to Albury, which is an hour-and-a-half, or to Melbourne ... they’d move wherever possible that I could continue my training.’⁸¹⁵</p>

Enhancing specialist schools—The Committee’s view

The evidence presented to the Committee makes it clear that Victoria’s three specialist schools are playing a valuable role in providing support and specialised educational opportunities to students who are gifted in sport, science and technology, as well as the arts. For students who are gifted in a non-academic discipline such as music, dance or sport, these schools provide invaluable assistance in helping students to balance the demands of their specialist discipline with school work.

The main issues identified by Inquiry participants relate to the awareness and accessibility of specialist schools. These have been consistent themes in relation to the secondary school programs discussed in this chapter and the Committee considers strategies to address these issues in the next section.

7.5 Improving access to and awareness of selective entry, SEAL and specialist schools

The discussion of selective entry, SEAL and specialist schools in this chapter has revealed widespread concern about awareness of these schools, as well as their accessibility. This section explores these issues in more detail and identifies potential solutions.

⁸¹² Sophie, *Transcript of evidence*, above n 800, 4.

⁸¹³ Mr Rob Carroll, *Transcript of evidence*, above n 776, 3.

⁸¹⁴ Genevieve, *Transcript of evidence*, above n 794, 3.

⁸¹⁵ Bella, *Transcript of evidence*, above n 798, 3.

7.5.1 Improving access for students from backgrounds of educational disadvantage

The evidence received by the Committee suggests that Victoria's selective entry, SEAL and specialist schools have diverse student populations. The Committee acknowledges that there are currently mechanisms in place to promote fairer access to selective entry and specialist schools. In particular, the equity consideration for admission to selective entry schools and the John Monash Science School, allows up to 10% of students to be admitted from backgrounds of educational disadvantage. While the evidence demonstrates that these requirements are being used to enrol students who would otherwise not be admitted to these schools, some groups remain underrepresented. In particular, the Committee is concerned that Indigenous students are significantly underrepresented in all three types of schools.

The Committee does not consider it has sufficient evidence to make a recommendation about how the accessibility of these schools can be improved. Therefore, it suggests that the Victorian Government undertake a comprehensive review of the selection criteria and processes at these schools to ensure that they are accessible to gifted students from all backgrounds.

The Committee notes that these secondary school programs may also become more accessible to gifted students from backgrounds of educational disadvantage as a flow on effect from increased efforts to identify and provide for gifted students from these backgrounds, which were recommended in chapters four and five.

Recommendation 34: Review of selective entry, SEAL and specialist school selection processes to ensure equitable access

That the Victorian Government undertake a review of the selection criteria and processes for selective entry, SEAL and specialist schools to ensure that gifted students from all backgrounds have access to these schools.

7.5.2 Improving awareness of students from backgrounds of educational disadvantage

Closely linked to the issue of access to selective entry, SEAL and specialist schools is awareness about these schooling options. The evidence reviewed by the Committee suggests that not all gifted students and their families are aware of the specialised educational options that exist for them at the secondary school level. Lack of awareness seems particularly acute among students from backgrounds of educational disadvantage.

The evidence to this Inquiry demonstrates that selective entry, SEAL and specialist schools are not widely promoted, with many students and their families finding out about these opportunities by word of mouth. The Committee is most concerned that students and families from backgrounds of educational disadvantage may not be linked into networks that promote such opportunities.

The Committee considers the need to increase the general awareness of gifted students and their families about the range of gifted educational opportunities in chapter ten of this report. However, it believes that the evidence discussed in this chapter shows there is a particularly critical need to promote awareness of selective entry, SEAL and specialist schools in communities with high levels of educational disadvantage. The

Committee considers that greater promotion of these educational options will help make these schools more accessible to students from backgrounds of educational disadvantage.

Recommendation 35: Promoting selective entry, SEAL and specialist schools in disadvantaged areas

That the Victorian Government promote selective entry, SEAL and specialist schools to communities, schools, parents and students in areas with high levels of educational disadvantage.

7.5.3 Opportunities for outreach

The discussion of selective entry and specialist schools in this chapter has highlighted that only a small number of high-achieving students currently have access to these schools. Two key issues have emerged from the Committee's consideration of these schools. Firstly, demand for places at these schools consistently exceeds the available places. Secondly, the location of these schools mean that these schools are not accessible to students in all parts of Melbourne, let alone all parts of the state. These issues also apply, albeit to a lesser extent, to the SEAL Program.

Several participants in this Inquiry argued that there was scope to give more gifted and high-ability students throughout the state access to the specialist learning opportunities provided by selective entry and specialist schools. The Victorian Association of State Secondary Principals proposed a specialist school that all gifted students can access for a semester on a rotating basis.⁸¹⁶ Other suggestions included exchange programs, mentoring and specialist learning opportunities using technology.⁸¹⁷

Some schools are already providing or exploring outreach opportunities. Mr Corkill told the Committee that John Monash Science School is committed 'to work a bit more widely than just catering to the kids who come to the school'.⁸¹⁸ Key outreach activities undertaken by the school to date include:

- Teachers and Year 10 students at the school worked with 40 students from local primary schools, who each produced a project for the school's science fair.
- The school hosted 20 students from remote areas of Victoria for a five week period. The school continues to have links with these students and their teachers.⁸¹⁹

Mr Corkill suggested that this kind of outreach approach has the potential to benefit many gifted young Victorians:

I think if we get the capacity to work with partner schools to actually reach out to more of these scientifically gifted kids statewide, you might not need more [specialist schools], with the prevalence of technology and running immersion days for kids. They come to Melbourne for a

⁸¹⁶ VASSP, *Submission 27*, 4.

⁸¹⁷ VASSP, 'Position paper: Specialist schools', included in *Submission 27 Appendix A*, 3; Dr Michael Faulkner, *Transcript of evidence*, above n 761, 8; Mr Ian Burrage, *Transcript of evidence*, above n 756, 12.

⁸¹⁸ Mr Peter Corkill, *Transcript of evidence*, above n 775, 4.

⁸¹⁹ *ibid.*, 3–4.

week or something, and then they can stay at home, which is probably better, because a lot of these kids do not want to relocate—and it is better for their home town.⁸²⁰

Victoria's selective entry high schools are also considering how they can reach out to benefit a larger number of high-ability students. Suzanne Cory High School informed the Committee that the Selective Entry High Schools network, which is made up of all four selective entry schools, is currently assessing how these schools can forge relationships with other schools 'based on a shared interest in students of high ability'. Mr Peter Starford, Principal of Suzanne Cory High School, stated:

At this point the main strategy under discussion is through an outreach program where the selective entry schools can contribute to the learning programs of higher ability students through the provision of curriculum materials and learning experiences for students and professional learning opportunities for teachers. This could take a number of forms including on-line and possible weekend and/or school holiday programs.⁸²¹

Throughout this chapter the Committee has acknowledged the success that selective entry, SEAL and specialist schools have meeting the needs of gifted and highly able students. The Committee believes there is significant potential for these schools, particularly the selective entry and specialist schools, to provide educational opportunities to a much broader group of students through the use of outreach.

The Committee particularly commends John Monash Science School for the innovative approach it has taken to sharing the school's expertise in science and technology with both primary and secondary students throughout the state. The Committee is of the view that such opportunities should be more broadly and systematically provided by selective entry and specialist schools to benefit gifted and high-ability students throughout Victoria. Such programs could include exchange programs, holiday programs or mentoring opportunities. The Committee considers that technology should be harnessed to make these outreach opportunities available to all gifted students throughout Victoria.

The Committee also considers that there are opportunities for teachers at selective entry, SEAL and specialist schools to share their skills and experience in educating gifted students with their colleagues in other schools. This is discussed in more detail chapter eight.

Recommendation 36: Outreach by selective entry and specialist schools

That the Victorian Government work with selective entry and specialist schools to provide increased access to learning opportunities for students who are not enrolled at these schools, including through exchange programs, holiday programs and mentoring opportunities.

7.6 Supporting gifted student athletes in Victorian secondary schools

In addition to gifted student athletes who are enrolled in Maribyrnong College's Sports Academy, there are many gifted athletes who attend other secondary schools throughout Victoria. The Victorian Institute of Sport (VIS) supports many such students

⁸²⁰ *ibid.*, 9.

⁸²¹ Letter from Principal, Suzanne Cory High School, above n 682, 2.

through its scholarship program. There are currently 61 Victorian secondary school students with VIS scholarships, mostly in Years 10, 11 and 12.⁸²²

VIS works closely with each student athlete and their school to ensure that a supportive structure is in place to enable student athletes to succeed in both sporting and academic spheres. As part of this support, the VIS runs the Athlete Career and Education (ACE) Program, which aims to assist student athletes develop life skills, education and career prospects along with their sport.⁸²³ Mr Tyler Cowley, a Year 12 student and Australian hockey squad representative, told the Committee about how the ACE program helped him cope with the pressure of juggling school and sport:

I went into it [Year 11] in 2009, and I personally could not quite handle everything regarding training, because the training load had just increased immensely and so had my study. I found that I got worn out. That is when I went to the ACE program ... we were able to devise a plan that would be able to see me through my VCE and manage my sport and my studies as well as getting the right amount of rest and support I needed. It was very good.⁸²⁴

VIS made four suggestions to the Committee about how gifted student athletes could be better supported in the Victorian secondary school system.

Firstly, VIS contended that each student athlete should have a designated contact person at school to monitor his or her educational and sporting obligations. VIS advised that such a contact person is generally provided in the university context.⁸²⁵ Ms Monette Russo, a past gymnast athlete, described the importance of having a contact person at school:

I was travelling a lot, being away from school, so having that one point of contact made it a lot easier, because they understood what was going on and that I was not a regular student. It helped because I was able to go straight to them. They knew my situation, and we could alter things if things needed to be altered.⁸²⁶

Secondly, VIS argued that student athletes who are competing at a high level in their sport during Years 11 and 12 should be given special consideration for places in tertiary education as part of the Special Entry Access Scheme.⁸²⁷ Under this scheme, tertiary institutions give extra consideration to applications from students from backgrounds of educational disadvantage.

The Committee asked the Victorian Tertiary Admissions Centre, which administers the Special Entry Access Scheme (SEAS), for its opinion on VIS's suggestion. VTAC advised that it sought views on this issue from Victorian tertiary institutions and found approximately equal levels of opposition and support or no objection to the proposal. The institutions that opposed the suggestion did so on the basis that:

SEAS applicants are educationally disadvantaged by externally imposed circumstances and not by choice. This is not the case with elite student athletes who voluntarily elect to undertake their training and competition alongside their school studies.⁸²⁸

⁸²² Victorian Institute of Sport (VIS), *Submission 52*, 16–17.

⁸²³ *ibid.*, 13–16.

⁸²⁴ Mr Tyler Cowley, Year 12 student, St Helena Secondary College, Australian hockey squad representative, VIS, *Transcript of evidence*, Melbourne, 12 September 2011, 3.

⁸²⁵ VIS, *Submission 52*, 25.

⁸²⁶ Ms Monette Russo, Past gymnast athlete, VIS, *Transcript of evidence*, Melbourne, 12 September 2011, 5.

⁸²⁷ VIS, *Submission 52*, 26.

⁸²⁸ Letter from Director, Victorian Tertiary Admissions Centre, to Chair, Victorian Parliament Education and Training Committee, 13 March 2012, 1.

There was also some concern that it would be inequitable to provide such special consideration to elite athletes but not to others who have voluntary commitments like elite musicians and artists.

VTAC pointed out that a number of universities have their own schemes to encourage and support elite athletes, including direct application processes for these students. VTAC did, however, envisage that it could play a greater role in this process:

Whilst selection remains an institutional matter, if there were sufficient interest VTAC could facilitate selection and admission by offering application arrangements on their behalf. This would provide a single point of application, which would be a benefit for applicants and institutions.⁸²⁹

A third suggestion VIS made for supporting student athletes is to allocate these students a place at the secondary school closest to their training centre in order to minimise their travel time.⁸³⁰ The Minister for Education acknowledged that high demand for places at particular government schools may prevent some student athletes gaining such access. However, he commented:

In evidence to the inquiry, former student athlete Monette Russo described how she had been assisted to enrol in a school closer to her training venue through a partnership between the Victorian Institute of Sport (VIS) and Melbourne Girls' College, a government school. The Government supports and encourages partnerships between schools and organisations such as VIS in developing flexible solutions to meet student needs.⁸³¹

Finally, VIS proposed that policies and procedures for student athletes who are travelling during their VCE exams should be reviewed. Ms Bernadette Sierakowski, VIS's Athlete Career and Education Coordinator, described this problem to the Committee:

Where our athletes are travelling they have to sit it at exactly the same time as the students here. If they are travelling overseas, predominantly that might mean that they need to wake up in the middle of the night and sit their exam—maybe on a plane. I suppose we would be seeking a little bit of flexibility around that security issue so that it would not interfere, because that could affect their performance the next day.⁸³²

The Victorian Curriculum and Assessment Authority (VCAA), which oversees the administration of VCE exams, informed the Committee that its processes enable some flexibility in relation to students undertaking exams while travelling:

The VCAA will always work individually with students to secure a suitable venue, whether it is interstate or overseas, to sit VCE examinations and will always negotiate with students on a case by case basis to find the best situation to each individual circumstance. This is naturally balanced with maintaining the high standards of security and integrity of the VCE examinations.⁸³³

The Committee acknowledges the significant support that VIS provides for student athletes, helping them cope with the demands of study and sport. In chapter five the Committee emphasised the importance of partnerships between schools and external

⁸²⁹ *ibid.*

⁸³⁰ VIS, *Submission 52*, 26.

⁸³¹ Letter from Minister for Education (Victoria), above n 673,11.

⁸³² Ms Bernadette Sierakowski, Athlete Career and Education Coordinator, VIS, *Transcript of evidence*, Melbourne, 12 September 2011, 4. See also Mr Tyler Cowley, *Transcript of evidence*, above n 824, 4; VIS, *Submission 52*, 26.

⁸³³ Letter from Chief Executive Officer, VCAA, to Chair, Victorian Parliament Education and Training Committee, 8 February 2012, 1. See also VCAA, *VCE and VCAL administrative handbook 2012* (2011) VCAA, 111.

organisations and recommended that these should be used more extensively. The Committee considers that partnerships between schools and the VIS are an important first step in ensuring that gifted student athletes are catered for in those schools. Benefits of such partnerships potentially include allowing students to access a school that is close to their training facilities and ensuring that a contact person at the school is nominated for each student athlete.

The Committee recognises that student athletes need substantial flexibility to ensure that they can juggle both sport and school. It considers that the current VCE exam arrangements offer such flexibility, while still maintaining the requisite integrity for the examination process.

Finally, while recognising that it may not be appropriate for such students to have access to the Special Entry Access Scheme, which is primarily directed at students from disadvantaged backgrounds, the Committee encourages Victorian tertiary institutions to work with VCAA to provide flexible and fair entry procedures to gifted student athletes whose academic performance may have been affected by their commitment to pursuing sporting excellence.

7.7 Early entry to university

Gifted students may enter primary school early or be accelerated by one or more year level during their schooling. As a result, many gifted students complete VCE at an earlier age than their peers and may seek early entry to university.

At present, each Victorian university has its own admission policy and minimum entry age. For example, students must be at least 17 years of age to enrol in an undergraduate degree at Monash University, although the Dean may grant permission for a student to be enrolled at the age of 16 years.⁸³⁴

Several Inquiry participants felt that it is currently too difficult for gifted young students to gain early entry to Victorian universities.⁸³⁵ The parents of one gifted student described their child's experience:

Some tertiary institutions will not accept younger students. DD1 [eldest daughter] was not eligible for her first choice of university due to her age. Instead she did a TAFE course close to home whilst waiting to age sufficiently to be accepted by the university.⁸³⁶

The Committee heard that early entry to university can be a very positive experience for gifted students. For example, Dr Gail Byrne, Chair of the CHIP Foundation, an independent advisory service specialising in the needs of gifted children and their families, highlighted:

Often once they get into the universities they are perhaps in the most enriching educational environment they have ever been in, because it is not about how you look, how old you are or how good you are at sport; suddenly it is about what you know, how you learn and how you apply it. For many of them it is terribly enriching, but they have to get in.⁸³⁷

⁸³⁴ DEECD, *Submission 58*, 5.

⁸³⁵ Dr Gail Byrne, Psychologist, Exceptional Children, *Submission 63*, 5; CHIP Foundation, *Submission 77*, 7; Ms Caelli Greenbank, *Transcript of evidence*, above n 723, 3.

⁸³⁶ Names withheld, *Submission 45*, 3.

⁸³⁷ Dr Gail Byrne, Chair, CHIP Foundation, *Transcript of evidence*, Melbourne, 25 July 2011, 9.

Similarly, gifted student, Ms Caelli Greenbank, told the Committee that that entering university early resulted in ‘numerous benefits that came with being able to make friends and to actually enjoy my classes because they were mentally stimulating’.⁸³⁸

A related issue, the prescribed school leaving age, was raised by one submission to the Inquiry. Ms Kirily Greenbank, a gifted student who completed her VCE at the age of 16, highlighted that Victorian students are currently required to remain in full-time education or training until the age of 17.⁸³⁹ The only exception to this is where a student is employed full-time. Ms Kirily Greenbank argued that this requirement discriminates against gifted students who complete VCE before the age of 17 as it prevents them from taking a gap year.⁸⁴⁰ No other submissions raised this issue.

The Committee considers that early entry to university may be beneficial for some gifted students. The Committee considers that Victorian universities should have admission policies that are flexible enough to allow gifted students early entry and recommends that the Victorian Government work with universities to ensure that admission processes facilitate early entry where appropriate. The Committee recognises that early entry to university may not be a suitable intervention for all gifted students, and that students will need to be considered on a case-by-case basis.

The Committee notes that one submission raised the issue of the prescribed age of school leaving. The Committee does not consider that it received sufficient evidence to make a recommendation in this regard. It notes that gifted young students who finish school early currently have the opportunity to pursue a range of activities including working, completing an overseas exchange and studying at university or TAFE.

Recommendation 37: Early entry to university

That the Victorian Government work with universities to ensure admission policies facilitate early access to university for gifted students in appropriate cases.

⁸³⁸ Ms Caelli Greenbank, *Transcript of evidence*, above n 723, 4.

⁸³⁹ Ms Kirily Greenbank, *Submission 118*, 1.

⁸⁴⁰ *ibid.*

Chapter 8: Teacher education and training

Key findings

- Teachers have a significant impact on the educational outcomes of all their students, including gifted students.
- Improved teacher education and training in relation to gifted education will ensure that teachers have the appropriate knowledge and skills to cater for gifted students, and also promote more positive teacher attitudes to gifted students and gifted education generally.
- To successfully provide for gifted students, teachers need to understand the concept of giftedness and the learning styles and emotional needs of gifted students, as well as know how to identify giftedness and how to implement strategies to cater for gifted students.
- Both pre-service and in-service early childhood educators would benefit from education about how to identify and cater for gifted children.
- At present there is little or no opportunity for pre-service teachers to study giftedness as part of their teacher training. Victorian teachers would benefit from studying giftedness at the pre-service stage, as well as from increased opportunities to work with gifted students as part of their teaching placements.
- There are few opportunities for Victorian teachers to access professional learning activities in relation to gifted education. There is a need to provide and promote increased professional learning activities on gifted education, and to support teachers to attend.
- Study of gifted education at the postgraduate level enhances teachers' capacity to cater for gifted students. Victorian teachers should be encouraged and supported to undertake postgraduate study in this area.
- In-service teachers should have increased opportunities to gain experience teaching gifted students through placements or exchange programs.
- School leaders play an important role in providing vision and direction for gifted education in their schools. All Victorian school leaders would benefit from increased information and education about gifted students and gifted education.

Teacher education and training

Teachers play a pivotal role in nurturing students' gifts and helping them reach their full potential. This chapter examines the education and training that teachers need both pre-service and in-service to equip them to cater for gifted students.

8.1 Why teacher education matters

Research shows that teachers have a very powerful influence on the educational outcomes of students.⁸⁴¹ In the course of this Inquiry the Committee heard many times that some teachers do not currently possess an appropriate level of knowledge, skills and understanding to enable them to effectively teach gifted students. Improved teacher education and training was seen as crucial in improving the education of gifted students in Victoria. As the Goldfields Local Learning and Employment Network stated:

The greatest impact on the learning, development and wellbeing of gifted and talented students, is adequate teacher training ... Unless our new teachers and those already in the system understand the needs and abilities of these students, we are undervaluing a future national human resource.⁸⁴²

This section explores current teacher attitudes and skill levels in relation to providing gifted education and the potential for education to enhance teachers' attitudes to gifted students and to meet their needs in the classroom.

8.1.1 Teachers' skills

Consistent with literature in this area, a number of participants in this Inquiry highlighted that Victorian teachers are committed to catering for their gifted students, but that many may simply lack the skills to do so.⁸⁴³ Research by the Department of Education and Early Childhood Development (DEECD) has identified lack of teacher knowledge as a

⁸⁴¹ John Hattie, 'Teachers make a difference: What is the research evidence?' (Paper presented at the ACER Research Conference, Melbourne, October 2003), 15–16; John Hattie, *Visible learning: A synthesis of over 800 meta-analyses relating to achievement* (2009) Routledge, 22–25; Ben Jensen et al, *Catching up: Learning from the best school systems in East Asia* (2012) Grattan Institute, 13.

⁸⁴² Goldfields Local Learning and Employment Network (LLEN), *Submission 86*, 7. See also Suzanne Cory High School, *Submission 85*, 5; Dr Glenison Alsop, Psychologist and Counsellor, *Submission 54*, 2; Dr John Munro, Associate Professor Exceptional Learning and Gifted Education, Melbourne Graduate School of Education, The University of Melbourne, *Submission 96*, 9.

⁸⁴³ Australian College of Educators (Victorian Branch), *Submission 21*, 4; Faculty of Education, Australian Catholic University, *Submission 13*, 5; Mr James Mulcahy, Principal, Lucknow Primary School, *Submission 16*, 2; Victorian Association for Gifted and Talented Children (VAGTC), *Submission 34*, 3. See also Selena Gallagher, 'Reflections from the deep end: Primary school teachers' experiences of gifted education' 16(1) *The Australasian Journal of Gifted Education* 20, 23; Wilma Vialle and Karen Rogers, 'Gifted, talented or educationally disadvantaged?', Routledge, included in *Submission 28 Appendix C*, Australian Association for the Education of the Gifted and Talented (AAEGT), 9–10.

key reason why gifted education is not implemented more widely in Victorian schools.⁸⁴⁴ This was reiterated by Ms Claire McInerney, the Principal of Plenty Parklands Primary School, who told the Committee:

From our point of view teachers are asking us and crying out. They really do want to help. They do not have the training and do not really understand about educating a really gifted child, and I do not have the resources to put a staff member into that.⁸⁴⁵

The research on the impact of teacher education on teaching practice is encouraging. A study conducted by Dr Margaret Plunkett, a Senior Lecturer in the Faculty of Education at Monash University, found that educating teachers makes a difference in terms of increasing their understanding the needs of gifted children, as well as their knowledge of strategies to effectively cater for them.⁸⁴⁶ Other research suggests that teacher education leads to a significant improvement in teachers' skill as well as the classroom environment.⁸⁴⁷

The skills that teachers need to effectively cater for gifted children are discussed in section 8.2.2 below.

8.1.2 Teachers' attitudes

Evidence presented to the Inquiry suggests that some Victorian teachers may have negative attitudes towards gifted students and gifted education generally. WiseOnes, a private provider of extension programs in Victorian primary schools, informed the Committee that it frequently encounters resistance to its programs from teachers and other school personnel:

about half of all class teachers, and some office staff too, refuse to allow the children to attend or strongly discourage them. Office staff have refused to take the school G&T [gifted and talented] levy for the program.⁸⁴⁸

Other Inquiry contributors including students, parents, schools and teachers' organisations agreed that negative attitudes to gifted students and gifted education programs are not uncommon.⁸⁴⁹ Gifted student, Ms Caelli Greenbank, told the Committee that she had encountered teachers who were negative towards her abilities:

My Year 8 English teacher definitely exhibited some of those negative attitudes ... knowing a teacher does not like you really is not fun ... If a teacher does not believe in giftedness, so to speak, and does not like to acknowledge that children can be different and can be more intelligent in some ways than other children, then you are never going to get anywhere.⁸⁵⁰

⁸⁴⁴ Department of Education and Early Childhood Development (DEECD), *Submission 58*, 10; Jane Stewart et al, *Research report: Current provision and opportunities for further central coordination of support for schools to address the educational needs of gifted and talented students in Victoria*, report for DEECD, unpublished, supplementary evidence received 6 September 2011, 19–20.

⁸⁴⁵ Ms Claire McInerney, Principal, Plenty Parklands Primary School, *Transcript of evidence*, Melbourne, 12 September 2011, 4.

⁸⁴⁶ Margaret Plunkett, 'Impacting on teacher attitudes towards gifted students' 9(2) *Australasian Journal of Gifted Education* 33, 40–41. See also Wilma Vialle and Karen Rogers, 'Gifted, talented or educationally disadvantaged?', Routledge, included in *Submission 28 Appendix C*, 10; Patricia King Rash and April Miller, 'A survey of practices of teachers of the gifted' 22(3) *Roeper Review* 192, 193.

⁸⁴⁷ Jan Hansen and John Feldhusen, 'Comparison of trained and untrained teachers of gifted students' 38(3) *Gifted Child Quarterly* 115, 119.

⁸⁴⁸ WiseOnes Australia, *Submission 18*, 12.

⁸⁴⁹ Box Hill High School, *Submission 81*, 4; Victorian Affiliated Network of Gifted Support Groups, *Submission 100 Appendix B*, 4; Victorian Association of Catholic Primary School Principals (VACPSP), *Submission 111*, 4.

⁸⁵⁰ Ms Caelli Greenbank, student, *Transcript of evidence*, Melbourne, 19 September 2011, 3–4.

Participants suggested that negative views common among teachers include that the needs of gifted students should be overlooked when they conflict with the needs of other students and that gifted students do not need to be specifically catered for.⁸⁵¹ Many parents feel that teachers hold negative attitudes towards them, perceiving the parents as 'pushy' or 'crazy' when they attempt to advocate on behalf of their gifted child.⁸⁵²

Some Inquiry participants pointed out that teachers may not wish to recognise gifted pupils because stimulating these students creates additional work for the teacher.⁸⁵³ Others observed that teachers may feel intimidated by gifted children. For example, the Australian Mathematics Trust, which runs maths and informatics enrichment programs for school students, stated, 'Many teachers feel inadequate when they discover a talented student in their class ... the teacher should not be expected to be "smarter" than such a student'.⁸⁵⁴ Similarly, research has identified that teachers' most preferred pupils are average and non-studious.⁸⁵⁵

However, not all participants agreed that negative attitudes exist towards gifted students in Victorian schools. Mr Frank Sal, President of the Victorian Association of State Secondary Principals, told the Committee:

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 the 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.⁸⁵⁶

Kayla, a Year 12 student at The Mac.Robertson Girls' High School, one of four Victorian selective entry secondary schools, shared her experience at her previous secondary school:

It was not so much that the teacher was negative towards your ability, it was sometimes that they were a bit frustrated that you had finished the work that they had set for the class ... I suppose it can get a bit irritating when a student keeps coming up and saying, 'What do I do for the next 40 minutes?' ...⁸⁵⁷

Research suggests that teacher education can have a significant positive impact on teachers' attitudes towards gifted students. Dr Plunkett and Dr Kronborg have tracked the attitudes of teaching students enrolled in a gifted education elective program at

⁸⁵¹ Ms Annette Spence, High Potential Learning Coordinator, Lalor Secondary College, *Submission 41*, 1; Names withheld, *Submission 45*, 3–4. See also Wilma Vialle and Karen Rogers, 'Gifted, talented or educationally disadvantaged?', Routledge, included in *Submission 28 Appendix C*, 6–7.

⁸⁵² Mr David Southwick MP, Chair, Education and Training Committee, *Transcript of evidence*, Melbourne, 19 September 2011, 6; Mrs Deborah DeBuhr, *Submission 46*, 2; Ms Maree Germech, Victorian Affiliated Network of Gifted Support Groups, *Transcript of evidence*, Melbourne, 10 October 2011, 2–3; Sonia, parent, *Transcript of evidence*, Melbourne, 19 September 2011, 5.

⁸⁵³ Names withheld, *Submission 9*, 4; Anna, Year 12 student, The Mac.Robertson Girls' High School, *Transcript of evidence*, Melbourne, 26 July 2011, 2.

⁸⁵⁴ Australian Mathematics Trust, *Submission 7*, 3. See also Ms Susan Wight, *Submission 93*, 2; Australian Council of State School Organisations, *Submission 32*, 5; Dr Danuta Chessor, Lecturer, School of Psychology, University of Western Sydney, *Submission 76*, 3.

⁸⁵⁵ Neil Carrington and Stan Bailey, 'How do preservice teachers view gifted students? Evidence from a NSW study' 9(1) *Australasian Journal of Gifted Education* 18, 20–21. See also Dr Michael Faulkner, Lecturer, School of Education, La Trobe University, *Transcript of evidence*, Bendigo, 20 September 2011, 7.

⁸⁵⁶ Mr Frank Sal, President, Victorian Association of State Secondary Principals (VASSP), *Transcript of evidence*, Melbourne, 25 July 2011, 8. See also Mr John Geary, Director of Teaching and Learning, Catholic College Bendigo, *Transcript of evidence*, Bendigo, 20 September 2011, 5; Ms Sarah Cody, Teacher, Catholic College Bendigo, *Transcript of evidence*, Bendigo, 20 September 2011, 5.

⁸⁵⁷ Kayla, Year 12 student, The Mac.Robertson Girls' High School, *Transcript of evidence*, Melbourne, 26 July 2011, 3.

Monash University. Consistent with previous research in this area, their work has found that specific education enhances teachers' attitudes and practices in relation to gifted students. Dr Plunkett summarised their findings:

The results have basically shown that there is a very big impact on people who do the course in terms of developing a much more positive attitude towards giftedness, particularly in relation to the value of acceleration, the value of grouping by ability and the fact that these students actually do require support.⁸⁵⁸

Many participants in this Inquiry agreed that teacher education is important in ensuring more positive teacher attitudes towards gifted students and gifted education.⁸⁵⁹

8.2 What makes a good teacher of gifted students?

This section considers the attributes and knowledge that teachers need to effectively teach gifted and talented students.

8.2.1 Teachers' characteristics

The Committee asked participants in this Inquiry to identify the characteristics of a good teacher for gifted and talented students. Participants suggested that an ideal teacher for such students:

- is flexible
- is open-minded
- is enthusiastic and passionate
- has depth of knowledge and skill in his or her subject area
- recognises and caters for different learning styles
- understands strategies for teaching gifted students
- is willing to put in extra time to lesson preparation
- is open to learning himself or herself
- understands the psychology and special needs of gifted students.⁸⁶⁰

⁸⁵⁸ Dr Margaret Plunkett, Senior Lecturer, Faculty of Education, Monash University, *Transcript of evidence*, Melbourne, 12 September 2011, 2. See also John Geake and Miraca Gross, 'Teachers' negative affect toward academically gifted students. An evolutionary psychological study' 52(3) *Gifted Child Quarterly* 217, 228; Karen Megay-Nespoli, 'Beliefs and attitudes of novice teachers regarding instruction of academically talented learners' 23(3) *Roeper Review* 178, 181; Miraca Gross, 'Changing teacher attitudes towards gifted children: An early and essential step' in Jimmy Chan et al (eds) *Maximizing potential: Lengthening and strengthening our stride* (1997) University of Hong Kong, Social Sciences Research Centre, 17.

⁸⁵⁹ Mrs Deborah DeBuhr, *Submission 46*, 6, 12–13; Australian Mathematics Trust, *Submission 7*, 3–4; Australian College of Educators (Victorian Branch), *Submission 21*, 6; Distance Education Centre Victoria, *Submission 24*, 2; Dr Leonie Kronborg, Coordinator of Gifted Education Assessment Clinic, Krongold Centre, Faculty of Education, Monash University, *Submission 104*, 8; Dr Maria Adams, *Submission 65*, 1; Ms Pam Lyons, Coordinator, Able Learners' Enrichment Program, La Trobe University, *Submission 71*, 3; Principals' Association of Victorian Catholic Secondary Schools (PAVCSS), *Submission 74*, 9; Methodist Ladies' College, *Submission 84*, 5; Ms Rhonda Collins, *Submission 110*, 4.

Some participants also pointed out that many teachers in gifted education programs are gifted themselves. Professor Leon Piterman, Pro Vice-Chancellor of Monash University's Berwick and Peninsula campuses, told the Committee in relation to Nossal High School, a new selective entry school:

I get the sense that a number of the teachers are fulfilling a position description comparable to that of a university academic. They have the same desire to gain knowledge, to be a tier of knowledge, to look for evidence for what works and what does not work and to critically appraise the evidence ... It is not just repeating and regurgitating things that are done in a fairly stereotypical fashion.⁸⁶¹

The characteristics of an effective gifted education teacher identified by Inquiry participants are consistent with research in this area.⁸⁶²

8.2.2 Teachers' knowledge

There were strong themes in the evidence about the specific knowledge that Victorian teachers need to successfully provide for gifted and talented students. The key learning areas identified by participants in this Inquiry are:

1. What giftedness is, including learning styles of gifted students.
2. How to identify gifted students.
3. Strategies to cater for gifted students, particularly curriculum differentiation.
4. The emotional needs of gifted students.⁸⁶³

The Committee recognises that these four learning areas should form the foundation for improved teacher education in relation to giftedness.

8.3 Education and training for early childhood educators

Some of the participants in this Inquiry called for increased education about giftedness for early childhood educators, both at the pre-service and in-service stages. Dr Gail Byrne, Chair of the CHIP Foundation, an independent advisory service specialising in the needs of gifted children and their families, told the Committee:

⁸⁶⁰ Dr Leonie Kronborg, Senior Lecturer, Coordinator of Postgraduate Studies in Gifted Education, Faculty of Education, Monash University, *Transcript of evidence*, Berwick, 26 July 2011, 3; Goldfields LLEN, *Submission 86*, 8; Mr Neil Davis, Acting Principal, Box Hill High School, *Transcript of evidence*, Box Hill, 29 August 2011, 6; Mr Colin Simpson, Principal, Victorian College of the Arts Secondary School (VCASS), *Transcript of evidence*, Southbank, 15 August 2011, 10; Ms Michelle Desaulniers, Teacher, Nossal High School, *Transcript of evidence*, Berwick, 26 July 2011, 2–3.

⁸⁶¹ Professor Leon Piterman, Pro Vice-Chancellor, Berwick and Peninsula campuses, Monash University, *Transcript of evidence*, Berwick, 26 July 2011, 4. See also Dr Leonie Kronborg, *Transcript of evidence*, 26 July 2011, above n 860, 3; Mr Neil Davis, *Transcript of evidence*, above n 860, 6; WiseOnes Australia, *Submission 18*, 6.

⁸⁶² Wilma Vialle and Siobhan Quigley, 'Does the teacher of the gifted need to be gifted?' 17(2) *Gifted and Talented International* 85, 86; Jan Hansen and John Feldhusen, above n 847, 119.

⁸⁶³ Dr Leonie Kronborg, Senior Lecturer, Coordinator of Postgraduate Studies in Gifted Education, Faculty of Education, Monash University, *Transcript of evidence*, Melbourne, 12 September 2011, 4, 7; Dr Debora Lipson, *Transcript of evidence*, Melbourne, 19 September 2011, 3; Australian College of Educators (Victorian Branch), *Submission 21*, 2; Dr Danuta Chessor, *Submission 76*, above n 854, 2–3; Associate Professor John Munro, Exceptional Learning and Gifted Education, Graduate School of Education, The University of Melbourne, *Transcript of evidence*, Melbourne, 19 September 2011, 5, 11.

[CHIP representatives] have been asked to go out to kindergartens, for instance, and talk to kindergarten teachers, because if we think that pre-service teacher training is poor, there is nothing in the very early years training, and after those sessions, as we have gone through those checklists, we have these people contacting us saying, 'I have got this child who is doing X or Y'.⁸⁶⁴

Similarly, a teacher with extensive experience working in gifted programs submitted:

The academic rigour of secondary schools and upper primary classrooms is quite foreign to most early learning centres and junior primary grades. Young gifted students who have mastered a skill are often encouraged (by teachers with little or no understanding of Gifted and Talented Education) to keep practising it, help other children learn it or try a different activity rather than master a more difficult skill associated with the first.⁸⁶⁵

The qualification requirements for early childhood educators are currently in a state of flux, with the establishment of the National Quality Framework on 1 January 2012. The Framework will provide national consistency in a range of areas, including qualifications and educator-to-child ratios. The new arrangements will be phased in between 2012 and 2020.

Generally, early childhood educators are required to hold an approved certificate III or teaching qualification.⁸⁶⁶ A new national body, the Australian Children's Education and Care Quality Authority, has been set up to oversee the implementation of the Framework, including to approve educator qualifications.

The Minister for Education advised the Committee that most early childhood educators in Victoria are required to complete four days of professional learning activities each year.⁸⁶⁷ New National Quality Standards, which have been introduced as part of the Framework, also place an emphasis on ongoing professional development, requiring all early childhood educators to have individual development plans to support their ongoing development and performance improvement.⁸⁶⁸

There are a paucity of programs and strategies in Australia that aim to increase the awareness and knowledge of early childhood educators about giftedness. The Committee's research identified initiatives in only two jurisdictions: Western Australia and New South Wales.

The Western Australian Department of Education's website provides a number of suggested learning activities for gifted students at the early childhood level.⁸⁶⁹

In New South Wales there is a more comprehensive approach, with the Best Start Gifted and Talented Kindergarten Resource Package aiming to equip teachers with the skills to identify and appropriately cater for gifted learners at an early age. As discussed in

⁸⁶⁴ Dr Gail Byrne, Chair, CHIP Foundation, *Transcript of evidence*, Melbourne, 25 July 2011, 6. See also Faculty of Education, Australian Catholic University, *Submission 13*, 6; Dr Gail Byrne, Psychologist, Exceptional Children, *Submission 63*, 6.

⁸⁶⁵ Name withheld, *Submission 75*, 2.

⁸⁶⁶ A list of approved courses is available at Australian Children's Education & Care Quality Authority (ACECQA), *Qualifications, lists & registers*, <<http://www.acecqa.gov.au/qualifications>> viewed 9 January 2012.

⁸⁶⁷ Letter from Minister for Education (Victoria), to Chair, Victorian Parliament Education and Training Committee, 7 February 2012, 1.

⁸⁶⁸ ACECQA, *Guide to the National Quality Standard* (2011) ACECQA, 182. Available at <<http://acecqa.gov.au/links-and-resources/national-quality-framework-resources/>> viewed 21 January 2012.

⁸⁶⁹ Department of Education (Western Australia), *Suggested activities: Early childhood*, <<http://www.det.wa.edu.au/curriculum-support/giftedandtalented/detcms/navigation/for-teachers/provision/suggested-activities/early-childhood/>> viewed 11 January 2011.

chapter four, under the Best Start Program an assessment tool is used to identify each student's literacy and numeracy skills and understanding when they commence kindergarten.⁸⁷⁰ The New South Wales Department of Education and Communities advised the Committee that kindergarten teachers have been provided with professional learning in curriculum differentiation to ensure they are able to cater for the needs of identified gifted students.⁸⁷¹

In chapter four the Committee concluded that early childhood educators are well placed to identify giftedness and recommended increased information and support to assist them in this function. As identified in chapter six, the Committee believes that it is essential to appropriately stimulate these gifted children once they have been identified, particularly by providing an appropriately differentiated curriculum.

While the Committee received very limited evidence in this area, the evidence before it suggests that the lack of both pre-service and in-service training on giftedness for early childhood educators is a barrier to improved provision for gifted students in the early childhood education setting. Therefore, the Committee recommends the Victorian Government explore opportunities to ensure that basic information about giftedness is included as part of pre-service education for those working as early childhood educators. This should be complemented by the provision of professional learning on giftedness for early childhood educators. This professional learning should cover both identification and strategies for catering for gifted children in the early childhood environment.

Recommendation 38: Pre-service training for early childhood educators

That the Victorian Government work with universities and TAFE colleges to provide increased opportunities for pre-service early childhood educators to learn about giftedness.

Recommendation 39: Professional learning for early childhood educators

That the Victorian Government develop and implement a professional learning package on giftedness for early childhood educators.

8.4 Pre-service teacher training

A strong theme in the evidence to this Inquiry was the need to ensure that pre-service teacher training equips all new teachers with at least some understanding of gifted students and how to cater for their needs. This section explores current pre-service teacher education and opportunities to enhance this.

8.4.1 Current pre-service teacher training

Pre-service teacher training requirements are currently in state of transition, with a move to nationally consistent standards. Currently, in order to first register as a teacher, applicants must have completed an approved four year teaching qualification or four years of higher study, including at least one year of an approved teaching

⁸⁷⁰ Department of Education and Training (New South Wales), *What is Best Start?*, <<http://www.curriculumsupport.education.nsw.gov.au/beststart/information/index.htm>> viewed 4 January 2012.

⁸⁷¹ Letter from Learning and Development R/General Manager, Department of Education and Communities (New South Wales), to Chair, Victorian Parliament Education and Training Committee, 15 November 2011, 5.

qualification.⁸⁷² Applicants must also have completed at least 45 days of supervised teaching practice. The Victorian Institute of Teaching is responsible for accrediting teacher training courses, but from 2013 this will be in line with nationally consistent standards.⁸⁷³ To obtain course accreditation institutions will be required to demonstrate how their program meets National Program Standards and equips graduating teachers to meet Graduate Teacher Standards.⁸⁷⁴

At present, gifted education does not feature prominently on the syllabus of pre-service teacher training courses in Australia. The Australian Catholic University, a provider of pre-service teacher training Australia-wide, submitted:

A cursory search on the internet reveals that an overwhelming majority of teacher education courses (early childhood, primary and high school) offered by universities in Australia, both undergraduate and post-graduate, do not include even one unit of study addressing the education of gifted and talented students. It appears that this has been the case for many years.⁸⁷⁵

The evidence received by the Committee is consistent with that observation.

Even if giftedness is studied by pre-service teachers as part of a core subject, it tends to be a very small component. For example, academic, Ms Barbara Black told the Committee that all second year students at Victoria University complete a subject called Making the Conditions for Learning, in which giftedness is studied in one part of a two hour session on students with different learning needs.⁸⁷⁶

A number of institutions do offer elective subjects for pre-service teachers in this area. These include:

- Monash University offers the elective Gifted Education, as part of both its pre-service primary and secondary teacher training, including through distance education.⁸⁷⁷ This subject specifically focuses on understanding and catering for giftedness.
- Victoria University offers the elective Teaching Children with Special Learning Needs, which addresses giftedness in one lecture out of a total of 12.⁸⁷⁸

Dr Michael Faulkner, a Lecturer in the School of Education La Trobe University, informed the Committee that he formerly ran one or two elective unit on gifted education at the University's Bendigo campus. However, these subjects have not been offered

⁸⁷² Victorian Institute of Teaching (VIT), *Qualification for teacher registration policy 2012* (2011) VIT. Available at <<http://www.vit.vic.edu.au/registration/registration-policies/Pages/IntroductionoftheQualificationforTeacherRegistrationPolicy2012.aspx>> viewed 21 December 2011.

⁸⁷³ Letter from Chief Executive Officer, VIT, to Chair, Victorian Parliament Education and Training Committee, 12 April 2012, 1.

⁸⁷⁴ Australian Institute for Teaching and School Leadership (AITSL), *Accreditation of initial teacher education programs in Australia: Standards and procedures April 2011* (2011) Education Services Australia. Available at <<http://www.aitsl.edu.au/teachers/accreditation-of-initial-teacher-education/initial-teacher-education-program-accreditation.html>> viewed 9 January 2012.

⁸⁷⁵ Faculty of Education, Australian Catholic University, *Submission 13*, 5. See also Wilma Vialle and Karen Rogers, 'Gifted, talented or educationally disadvantaged?', Routledge, included in *Submission 28 Appendix C*, 10.

⁸⁷⁶ Ms Barbara Black, *Transcript of evidence*, Melbourne, 19 September 2011, 4.

⁸⁷⁷ Dr Leonie Kronborg, Senior Lecturer, Coordinator of Postgraduate Studies in Gifted Education and Dr Margaret Plunkett, Senior Lecturer, Faculty of Education, Monash University, *Submission 92*, 1, 5.

⁸⁷⁸ Dr Debora Lipson, *Transcript of evidence*, above n 863, 3.

since 2009 due to 'Changes in course structure and shifting VIT [Victorian Institute of Teaching] requirements'.⁸⁷⁹

In addition, the Catholic Education Office Melbourne informed the Committee that it has actively pursued relationships with the University of Melbourne and the Australian Catholic University, providing expert staff to deliver sessional lectures on gifted education to pre-service teachers at these institutions.⁸⁸⁰ Mrs Deborah DeBuhr, a teacher and education consultant, told the Committee that she was in preliminary discussion with the University of Ballarat to introduce lectures on gifted education for pre-service teachers.⁸⁸¹

8.4.2 Is current pre-service teacher training adequate?

Many participants in the Inquiry, including both teacher educators and teachers themselves, emphasised that the current pre-service teacher training is not adequate when it comes to gifted education. Dr Debora Lipson who is involved with the development and provision of units in the Bachelor of Education at Victoria University told the Committee that, in her personal view, the current offerings at the University are not sufficient. She commented:

what we find is that many pre-service teachers do not engage in deep and reflective discussions pertaining to gifted education in any targeted, thorough, sophisticated or overt way through the four years of their course.⁸⁸²

Dr Kronborg and Dr Plunkett informed the Committee that there is growing interest in the elective gifted education subject they offer at Monash University, with enrolments rising from 142 when it was introduced in 2008, to 180 in 2010. However, their submission notes 'as this unit is only an Elective, there are many who leave Monash Education programs without any preparation for teaching highly able students'.⁸⁸³ Dr Plunkett outlined why she thought Monash's elective course was increasingly popular:

students talk amongst themselves and they will make comments like, 'You really need to do this unit because it has just taught me so much'. I think students are realising amongst themselves that they are very underprepared to deal with individual differences across a whole range of areas, but particularly in relation to giftedness.⁸⁸⁴

Similarly, many teachers lamented that they did not study giftedness at all, or in enough detail, as part of their undergraduate training. For example, Mrs Michelle Whitby, a primary school teacher with over ten years' experience, told the Committee:

In my four year undergraduate degree, the learning needs of gifted students was covered in one lecture, whilst adaptation of curriculum for less able students was a regular discussion throughout the course.⁸⁸⁵

⁸⁷⁹ Dr Michael Faulkner, Lecturer, School of Education, La Trobe University, *Submission 95*, 1–2.

⁸⁸⁰ Catholic Education Office Melbourne, *Submission 87*, 8.

⁸⁸¹ Mrs Deborah DeBuhr, *Submission 46*, 4.

⁸⁸² Dr Debora Lipson, *Transcript of evidence*, Melbourne, above n 863, 3. See also Dr Debora Lipson and Ms Barbara Black, *Submission 78*, 4; Dr Michael Faulkner, *Transcript of evidence*, above n 855, 3.

⁸⁸³ Dr Leonie Kronborg and Dr Margaret Plunkett, *Submission 92*, above n 877, 5.

⁸⁸⁴ Dr Margaret Plunkett, *Transcript of evidence*, above n 858, 4.

⁸⁸⁵ Mrs Michele Whitby, *Submission 114*, 1. See also Dr Gail Byrne, *Transcript of evidence*, above n 864, 5–6; Ms Carolyn Ferguson, *Submission 55*, 2; Mr Martin Jellinek, Science Teacher, specialising in SEAL classes, Box Hill High School, *Transcript of evidence*, Box Hill, 29 August 2011, 7.

8.4.3 Improving pre-service teacher training

The overwhelming majority of participants in this Inquiry agreed that pre-service teachers need more training about giftedness. This section explores how pre-service teacher training can be enhanced both academically and through practical experience, to better equip all teachers to cater for gifted students.

Should gifted education be compulsory for pre-service teachers?

Many Inquiry participants argued that training in gifted education should be mandatory for all training teachers.⁸⁸⁶ This same conclusion was reached by the 2001 report of the Senate Employment, Workplace Relations, Small Business and Education References Committee, which recommended that registration requirements should require all newly graduated teachers to have completed at least one semester unit on gifted education.⁸⁸⁷ However, in undertaking the current Inquiry the Committee found no evidence of any Australian universities including a core subject on gifted education as part of their pre-service teacher training as recommended by the 2001 report.

The CHIP Foundation's submission articulated why compulsory pre-service education for teachers is warranted:

If one takes the rule-of-thumb that the top 5% of a population are "high intellectual potential" approximately 35,000 students in Victorian schools are being educated by teachers who have received no pre-service training into their needs. Surely this number of students is not inconsiderable and warrants some obligatory study for all teachers.⁸⁸⁸

Similarly, Ms Pat Truscott, a WiseOnes licensee, told the Committee:

I think we sell teachers short by not permanently putting into teacher training an understanding of gifted education very early, not at postgrad level ... How can we accuse people of not knowing and not doing if in fact we have not given them those tools very early and made sure that they understand that it is quite a normal thing for 10 to 15 per cent of the children they will see in front of them?⁸⁸⁹

Several Inquiry participants suggested that the Victorian Institute of Teaching's (VIT) initial registration requirements should include a requirement to have completed some study on gifted education. For example, Ms Pam Lyons, Coordinator of the Able Learners' Enrichment Program at La Trobe University, told the Committee:

⁸⁸⁶ AAEGT, *Submission 28*, 3; VAGTC, *Submission 34*, 13; Dr Gail Byrne, *Submission 63*, above n 864, 6; Ms Caelli Greenbank, *Submission 67*, 2–3; Methodist Ladies' College, *Submission 84*, 5–6; Maroondah Gifted Children's Parents' Association, *Submission 98*, 10; Gifted Resources, *Submission 113*, 12; Department of Education (Tasmania), *Submission 10*, 8; VACPSP, *Submission 111*, 4; Dr Michael Faulkner, *Submission 95*, above n 879, 3; Ms Pam Lyons, *Submission 71*, above n 859, 4; Box Hill High School, *Submission 81*, 10; Name withheld, *Submission 75*, 2; Dr Debora Lipson, *Transcript of evidence*, above n 863, 3; Associate Professor John Munro, *Transcript of evidence*, above n 863, 6; Dr Karen Ward, *Transcript of evidence*, Bendigo, 20 September 2011, 3; Mr Phil Brown, Executive Officer, Country Education Project, *Transcript of evidence*, Melbourne, 10 October 2011, 8; Ms Maxine Cowie, Director, Starjump, *Transcript of evidence*, Melbourne, 10 October 2011, 5.

⁸⁸⁷ Senate Employment, Workplace Relations, Small Business and Education References Committee, *The education of gifted children* (2001) Commonwealth of Australia, 96.

⁸⁸⁸ CHIP Foundation, *Submission 77*, 4–5.

⁸⁸⁹ Ms Pat Truscott, Education Manager, Access Re-Ed Services, WiseOnes Australia licensee, *Transcript of evidence*, Melbourne, 25 July 2011, 6.

the only way you are going to get teachers doing pre-service gifted is to get the VIT to mandate that they have to have at least one unit of gifted education to get teacher registration. In the end it is the VIT that approves the education courses, and if they do not care if you are doing gifted education, it is not going to be put in the course.⁸⁹⁰

This is the approach that was recommended by the Senate Committee in 2001.

However, not all participants in this Inquiry agreed that studying gifted education should be mandatory for pre-service teachers. Dr Kronborg expressed the view that pre-service training on giftedness should be offered only as an elective for those training to be secondary school teachers,⁸⁹¹ while her Monash University colleague, Dr Plunkett, stressed it should be compulsory for all primary school teaching students.⁸⁹² WiseOnes argued that gifted students should only be taught by teachers who are gifted themselves and suggested that learning about gifted education should only be compulsory for pre-service teachers identified as having high IQs.⁸⁹³

Some contributors also noted the challenges associated with mandating pre-service gifted education study. Mr Ian Burrage, the General Manager of DEECD's Education and Policy Division, told the Committee that while he supported more pre-service education about giftedness there were issues with curriculum crowding in pre-service teacher training:

We have the challenge on the pre-service side regularly that everyone wants more time on their issue in pre-service education. People would say the same about maths, science, languages and a whole range of issues. Because this is a particular cohort with particular needs, the awareness of their particular needs does need to be raised, but not every teacher can be an absolute expert in every field.⁸⁹⁴

He suggested that pre-service teacher training should give teachers an awareness of giftedness but not raise it in depth, with teacher then able to draw on support and resources when they need it. The resources that teachers need to support them in teaching gifted students are discussed in chapter nine.

The Committee wrote to the Victorian Institute of Teaching requesting its views on the evidence received about pre-service teacher training, particularly the argument voiced by many participants that all pre-service teachers should be required to study giftedness. The Institute informed the Committee that the new national standards will ensure that all accredited teacher training courses will address the needs of gifted learners. In particular, the Institute stated:

providers wishing to have their initial teacher education programs accredited are required to provide evidence that graduates will be able to demonstrate:

- knowledge and understanding of physical, social and intellectual development and characteristics of students and how these may affect learning (Standard 1.1)
- knowledge and understanding of strategies for differentiating teaching to meet the specific learning needs of students across the full range of abilities (Standard 1.5)

⁸⁹⁰ Ms Pam Lyons, Coordinator, Able Learners' Enrichment Program, La Trobe University, *Transcript of evidence*, Bendigo, 20 September 2011, 3. See also Dr Michael Faulkner, *Submission 95*, above n 879, 3.

⁸⁹¹ Dr Leonie Kronborg, *Transcript of evidence*, above n 863, 5.

⁸⁹² Dr Margaret Plunkett, *Transcript of evidence*, above n 858, 4.

⁸⁹³ WiseOnes Australia, *Submission 18*, 3, 11.

⁸⁹⁴ Mr Ian Burrage, General Manager, Education and Policy Research Division, DEECD, *Transcript of evidence*, Melbourne, 25 July 2011, 4–5. See also Dr Michael Faulkner, *Transcript of evidence*, above n 855, 3.

- set learning goals that provide achievable challenges for students of varying abilities and characteristics (Standard 3.1)
- identify strategies to support inclusive student participation and engagement in classroom activities (Standard 4.1)⁸⁹⁵

The Committee recognises that the current pre-service training does not adequately equip teachers to identify and cater for gifted children in Victorian schools. The Committee notes that new accreditation requirements effective from 2013 will require course providers to demonstrate that their courses provide pre-service teachers with the knowledge and ability to cater for a wide range of students, including gifted and high-ability students. The Committee is confident that this new approach will, over time, ensure that all new teachers have at least a basic understanding of giftedness and gifted students, which can be built on through classroom experience and professional development once they commence teaching.

Providing opportunities to work with gifted students on teaching placements

Several Inquiry participants called for student teachers to be exposed to gifted students as part of their practical training.⁸⁹⁶ Most pre-service teachers do not currently have the opportunity to gain practical experience working with gifted students. Ms Gabrielle Leigh, President of the Victorian Principals Association, which represents primary school principals and leaders, told the Committee that as a student teacher, 'You are fortunate if you go into a classroom with a good practitioner and they have a gifted child and they talk to you about it.'⁸⁹⁷

Miss Natalie Sellick, a Grade 4 teacher at Kennington Primary School in Bendigo, emphasised that academic learning alone is not sufficient and that training teachers would benefit from in-classroom exposure to gifted students:

I think university is still quite removed from the classroom. Even though you might do a gifted and talented program or unit at university, it is still quite removed from what it looks like in the classroom and how it runs. I think it is definitely important for them to be doing the theory side, but also it is very important for them to hop into the classroom and see what it is like to look at that child, assess where they are at and monitor them as well.⁸⁹⁸

The Country Education Project, a community organisation that works to support and develop education in rural Victoria, reflecting on its involvement in providing practical experience to pre-service teachers virtually, noted that the exposure to gifted students does not necessarily have to be face-to-face.⁸⁹⁹

The Committee came across several examples of pre-service teachers having the opportunity to work with gifted students. Nossal High School has been specifically

⁸⁹⁵ Letter from Chief Executive Officer, VIT, above n 873, 2.

⁸⁹⁶ Department of Education (Tasmania), *Submission 10*, 8; Ms Pam Lyons, *Transcript of evidence*, above n 890, 3. See also Michael Faulkner and Pam Lyons, 'La Trobe University's Able Learners' Enrichment Programme: An innovation in regional Australia', included in *Submission 71 Appendix A*, 8.

⁸⁹⁷ Ms Gabrielle Leigh, President, Victorian Principals Association (VPA), *Transcript of evidence*, Melbourne, 12 September 2011, 8.

⁸⁹⁸ Miss Natalie Sellick, Grade 4 Teacher, Kennington Primary School, *Transcript of evidence*, Bendigo, 20 September 2011, 7.

⁸⁹⁹ Mr Phil Brown, *Transcript of evidence*, above n 886, 8.

designed to accommodate up to ten student teachers at a time and works very closely with the School of Education at Monash University.⁹⁰⁰

Another example is the Able Learners' Enrichment Program, a holiday program for gifted school students aged 5 to 14 run at La Trobe University's Bendigo campus. For a number of years both undergraduate and master's students studying a gifted education elective unit at La Trobe University in Bendigo had the opportunity to participate in the Program as workshop tutors. The Program's Coordinators, Dr Faulkner and Ms Lyons, reflected:

The practical experience of teaching gifted students made a significant difference to their [the teachers'] understanding of the characteristics and needs of these students ... a purely theoretical study of giftedness does not completely prepare teachers for the variety of differences they will encounter when teaching gifted children.⁹⁰¹

Dr Faulkner expanded on this at the Committee's public hearing, explaining that practical exposure was important in helping teachers form more positive views about gifted students.⁹⁰² Due to changes in the course structure noted earlier in this chapter, pre-service teachers at La Trobe no longer participate in this program.

The Committee agrees that there are significant benefits in pre-service teachers having practical experience working with gifted students as part of their teaching placements. Such exposure may help promote more positive attitudes to gifted students among these training teachers, as well as providing them with more confidence and skill to effectively identify and cater for these students when they commence work as teachers. While the Committee acknowledges that it is not possible for all training teachers to have an opportunity to work with gifted students, it believes that there is potential to significantly expand such opportunities, including through using technology.

Recommendation 40: Opportunities for pre-service teachers to work with gifted students

That the Victorian Government work with universities to provide increased opportunities for pre-service teachers to work with gifted students as part of their teaching placements.

8.5 Teacher professional learning

Teachers' learning does not stop when they complete their pre-service training. Evidence to the Inquiry emphasised the importance of teachers having access to professional learning to update and enhance their knowledge and skills on an ongoing basis. This section explores current teacher professional learning opportunities in relation to gifted education and identifies potential areas for improvement.

⁹⁰⁰ Mr Roger Page, Principal, Nossal High School, *Transcript of evidence*, Berwick, 26 July 2011, 2.

⁹⁰¹ Michael Faulkner and Pam Lyons, 'La Trobe University's Able Learners' Enrichment Programme: An innovation in regional Australia', included in *Submission 71 Appendix A*, 8.

⁹⁰² Dr Michael Faulkner, *Transcript of evidence*, above n 855, 3.

8.5.1 Current professional learning requirements

The standards of practice for teachers recognise the importance of ongoing teacher professional learning.⁹⁰³ Professional learning requirements have also been incorporated into teacher registration, with Victorian teachers currently required to complete 100 hours of teacher professional learning in each five year registration period.⁹⁰⁴ The professional learning requirements were increased from 75 hours required over a four year period in 2012.⁹⁰⁵

While professional learning activities must relate to the standards of professional practice to count for registration purposes, teachers have flexibility in selecting the professional learning activities that suit their individual needs. There are a wide range of activities that may be recognised as professional learning including conferences, workshops, seminars, professional reading and professional meetings.⁹⁰⁶ At least half of a teacher's professional learning activities must involve research-based knowledge sourced from outside the immediate school environment.

8.5.2 What professional learning activities are currently available?

A search of the PDi database of accredited professional learning activities maintained by the Victorian Institute of Teaching found only four courses directly related to gifted education.⁹⁰⁷ However, the Committee received evidence about a number of other gifted education professional learning opportunities. These include:

- The Victorian Association for Gifted and Talented Children, a voluntary organisation that support educators and parents to teach and raise gifted students, provides conferences, workshops and seminars across Victoria.⁹⁰⁸
- The Gifted Support Network, a support group for parents with gifted children, runs seminars with expert speakers, which are usually well attended by teachers.⁹⁰⁹
- The Catholic Education Office Melbourne provides workshops with expert speakers throughout the state.⁹¹⁰
- The Australian Association for the Education of the Gifted and Talented, a national association representing the interests of gifted children, is currently

⁹⁰³ VIT, *Standards of professional practice for full registration* (2003) VIT. Available at <Standards of professional practice for full registration> viewed 21 December 2011; AITSL, *National professional standards for teachers*, <<http://www.teacherstandards.aitsl.edu.au/Standards/AllStandards>> viewed 5 June 2012.

⁹⁰⁴ AITSL, *Fixed period of registration*, <<http://www.aitsl.edu.au/teachers/registration/fix-period-of-registration.html>> viewed 9 January 2012.

⁹⁰⁵ VIT, *Changes to renewal of registration for teachers currently in a five-year period*, <<http://www.vit.vic.edu.au/registration/i-want-to-renew-my-registration/Pages/Changestorenewalofregistrationforteacherscurrentlyinafive-yearperiod.aspx>> viewed 21 December 2011.

⁹⁰⁶ VIT, *What PD will be recognised?* (n.d.) VIT. Available at <What PD will be recognised?> viewed 21 December 2011.

⁹⁰⁷ VIT, *Pd search*, <<http://search.pdi.vic.edu.au/vitdb/app>> viewed 14 June 2012.

⁹⁰⁸ VAGTC, *Submission 34*, 3, 9.

⁹⁰⁹ Ms Louise Broadbent, President, Gifted Support Network, *Transcript of evidence*, Melbourne, 12 September 2011, 2, 6.

⁹¹⁰ Catholic Education Office Melbourne, *Submission 87*, 8.

producing a DVD that will showcase best practice in gifted education across primary and secondary schools throughout Australia.⁹¹¹

Several academics participating in this Inquiry also indicated that they provide occasional professional learning activities to Victorian teachers upon request.⁹¹²

Many of the professional learning activities highlighted by Inquiry participants are provided on a voluntary basis, and not all are recognised for the purposes of teacher registration requirements.⁹¹³

In addition to these general professional learning activities, DEECD facilitates specific professional learning for Select Entry Accelerated Learning (SEAL) Program teachers.⁹¹⁴ The Committee did not receive detailed information about the contents of this training but notes that the Department's website makes it clear that professional learning, while important to the successful implementation of the SEAL Program, is primarily the responsibility of each individual SEAL school.⁹¹⁵

The 2001 Senate committee report found that professional learning on giftedness needs to be systematic and centrally supported and recommended increased teacher professional development in this area.⁹¹⁶ That Committee's recommendation was implemented through the Gifted Education Professional Learning Package developed by Gifted Education Research, Resource and Information Centre (GERRIC). The package consists of six modules and covers all levels of schooling. It is aimed at all teachers but contains extension components to extend the knowledge of teachers who already have an understanding of giftedness. The package was sent to all Australian schools in 2005 and is also available online.⁹¹⁷

Professional learning in schools

Many schools that contributed to the Inquiry highlighted their strong commitment to professional learning in the area of gifted education.⁹¹⁸ Of particular note is Nossal High School, one of the state's new selective entry schools. At Nossal teachers are regularly provided with up-to-date reading material about giftedness and Wednesday afternoons are specifically dedicated to professional learning. Mr Stuart Fankhauser told the Committee that, as a new teacher at the school, he had benefited significantly from the regular professional learning sessions:

⁹¹¹ VAGTC, *Submission 34*, 6.

⁹¹² Dr Margaret Plunkett, *Transcript of evidence*, above n 858, 5–6; Dr Leonie Kronborg, *Transcript of evidence*, above n 863, 5–6.

⁹¹³ Dr Margaret Plunkett, *Transcript of evidence*, above n 858, 5; Ms Louise Broadbent, *Transcript of evidence*, above n 909, 2, 6; VAGTC, *Submission 34*, 1.

⁹¹⁴ Mr Ian Burrage, *Transcript of evidence*, above n 894, 9, 11; DEECD, *Submission 58*, 7.

⁹¹⁵ DEECD, *School and teacher support*, <<http://www.education.vic.gov.au/studentlearning/programs/gifted/seal/support.htm>> viewed 9 January 2012.

⁹¹⁶ Senate Employment, Workplace Relations, Small Business and Education References Committee, above n 887, 96–97.

⁹¹⁷ Miraca Gross et al, *Gifted Education Professional Development Package* (2005) Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations. Available at <http://www.dest.gov.au/sectors/school_education/publications_resources/profiles/Gifted_Education_Professional_Development_Package.htm> viewed 9 January 2012.

⁹¹⁸ Rosebud Secondary College, *Submission 50*, 6–7; Methodist Ladies' College, *Submission 84*, 6; Mr Bruce Cunningham, Principal, Camelot Rise Primary School, *Transcript of evidence*, Glen Waverley, 15 August 2011, 5; Suzanne Cory High School, *Submission 85*, 6; Ms Amy Porter, Assistant Principal, The Mac.Robertson Girls' High School, *Transcript of evidence*, Melbourne, 26 July 2011, 3; Mr Tim Storey, Head of Dance, VCASS, *Transcript of evidence*, Southbank, 15 August 2011, 11; Mr Michael Sargeant, Head of Music, VCASS, *Transcript of evidence*, Southbank, 15 August 2011, 11.

The explicit PD [professional development] that we have been able to have on Wednesday afternoons has been terrific, and it is very regular, which is also terrific. It just keeps the conversation going ... For me, the value has been the links with researchers. They have such close links with various universities—Melbourne and Monash—and they come to our school and discuss their research to keep us abreast of the latest ideas. It has been extremely valuable. I do not know how that close connection can be maintained in every school around the state, but for us it has been absolutely terrific and very valuable.⁹¹⁹

The school's Principal, Mr Roger Page, informed the Committee that because of the school's newness and its on-site professional development centre, Nossal hosts many visitors 'who come down to look at what we are doing but who also share what they are doing too, so it is very much a two-way communication'.⁹²⁰ To date professional learning topics at Nossal have included concepts of giftedness, identification, and curriculum differentiation.⁹²¹

Dr Kronborg is conducting a project to document the outcomes of the professional learning activities at the school. She predicted that over a three to four year period 'teachers will change from novices to experts in teaching highly able students in a select entry high school, which will result in a positive impact for all students who enter the school'.⁹²²

8.5.3 Is current teacher professional learning adequate?

Many participants in the Inquiry argued that Victorian teachers need increased access to quality professional learning opportunities in the area of giftedness. For example, Dr Faulkner from La Trobe University submitted:

There are many teachers in Victorian schools who have little formal education in this area, and some carry into their teaching the unaltered attendant attitudes, they began their pre-service education with.⁹²³

Similarly, Dr John Munro, Associate Professor of Exceptional Learning and Gifted Education at Melbourne University's Graduate School of Education, commented:

the professional knowledge of school staff in relation to gifted education provision is comparatively low, particularly when compared with staff knowledge of other aspects of curriculum provision.⁹²⁴

A number of contributors to the Inquiry spoke highly of GERRIC package developed as a result of the 2001 Senate inquiry, although there was concern that it is not being widely used. For example, Ms Sarah Cody, a teacher at the Catholic College Bendigo, told the Committee:

That is fabulous for staff to self-pace their own professional development and it has fantastic content, but the reality is that there are not going to be a lot of people, even with a large staff like ours, who are going to sit down and find that time to go through it.⁹²⁵

⁹¹⁹ Mr Stuart Fankhauser, Teacher, Nossal High School, *Transcript of evidence*, Berwick, 26 July 2011, 2. See also Nossal High School, *Submission 57*, 17–19.

⁹²⁰ Mr Roger Page, *Transcript of evidence*, above n 900, 3.

⁹²¹ Dr Leonie Kronborg, *Transcript of evidence*, above n 863, 5.

⁹²² Dr Leonie Kronborg, *Submission 104*, above n 859, 7.

⁹²³ Dr Michael Faulkner, *Submission 95*, above n 879, 3.

⁹²⁴ Dr John Munro, *Submission 96*, above n 842, 10.

However, Dr Munro submitted that while many teachers have found the content to be of interest, most of those who have completed the package have not changed their teaching practices.⁹²⁶

Several teachers expressed the view that their schools could do more in terms of teacher professional learning in gifted education. One teacher, who resigned to undertake a master's degree in gifted education, reflected that she had never been offered professional learning in gifted education in almost 20 years of teaching.⁹²⁷

The particular lack of gifted education professional learning offerings for teachers in rural and regional areas was also a strong theme in the evidence.⁹²⁸ Other concerns included that training opportunities are only available to schools with specific gifted programs, such as SEAL schools,⁹²⁹ and conversely, that there is not a strong enough commitment to teacher professional learning in some schools with specialist gifted programs.⁹³⁰

Some Inquiry participants were critical of available professional learning offerings. Ms Amy Porter, Assistant Principal at The Mac.Robertson Girls' High School, told the Committee:

most of the professional development out there that is aimed at teaching gifted and talented students does not really understand the way in which these students operate. Often it is a waste of time for staff to go. Unless we have been to the professional development previously, we tend not to advise staff to go because it is often disappointing.⁹³¹

Another teacher at the school noted the lack of professional learning activities aimed at teachers of higher year levels, as well as the lack of professional learning relevant to maths and science teachers.⁹³²

DEECD's submission acknowledged that current training opportunities were not sufficient.⁹³³ At public hearing Mr Burrage from the Department admitted the Victorian Government could do more in this area 'because professional learning, if it is done on a unit-by-unit or school-by-school basis, is expensive, apart from anything else. We could provide more on a statewide basis'.⁹³⁴ Other participants agreed that there needs to be a more centralised approach to providing teacher professional learning in giftedness.⁹³⁵

⁹²⁵ Ms Sarah Cody, *Transcript of evidence*, above n 856, 4. See also VAGTC, *Submission 34*, 6; WiseOnes Australia, *Submission 18*, 15; Mrs Deborah DeBuhr, *Submission 46*, 3; Dr Leonie Kronborg, *Transcript of evidence*, above n 863, 3.

⁹²⁶ Dr John Munro, *Submission 96*, above n 842, 11.

⁹²⁷ Ms Carolyn Ferguson, *Submission 55*, 2. See also Ms Felicity Walker, *Submission 69*, 3; PAVCSS, *Submission 74*, 4; VPA, *Submission 105*, 2.

⁹²⁸ Country Education Project, *Submission 79*, 5; Ms Pam Lyons, *Transcript of evidence*, above n 890, 2; Ms Moragh Tyler, Wonthaggi interest group for gifted and talented children, *Transcript of evidence*, Melbourne, 19 September 2011, 5; Ms Kim Kirkpatrick, Grade 5 Teacher, Kennington Primary School, *Transcript of evidence*, Bendigo, 20 September 2011, 7; Ms Trudi Jacobson, Assistant Principal, Kennington Primary School, *Transcript of evidence*, Bendigo, 20 September 2011, 7.

⁹²⁹ Names withheld, *Submission 9*, 7; Country Education Project, *Submission 79*, 9; VAGTC, *Submission 34*, 16. See also Rosebud Secondary College, *Submission 50*, 6–7.

⁹³⁰ VASSP, *Submission 27*, 4; Dr Debora Lipson and Ms Barbara Black, *Submission 78*, 3; Ms Carmel Meehan, President, VAGTC, *Transcript of evidence*, Melbourne, 25 July 2011, 9–10; Dr Leonie Kronborg, *Transcript of evidence*, above n 863, 10.

⁹³¹ Ms Amy Porter, *Transcript of evidence*, above n 918, 3.

⁹³² Ms Margaret Akins, Assistant Principal, The Mac.Robertson Girls' High School, *Transcript of evidence*, Melbourne, 26 July 2011, 3–4. See also *ibid.*, 4.

⁹³³ DEECD, *Submission 58*, 10.

⁹³⁴ Mr Ian Burrage, General Manager, *Transcript of evidence*, above n 894, 11.

⁹³⁵ Suzanne Cory High School, *Submission 85*, 6; VPA, *Submission 105*, 2; Lilydale High School, *Submission 47*, 3.

8.5.4 Improving teacher professional learning

The evidence presented to the Committee makes it clear that Victorian teachers need increased opportunities to access quality professional learning activities in relation to gifted education. This section considers potential strategies for improving teacher professional learning.

Mandatory or targeted professional learning?

There was strong support among Inquiry participants for professional learning in relation to gifted education being made compulsory for some or all Victorian teachers. Several participants saw mandatory training in giftedness as the only way of ensuring that all teachers access professional learning in this area. Ms Lyons of La Trobe University told the Committee:

Who you need to catch are the ones who are not interested and do not believe in it ... It cannot be a voluntary thing because some people are not going to volunteer. If you do not believe they [gifted students] exist, why would you go and do PD [professional development] in something that is mythical?⁹³⁶

The Victorian Association of Catholic Primary School Principals argued that teachers require mandatory professional learning in this area ‘to ensure we stop these students from ‘falling through the cracks’ or being under-challenged, bored and therefore failing’.⁹³⁷

Suggestions for implementing mandatory professional learning on gifted education included:

- requiring all teachers to undertake at least one activity on gifted education in a five year period as part of their compulsory professional learning requirements⁹³⁸
- requiring all schools to provide three hours of in-service training for all staff in one year of a five year cycle⁹³⁹
- requiring all schools to ensure that at least three teachers receive training in giftedness each year.⁹⁴⁰

Other participants suggested a more targeted approach to teacher professional learning, arguing that professional learning is especially important for teachers in schools with specialist programs, particularly for the teachers coordinating those programs.⁹⁴¹ Dr Kronborg cited research she has undertaken with Dr Plunkett that suggests that educating gifted education program leaders results in improved program quality. She told the Committee:

⁹³⁶ Ms Pam Lyons, *Transcript of evidence*, above n 890, 4–5. See also Mrs Deborah DeBuhr, *Submission 46*, 14.

⁹³⁷ VACPSP, *Submission 111*, 4. See also Dr Debora Lipson and Ms Barbara Black, *Submission 78*, 4; Catholic Education Office Melbourne, *Submission 87*, 5; Mrs Michele Whitby, *Submission 114*, 9.

⁹³⁸ Ms Pam Lyons, *Transcript of evidence*, above n 890, 4–5.

⁹³⁹ Mr Paul Double, *Submission 15*, 1.

⁹⁴⁰ Ms Mauren Theobald, *Submission 115*, 1. See also Box Hill High School, *Submission 81*, 9.

⁹⁴¹ Brunswick Secondary College, *Submission 40*, 5; Box Hill High School Council, *Submission 73*, 2; Ms Monica Jago, SEAL Program Coordinator, Wangaratta High School, *Submission 48*, 7; Mrs Jo Freitag, Coordinator, Gifted Resources, *Transcript of evidence*, Melbourne, 19 September 2011, 5; Ms Mauren Theobald, *Submission 115*, 1.

if you have a coordinator of a program who really understands the needs of gifted kids and how to provide for the curriculum for those students, they also know how to bring in appropriately informed teachers and bring in professional learning staff to provide professional learning that can upskill the teachers. They are much more focused and they are much more supportive.⁹⁴²

Dr Lispon argued that professional learning opportunities should initially be targeted at teachers who are committed to gifted education: 'Then if they are attending these training sessions those selected staff may be able to enthuse the rest of the staff or at least some of their close colleagues.'⁹⁴³ Several other contributors also supported the idea of selected teachers attending professional learning activities and then sharing their knowledge and enthusiasm with their colleagues when they return to school.⁹⁴⁴

However, other Inquiry participants, while not necessarily supporting compulsory professional learning on gifted education, argued that all teachers need to have access to training in this area if there is an expectation that gifted children will be effectively catered for in all Victorian classrooms. For instance, Ms Leigh of the Victorian Principals Association told the Committee, 'In primary schools we believe it should be every teacher who should have the knowledge rather than just having one teacher who has all the knowledge.'⁹⁴⁵

While noting that more could be done in the area of teacher professional learning in relation to gifted education, Mr Burrage from DEECD pointed out that there many competing priorities in terms of improving teachers' knowledge:

It is in sort of a contested area about the time and space that can be given to an issue and that individual teachers can manage, so it is about providing tiered responses and support for teachers for them to be able to deal with the issue.⁹⁴⁶

He suggested a tiered response that does not aim to make all teachers experts, but rather gives them the knowledge they need. He nominated identifying gifted students as a particular area where teachers could benefit from improved professional learning opportunities.

What type of professional learning opportunities do teachers need?

The evidence to the Inquiry suggests that teachers need to be supported to attend a broad range of professional learning activities such as conferences and seminars and workshops with experts.⁹⁴⁷

⁹⁴² Dr Leonie Kronborg, *Transcript of evidence*, above n 863, 6. See also Ms Louise Broadbent, *Transcript of evidence*, above n 909, 6; Leonie Kronborg and Margaret Plunkett, 'Providing an optimal school context for talent development: An extended curriculum program in practice' 15(1) *Australasian Journal of Gifted Education* 264, 269–271.

⁹⁴³ Dr Debora Lipson, *Transcript of evidence*, above n 863, 5.

⁹⁴⁴ Ms Trudi Jacobson, *Transcript of evidence*, above n 928, 6; Mr David Huggins, Assistant Director, Student Services, Catholic Education Office Melbourne, *Transcript of evidence*, Melbourne, 12 September 2011, 4.

⁹⁴⁵ Ms Gabrielle, *Transcript of evidence*, above n 897, 7. See also Ms Patricia Pace, Leading Teacher, Mill Park Heights Primary School, *Transcript of evidence*, Melbourne, 12 September 2011, 11; Susan, parent, *Transcript of evidence*, Bendigo, 20 September 2011, 9; Alison, parent, *Transcript of evidence*, Bendigo, 20 September 2011, 9.

⁹⁴⁶ Mr Ian Burrage, *Transcript of evidence*, above n 894, 11.

⁹⁴⁷ Mr Paul Double, *Submission 15*, 2; AAEGT, *Submission 28*, 3; Faculty of Education, Australian Catholic University, *Submission 13*, 11.

Dr Munro also emphasised the importance of teachers having access to sabbatical leave and other opportunities to extend their knowledge outside the classroom environment. He commented:

A teacher's knowledge of what goes on in a classroom is priceless ... but teachers need the opportunity to link that knowledge with where the research is going and where ideas in other areas are going so that they can come back to the classroom and then operate.⁹⁴⁸

There was also support for teachers to have the opportunity to come together and reflect on their experiences teaching gifted students. This is discussed further in chapter nine.

The Committee heard it is essential that professional learning is ongoing, rather than just a once off event, and linked to the teacher's in-classroom experiences. Dr Plunkett told the Committee that research conducted with her colleague, Dr Kronborg, found:

on its own it [professional learning] does not have a lasting impact ... It does not bring about real change over a long period of time because they have not been immersed in research and they have not really done anything practical.⁹⁴⁹

Encouraging and supporting teachers to access professional learning activities

The Committee heard there is sometimes limited demand for teacher professional learning in relation to giftedness. Dr Black told the Committee that Victoria University does not provide any professional learning for teachers in the western suburbs of Melbourne and that, 'We have not even had any requests.'⁹⁵⁰ The Committee also heard that there was a very low rate of attendance of government schools representatives at the Victorian Association for Gifted and Talented Children's 2011 conference: only three out of over 120 delegates were from the government school sector.⁹⁵¹

The major barriers preventing teachers from accessing professional learning opportunities include course costs, the cost to the school of providing casual relief teachers and other demands on teachers' time. Submissions emphasised the importance of providing time release for teachers to attend professional learning activities⁹⁵² and funding professional learning activities.⁹⁵³ Other participants suggested that professional learning could be accredited or linked to promotion opportunities to provide incentives for teachers to participate.⁹⁵⁴

As most professional learning opportunities are based in the Melbourne metropolitan area, distance is also a major obstacle to teachers in rural and regional areas attending. Mr Brown of the Country Education Project told the Committee:

⁹⁴⁸ Associate Professor John Munro, *Transcript of evidence*, above n 863, 6.

⁹⁴⁹ Dr Margaret Plunkett, *Transcript of evidence*, above n 858, 6. See also Dr Susan Nikakis, Education Officer, Gifted and Talented, Catholic Education Office Melbourne, *Transcript of evidence*, Melbourne, 12 September 2011, 4; Ben Jensen, above n 841, 14.

⁹⁵⁰ Ms Barbara Black, *Transcript of evidence*, above n 876, 4. See also Dr Debora Lipson and Ms Barbara Black, *Submission 78*, 4.

⁹⁵¹ Dr Michael Faulkner, *Transcript of evidence*, above n 855, 4.

⁹⁵² Ms Monica Jago, *Submission 48*, above n 941, 6; Tournament of Minds (Vic), *Submission 43*, 12; Dr Debora Lipson, *Transcript of evidence*, above n 863, 5.

⁹⁵³ Gifted Support Network, *Submission 49*, 18; VPA, *Submission 105*, 3; Ms Pam Lyons, *Transcript of evidence*, above n 890, 4; VAGTC, *Submission 34*, 8.

⁹⁵⁴ Dr Debora Lipson, *Transcript of evidence*, above n 863, 5; Dr John Munro, *Submission 96*, above n 842, 10; Department of Education and Communities (New South Wales), *Submission 99*, 6.

We need to address the issue of distance, travel time and the models that we currently have in our system to deliver that professional learning. For example, I run a workshop in Bendigo for all my north-west counterparts and it goes for 3½ hours. It takes me 3½ hours to get there and 3½ hours to go home again. Why would I go?⁹⁵⁵

Long travel times to attend professional learning events also adds to the cost for schools, which must pay to replace the teacher for multiple days, as well as meeting travel and accommodation expenses.

There was wide support for the greater use of online platforms to increase the accessibility of professional learning opportunities.⁹⁵⁶ However, Mr Brown emphasised the need for a blended approach to the use of technology:

That face-to-face hand-shaking, 'Hello, this is me, this is where I come from,' all those things are important for me as a teacher. Then I will feel comfortable about working with you digitally because I've met you and I know you.⁹⁵⁷

Another suggestion was to focus training around school clusters or networks. Ms Moragh Tyler, who represented an interest group for parents and educators based in Wonthaggi, suggested that the advantage of a cluster approach is that 'you could share the cost and you could actually get experts to move down or just go and talk to a group of teachers down there, rather than them having to come up to the city'.⁹⁵⁸ The potential benefits of cluster arrangements to support teachers more broadly are examined in chapter nine.

Improving teacher professional learning—The Committee's view

The Committee recognises that ongoing professional learning is important to ensure that in-service teachers have access to the most current knowledge and pedagogy in relation to gifted education.

The Committee believes that individual teachers are in the best position to identify their own learning needs and therefore does not support mandatory professional learning on gifted education. However, it believes that the importance of teacher professional learning needs to be emphasised in both the Victorian Government policy on gifted education, as well as the model school policy. This will help ensure that professional learning in this area has a strong foundation in all Victorian schools.

The Committee believes that the Victorian Government needs to do far more to centrally provide and promote professional learning activities in gifted education and to support teacher attendance. The evidence shows that cost and distance are the biggest barriers to teachers accessing professional learning, particularly those living in rural and regional areas. The Committee acknowledges that these barriers are not unique to gifted education, but apply to all teacher professional learning. To overcome these barriers, the Committee suggests the Victorian Government consider digital learning opportunities for teachers. However, the Committee is also mindful of evidence that face-to-face learning

⁹⁵⁵ Mr Phil Brown, *Transcript of evidence*, above n 886, 7. See also Mrs Deborah DeBuhr, *Submission 46*, 4; Ms Moragh Tyler, *Transcript of evidence*, above n 928, 5; Ms Pam Lyons, *Transcript of evidence*, above n 890, 2.

⁹⁵⁶ Country Education Project, *Submission 79*, 9; Faculty of Education, Australian Catholic University, *Submission 13*, 10–1; Dr John Munro, *Submission 96*, above n 842, 12; Gifted Resources, *Submission 113*, 12; VASSP, *Submission 27*, 4.

⁹⁵⁷ Mr Phil Brown, *Transcript of evidence*, above n 886, 8.

⁹⁵⁸ Ms Moragh Tyler, *Transcript of evidence*, above n 928, 5. See also Ms Henriette Boonen-Hackett, *Submission 26*, 3; Ms Pam Lyons, *Transcript of evidence*, above n 890, 2; *ibid.*, 6–7.

is still important for Victorian teachers, and encourages the Victorian Government to adopt a blended approach.

New professional learning opportunities should include the four key learning areas identified in section 8.2.2: what is giftedness, identification, strategies to cater for gifted students and the emotional needs of gifted students.

The Committee also considers it important that the Victorian Government support teachers to attend professional learning activities, for example assisting with course fees and the costs of replacement teachers.

Recommendation 41: Increasing professional learning opportunities in gifted education

That the Victorian Government provide and promote increased professional learning opportunities on gifted education, including online, and support teachers to attend.

Recommendation 42: Policy support for professional learning in gifted education

That the Victorian Government, through the Victorian policy and the model school policy on the education of gifted students, emphasise the importance of teacher professional learning.

8.5.5 Postgraduate learning opportunities

A number of universities currently offer postgraduate courses specifically focused on gifted education. To provide but two examples, the Australian Catholic University offered a Postgraduate Certificate in Education (Gifted Education) for the first time in 2011⁹⁵⁹ and Monash University offers a Master of Education specialising in gifted education.⁹⁶⁰

Some participants in this Inquiry emphasised that postgraduate study in gifted education substantially enhances teachers' ability to cater for their gifted students. Mr Martin Jellinek, a teacher in the SEAL program at Box Hill High School, told the Committee he is currently undertaking a master's degree with a focus on gifted education and that the benefits have been immediate:

I have found things that were discussed in class I have just walked straight back into the classroom, implemented them to the most unbelievable results.⁹⁶¹

Other contributors drew the Committee's attention to research suggesting that SEAL schools with the strongest Year 12 results also had the highest number of teachers with postgraduate qualifications in gifted education⁹⁶² and that teachers with substantial gifted education training are more successful in differentiating instruction.⁹⁶³

⁹⁵⁹ Faculty of Education, Australian Catholic University, *Submission 13*, 5.

⁹⁶⁰ Dr Leonie Kronborg and Dr Margaret Plunkett, *Submission 92*, above n 877, 1–2.

⁹⁶¹ Mr Martin Jellinek, *Transcript of evidence*, above n 885, 7. See also Methodist Ladies' College, *Submission 84*, 6.

⁹⁶² Ms Monica Jago, *Submission 48*, above n 941, 6.

⁹⁶³ Wilma Vialle and Karen Rogers, 'Gifted, talented or educationally disadvantaged?', Routledge, included in *Submission 28 Appendix C*, 10; Karen Westberg and Francis Archambault, 'A multi-site case study of successful classroom practices for high ability students' 44(1) *Gifted Child Quarterly* 42, 48–49.

Postgraduate qualifications were seen as particularly valuable for those teaching in a school with a gifted program, or acting in a specialist role such as gifted education coordinator.⁹⁶⁴

Academics working in this field also emphasised the importance of higher study both in terms of contributing to the gifted education research base,⁹⁶⁵ and in terms of ensuring there are sufficient staff qualified to teach in this field at a tertiary level in future.⁹⁶⁶

The Committee heard there are a number of obstacles that discourage teachers from undertaking postgraduate study in gifted education. The most commonly identified barriers were cost and time. Ms Carolyn Ferguson, a teacher with over 20 years experience, informed the Committee that her school offered no financial assistance or time release to support her master's-level study of gifted education. She resigned in order to focus on her study.⁹⁶⁷ Inquiry participants saw providing scholarships and time release as important in encouraging more teachers to undertake postgraduate study in gifted education.⁹⁶⁸

Box Hill High School's evidence suggested that current fringe benefit tax laws also act as a disincentive for schools to fund teachers' postgraduate studies in gifted education.⁹⁶⁹ No other participants mentioned this issue.

The Committee agrees that there is significant value in encouraging interested teachers to undertake postgraduate study in gifted education. Increased higher study of gifted education has benefits in terms of up-skilling individual teachers, and also in terms of contributing to research and the depth of tertiary teaching expertise. The Victorian Government should promote access to postgraduate study in gifted education by providing scholarships and supporting schools to support teachers to undertake study, for example by providing funding for casual relief teachers.

Recommendation 43: Scholarships for postgraduate study in gifted education

That the Victorian Government provide scholarships for teachers to undertake postgraduate study in gifted education.

Recommendation 44: Other support for postgraduate study in gifted education

That the Victorian Government support schools to support teachers to undertake postgraduate study in gifted education.

⁹⁶⁴ AAEGT, *Submission 28*, 3; Ms Caelli Greenbank, *Submission 67*, 3; Dr Leonie Kronborg, *Transcript of evidence*, above n 863, 6; Gifted Resources, *Submission 113*, 12. See also Leonie Kronborg and Margaret Plunkett, 'Providing an optimal school context for talent development', above n 942, 271.

⁹⁶⁵ Dr Leonie Kronborg and Dr Margaret Plunkett, *Submission 92*, above n 877, 7; Dr Michael Faulkner, *Transcript of evidence*, above n 855, 4.

⁹⁶⁶ Faculty of Education, Australian Catholic University, *Submission 13*, 7; Dr Susan Nikakis, *Transcript of evidence*, above n 949, 4.

⁹⁶⁷ Ms Carolyn Ferguson, *Submission 55*, 2.

⁹⁶⁸ CHIP Foundation, *Submission 77*, 9; Dr Leonie Kronborg and Dr Margaret Plunkett, *Submission 92*, above n 877, 7; Dr Leonie Kronborg, *Transcript of evidence*, above n 863, 6; Suzanne Cory High School, *Submission 85*, 6; Dr Michael Faulkner, *Submission 95*, above n 879, 4; Dr Debora Lipson, *Transcript of evidence*, above n 863, 5.

⁹⁶⁹ Box Hill High School, *Submission 81*, 11; Ms Vanessa Reynolds, Gifted Education Coordinator, Box Hill High School, *Transcript of evidence*, Box Hill, 29 August 2011, 7.

8.5.6 Providing opportunities for teachers to gain experience with gifted students

Some Inquiry participants felt that in-service teachers should have more opportunities to gain experience teaching gifted children. The Victorian Association of State Secondary Principals suggested that teachers could do internships at specialist schools.⁹⁷⁰ Similarly, Ms Lipson, an academic involved in pre-service teacher training, proposed that teachers could be funded to undertake secondments with organisations that provide support and material for gifted education. She saw the benefit of this as being 'when they are then immersed in an environment where the focus has been gifted education they may up skill very quickly, and of course then they take that notion back to their school'.⁹⁷¹

Methodist Ladies' College, an independent school for students from Prep to Year 12, has implemented an internal system to provide more staff at the school with opportunities to work with gifted students. Staff members from throughout the school are coopted to work part-time in the school's specialised Compass Centre. The coopted teachers work alongside experienced teachers for a two or three year period, giving them expertise teaching gifted students, which they then take back to their faculties.⁹⁷²

The Committee agrees that there would be significant benefit in a greater number of teachers having the opportunity to work with gifted and high-ability students in specialist programs and schools. This would allow these teachers to build a practical understanding of the learning styles and needs of these students that they could take back to their home school. Such a system could operate both internally, for example, giving more teachers in a SEAL school the opportunity to teach SEAL classes and externally, for example, providing short-term placements for teachers in Victoria's specialist and selective entry schools.

Recommendation 45: Opportunities for teachers to undertake placements in schools with gifted education programs

That the Victorian Government implement a scheme to provide opportunities for teachers to undertake placements or exchanges in schools with gifted education programs.

Recommendation 46: Policy support for greater teacher participation in gifted education programs within schools

That the Victorian Government, through the model school policy on the education of gifted students, encourage schools to provide increased opportunities to all teachers to teach as part of gifted education programs within the school.

⁹⁷⁰ VASSP, *Submission 27*, 5.

⁹⁷¹ Dr Debora Lipson, *Transcript of evidence*, above n 863, 5.

⁹⁷² Methodist Ladies' College, *Submission 84*, 6; Ms Kathy Harrison, Compass Centre Coordinator, Methodist Ladies' College, *Transcript of evidence*, Melbourne, 19 September 2011, 5.

8.6 Professional learning for school leaders

School principals play a crucial role in leading school culture and learning.⁹⁷³ The importance of the position of principal has been acknowledged in new National Professional Standards for Principals, which state, 'Principals are the leading educational professionals in the school. They inspire students, staff and members of the community to continuously enhance the learning of all.'⁹⁷⁴

The Standards were developed collaboratively and endorsed by education ministers Australia-wide in 2011.⁹⁷⁵ The Standards define the role of principal and identify the key leadership requirements and professional practices for principals. Of particular relevance to this Inquiry, two of the identified professional practices recognise that principals play a fundamental role in leading teaching and learning, as well as staff development at a school.⁹⁷⁶ Evidence to this Inquiry highlighted that principals and other school leaders have a significant impact on gifted education in these two areas.

Firstly, some participants emphasised that a school's leaders play a key role in making gifted education a priority at that school. WiseOnes told the Committee that school leaders act as gatekeepers, determining whether a school is open to its programs. WiseOnes submitted, 'If the school leaders are not gifted, or not the parents of gifted children, the program never gets into that school.'⁹⁷⁷ Similarly, teacher and education consultant, Mrs DeBuhr, told the Committee that one principal had commented to her, 'We don't have any gifted students at our school!'⁹⁷⁸ Mrs DeBuhr observed that such attitudes are significant barriers to the introduction of specialist programs.

Secondly, the evidence to the Inquiry suggests that principals and other school leaders are in a key position to influence the attitudes of all teachers in their school in relation to gifted students and their education. A parent who participated in the Committee's Parents' Forum opined:

I think that something has to be done as well about educating the principals. They are the leaders of the school, especially at the primary level. The teachers are there every day, but they do take the lead somewhat from their leaders in the school. If the principals have a change of understanding about giftedness and talent, they can actually make changes happen in their school and even bring teachers who may not agree along with them.⁹⁷⁹

Mr Burrage of DEECD also recognised that it was important that principals understand their role as 'instructional leaders' in relation to the education of gifted students.⁹⁸⁰

⁹⁷³ Ben Jensen et al, above n 841, 68.

⁹⁷⁴ AITSL, *National professional standard for principals* (2011) Education Services Australia, 2. Available at <National professional standard for principals> viewed 21 January 2012.

⁹⁷⁵ AITSL, National professional standard for principals, <<http://www.aitsl.edu.au/school-leaders/national-professional-standard-for-principals/national-professional-standard-for-principals.html>> viewed 21 January 2012.

⁹⁷⁶ AITSL, *National professional standard for principals*, above n 974, 4.

⁹⁷⁷ WiseOnes Australia, *Submission 18*, 13. See also Ms Pat Truscott, *Transcript of evidence*, above n 889, 4.

⁹⁷⁸ Mrs Deborah DeBuhr, *Submission 46*, 2. See also Dr Michael Faulkner, *Transcript of evidence*, above n 855, 3.

⁹⁷⁹ Forum participant 1, parent, *Transcript of evidence*, Melbourne, 19 September 2011, 13. See also Department of Education and Communities (New South Wales), *Submission 99*, 9; Mr James Mulcahy, *Submission 16*, above n 843, 2.

⁹⁸⁰ Mr Ian Burrage, *Transcript of evidence*, above n 894, 5.

There was support among participants for education about giftedness to be provided specifically to school leaders. Dr Munro suggested that professional learning for school leaders should equip them to:

- provide instructional leadership for gifted and talented learning
- develop a vision and goals for gifted provision in the school and to unpack these in terms of school processes ...
- develop an explicit professional learning and implementation pathway with outcomes, goals and 'deliverables' specified for each term ...⁹⁸¹

The Committee notes that school leaders provide the vision and direction for gifted education within a school. However, it recognises that not all school leaders may have a good understanding of gifted students and gifted education. The Committee believes that all Victorian school leaders would benefit from increased information and education about gifted students and gifted education. This would complement the rollout of the state-wide gifted education policy, and encourage school leaders to implement or enhance gifted education programs in their schools and prioritise teacher professional learning in this area.

Recommendation 47: Education for school leaders

That the Victorian Government provide information and education on gifted education to all school leaders.

⁹⁸¹ Dr John Munro, *Submission 96*, above n 842, 12. See also Dr Leonie Kronborg, Coordinator of Gifted Education Assessment Clinic, Krongold Centre, *Transcript of evidence*, Melbourne, 12 September 2011, 7–8.

Chapter 9: Supporting teachers and schools

Key findings

- The Department of Education and Early Childhood Development currently provides only very limited information and support to help teachers and schools cater for gifted students.
- Teachers of gifted students can benefit considerably from sharing their knowledge and experiences with their peers both within their school and at other schools. There is a need for increased collaboration and networking in relation to gifted education between teachers and schools across all school sectors.
- Most Victorian teachers presently have little access to expert advice about gifted education. Such advice should be readily available both within a school, for example through a trained gifted education coordinator, as well as through the Department of Education and Early Childhood Development.
- At present, Victorian teachers do not have ready access to information, research and other resources to help them understand and cater for gifted students. The Department of Education and Early Childhood Development should play a greater role in ensuring that teachers have access to a wide range of information about giftedness and gifted education strategies.
- Some schools, particularly in rural and regional areas, experience difficulty recruiting staff with appropriate skills and qualifications to teach gifted students. This highlights the need for schools to have access to appropriate information, advice, resources and professional development opportunities, so that teachers with no background in gifted education can be appropriately up-skilled.

Supporting teachers and schools

Catering for the needs of gifted students can be challenging for both schools and individual teachers. This chapter considers the external support that teachers and schools need in order to implement and sustain effective gifted education programs and provisions.

9.1 What support is currently available for teachers and schools?

Many participants in this Inquiry were critical of the current lack of central support provided to teachers and schools to help them cater for their gifted students.

As outlined in chapter two, gifted education is primarily the responsibility of each Victorian school. Therefore, the support that an individual teacher will receive in catering for gifted students is very dependent on his or her school. The Department of Education and Early Childhood Development (DEECD) does provide some limited central support for schools with specialist programs, such as the Select Entry Accelerated Learning (SEAL) Program. In addition, some schools take an active approach to equipping their teachers to provide effective gifted education. However, the evidence to this Inquiry suggests that these schools are the exception rather than the rule.

Mr Ian Burrage, the General Manager of the Education and Policy Division at DEECD, described the current support that the Department provides to Victorian teachers and schools:

We have our presence on the website that gives some guidance and references to approaches to providing for the gifted and talented. We have the SEAL network for professional learning and regular contact. People in the Department do take calls and provide guidance to parents over the phone.⁹⁸²

DEECD's submission acknowledged that lack of access to appropriate resources is a significant impediment to teachers and schools effectively catering for gifted students.⁹⁸³ Both the submission and Mr Burrage recognised that the Department could do more to support teachers and schools.

The Committee has already examined some of the support that teachers and schools need to provide effective gifted education programs. In chapter three the Committee considered the need for strong policy support and direction in this area. In chapters four and five the Committee highlighted the need for teachers to have access to information and support in relation to identifying and catering for gifted students. In chapter eight the

⁹⁸² Mr Ian Burrage, General Manager, Education and Policy Research Division, Department of Education and Early Childhood Development (DEECD), *Transcript of evidence*, Melbourne, 25 July 2011, 11.

⁹⁸³ DEECD, *Submission 58*, 10.

Committee identified the support teachers need in terms of improved education and training both at the pre-service and in-service stages. This chapter builds on the recommendations in those chapters, exploring other support that both teachers and schools need to develop, implement and sustain effective gifted education programs and teaching practices.

9.2 Networks of teachers and schools

A number of Inquiry participants highlighted the value of links between teachers and schools to facilitate the sharing of information, knowledge and expertise about gifted education both at the intra-school and inter-school levels. For example, the Victorian Association for Gifted and Talented Children, a voluntary organisation that supports educators and parents to teach and raise gifted students, submitted:

Without real and tangible support, the classroom teacher has very little hope of developing and sustaining a gifted and talented program in isolation. Networking and collegial training is an essential component of sustaining any real change.⁹⁸⁴

This section explores opportunities to enhance collaboration between teachers at both the school and inter-school levels.

9.2.1 Networks within schools

Evidence to the Committee emphasised the need to provide opportunities for all teachers of gifted students at a school to meet regularly to discuss their experiences and insights.⁹⁸⁵ This has been incorporated into gifted education programs in some other Australian jurisdictions. For example, South Australian schools running the Ignite Program, a program that provides accelerated learning for gifted secondary school students, provide sharing and planning time for Program staff, in addition to specific professional learning activities.⁹⁸⁶

The Committee considers that it is important to support teachers of gifted students within each school to meet and share experiences. The Committee is aware that Victorian teachers face considerable time pressures and recognises that teachers need to be specifically supported to come together to share their experiences of gifted learning, for instance through time release.

9.2.2 Networks between schools

Many Inquiry participants saw considerable utility in schools forming links and sharing gifted education resources and knowledge with other schools. The Committee heard that gifted education teachers are often quite isolated in their school environment and can benefit significantly from contact with teachers in other schools. Mr Paul Double, a teacher and Victorian Association for Gifted and Talented Children committee member stated:

⁹⁸⁴ Victorian Association for Gifted and Talented Children (VAGTC), *Submission 34*, 7.

⁹⁸⁵ Lilydale High School, *Submission 47*, 3; Methodist Ladies' College, *Submission 84*, 3; Victorian Association of Catholic Primary School Principals (VACPSP), *Submission 111*, 2; Ms Barbara Black, *Transcript of evidence*, Melbourne, 19 September 2011, 3.

⁹⁸⁶ Department of Education and Children's Services (South Australia), *Submission 3*, 7.

Very often in a school a person in a tagged position, such as gifted and talented [coordinator] ... feels like an island within the school, as if they are losing a battle. There are all these connotations about what gifted means; people are cynical, and then they seem to give up. But if they are within a cluster and a solidified group of people who can consult with each other, even once a term, that makes all the difference.⁹⁸⁷

Ms Kathy Harrison, Coordinator of the Compass Centre at the Methodist Ladies' College (MLC), an independent school for students from Prep to Year 12, agreed. She commented, 'Often there is only one of us or a couple of us in a school, so we really need one another across schools to support and to share creative ideas and practice.'⁹⁸⁸

Both of these teachers and their schools are involved in the Boroondara Gifted Network, which they cited as an effective example of a school cluster or network, providing an avenue for cross-school peer support. The Boroondara Gifted Network currently involves 15 secondary schools from all three school sectors in the Boroondara area. The teachers from the Network schools meet once each term to share best practice, as well as experiences and issues.⁹⁸⁹ In addition, Ms Harrison indicated that she saw the Network as having great potential to extend teachers' learning by providing reflective reading and discussion opportunities.⁹⁹⁰

The Committee also received evidence of successful teacher networks in both the Catholic and government school sectors. The Catholic Education Office, Diocese of Sale has established a network for gifted and talented coordinators' at secondary schools, which provides a vehicle for sharing ideas, coordinating projects and providing teacher professional learning activities.⁹⁹¹ In addition, as noted in chapter seven, DEECD facilitates a SEAL school network, which provides 'mutual support between SEAL program schools; opportunities for sharing of resources and curriculum initiatives; professional learning and peer quality assurance'.⁹⁹² Mr Burrage of DEECD suggested that the SEAL network had the potential to be widened to provide support for other teachers throughout the state with an interest in gifted education.⁹⁹³

Many other Inquiry participants agreed that inter-school networks could provide a platform for increased peer support, information and knowledge sharing and professional learning.⁹⁹⁴ A network approach was seen as particularly important in rural and regional areas, where teachers may be especially isolated.⁹⁹⁵ While many participants noted the potential for technology to facilitate links between teachers in

⁹⁸⁷ Mr Paul Double, Committee member, VAGTC, *Transcript of evidence*, Melbourne, 25 July 2011, 8.

⁹⁸⁸ Ms Kathy Harrison, Compass Centre Coordinator, Methodist Ladies' College, *Transcript of evidence*, Melbourne, 19 September 2011, 2.

⁹⁸⁹ Methodist Ladies' College, *Submission 84*, 3–4. See also Mr Paul Double, *Transcript of evidence*, above n 987, 5; *ibid.*, 5; Mr Paul Double, *Supplementary submission 15A*.

⁹⁹⁰ Ms Kathy Harrison, *Transcript of evidence*, above n 988, 5.

⁹⁹¹ Catholic Education Office, Diocese of Sale, *Submission 66*, 2.

⁹⁹² DEECD, *Submission 58*, 7.

⁹⁹³ Mr Ian Burrage, *Transcript of evidence*, above n 982, 10–11.

⁹⁹⁴ Belgrave Parent Support Group for Gifted and Talented Students, *Submission 60*, 3; Dr Michael Faulkner, Lecturer, School of Education, La Trobe University, *Transcript of evidence*, Bendigo, 20 September 2011, 4; Ms Pam Lyons, Coordinator, Able Learners' Enrichment Program, La Trobe University, *Transcript of evidence*, Bendigo, 20 September 2011, 2–3.

⁹⁹⁵ Mr Phil Brown, Executive Officer, Country Education Project, *Transcript of evidence*, Melbourne, 10 October 2011, 6–7; Ms Moragh Tyler, Wonthaggi interest group for gifted and talented children, *Transcript of evidence*, Melbourne, 19 September 2011, 3; Ms Kim Kirkpatrick, Grade 5 Teacher, Kennington Primary School, *Transcript of evidence*, Bendigo, 20 September 2011, 7–8.

different school, the Committee heard it is still important for teachers to have the opportunity to meet face-to-face.⁹⁹⁶

Some participants observed that there is currently limited communication and sharing between the Catholic, government and independent school sectors.⁹⁹⁷ Networks comprising representatives of all three sectors, such as the Boroondara Gifted Network, were seen as a valuable way of enhancing cross-sector communication.

The evidence suggests that inter-school networks need support in order to fulfil their potential. Ms Patricia Pace, Leading Teacher at Mill Park Heights Primary School, told the Committee that she ran a network in the Whittlesea area for a number of years but, 'It became really difficult, firstly, just to get people together because of their work load, and secondly, because there was only a very small amount of funding to get quality speakers in to talk to us.'⁹⁹⁸

In some other Australian jurisdictions there are better links between schools in relation to gifted education. For example, in New South Wales, regional Gifted Education Committees have been established.⁹⁹⁹ In addition, under the Best Start Lighthouse Project in that jurisdiction, schools with strong student achievement in the early years are being supported to develop a network with other schools to share learnings and strategies for enhancing students' numeracy and literacy.¹⁰⁰⁰

The Committee acknowledges that gifted education teachers can benefit considerably from sharing knowledge and experiences with their peers at their own and other schools. The Committee has already identified the potential benefits of inter-school networks in terms of expanding the facilities and educational offerings available to gifted students (see chapter five). In addition to this, the Committee recognises that networks can play a key role in providing collegial support and learning for teachers.

The Committee commends the networks that are already in place but believes these should be significantly expanded, both through the use of online and face-to-face methods. In particular, the Committee considers that teacher networks would be very beneficial in rural and regional Victoria where gifted education teachers may be especially isolated. The Committee's view is that such networks need government support in order to be sustained over the long term.

The Committee notes that at present there are limited opportunities for professional collaboration and cooperation in relation to gifted education between the three school sectors. It considers that the networks recommended in this report provide an important opportunity to increase knowledge sharing between these sectors.

⁹⁹⁶ Mr Phil Brown, *Transcript of evidence*, above n 995, 8; Faculty of Education, Australian Catholic University, *Submission 13*, 11.

⁹⁹⁷ Australian College of Educators (Victorian Branch), *Submission 21*, 3; Mr Paul Double, *Submission 15*, 2; Victorian Catholic Schools Parent Body, *Submission 51*, 4; Ms Moragh Tyler, *Transcript of evidence*, above n 995, 3; Ms Annette Rome, Director of Staff Learning, Methodist Ladies' College *Transcript of evidence*, Melbourne, 19 September 2011, 7.

⁹⁹⁸ Ms Patricia Pace, Leading Teacher, Mill Park Heights Primary School, *Transcript of evidence*, Melbourne, 12 September 2011, 18. See also Ms Claire McInerney, Principal, Plenty Parklands Primary School, *Transcript of evidence*, Melbourne, 12 September 2011, 18; Methodist Ladies' College, *Submission 84*, 4–5; Belgrave Parent Support Group for Gifted and Talented Students, *Submission 60*, 3.

⁹⁹⁹ Department of Education and Communities (New South Wales), *Submission 99*, 10. See also ACT Education and Training Directorate, 'Information about the implementation of the ACT Gifted and Talented Students Policy (2008)', included in *Submission 20 Attachment C*, 2.

¹⁰⁰⁰ Department of Education and Training (New South Wales), *General information*, <<http://www.curriculumsupport.education.nsw.gov.au/beststart/lighthouse/general/index.htm>> viewed February 2011.

Recommendation 48: Policy support for inter-school and intra-school gifted education teacher networks

That the Victorian Government, through the Victorian policy and the model school policy on the education of gifted students, emphasise the importance of teacher networks for gifted education teachers both within and between schools.

Recommendation 49: Supporting inter-school gifted education teacher networks

That the Victorian Government support the establishment of gifted education teacher networks between schools from all school sectors.

9.3 Access to expert advice and support

The evidence to the Inquiry made it clear that teachers need ready access to expert advice and practical assistance to help them cater for gifted students in their classrooms. Such help can be provided from within the school, as well as externally.

9.3.1 In-school specialists

Many Inquiry participants argued that expert advice and support should be available within schools through a specialist gifted education teacher or coordinator.¹⁰⁰¹ The Australian Council of State School Organisations, the peak national organisation representing the parents, families and school communities of children attending government schools, detailed the role that such a specialist teacher could play:

The teacher would work with the principal and senior staff to improve provision across the school(s). They should also work closely with other teachers to ensure that teaching and learning approaches ensure work is sufficiently challenging to meet the needs of all gifted and talented pupils on a day-to-day basis.¹⁰⁰²

The Victorian Association for Gifted and Talented Children's submission stated that few government schools employ gifted coordinators and noted that, even if they do, the position requires no specific formal training.¹⁰⁰³ Several other participants also emphasised the importance of any designated gifted education coordinator having a specialist qualification in gifted education.¹⁰⁰⁴

¹⁰⁰¹ Australian Association for the Education of the Gifted and Talented (AAEGT), *Submission 28*, 3; Belgrave Parent Support Group for Gifted and Talented Students, *Submission 60*, 3; Name withheld, *Submission 75*, 3; Principals' Association of Victorian Catholic Secondary Schools, *Submission 74*, 10; Ms Henriette Boonen-Hackett, *Submission 26*, 3; Mr Wayne and Mrs Meredith Burton, *Submission 17*, 6; Maria, parent, *Transcript of evidence*, Melbourne, 19 September 2011, 16; Ms Kim Kirkpatrick, *Transcript of evidence*, above n 995, 8; Ms Marlene Laurent, Principal, Glenferrie Primary School, *Transcript of evidence*, Melbourne, 12 September 2011, 4; Ms Gabrielle Leigh, President, Victorian Principals Association, *Transcript of evidence*, Melbourne, 12 September 2011, 13; Gifted Support Network, *Submission 49*, 9; Maroondah Gifted Children's Parents' Association, *Submission 98*, 10; Mr Nick Pastalatzis, *Submission 101*, 1. See also Leonie Kronborg and Margaret Plunkett, 'Providing an optimal school context for talent development: An extended curriculum program in practice' 15(1) *Australasian Journal of Gifted Education* 264, 269–271.

¹⁰⁰² Australian Council of State School Organisations, *Submission 32*, 6.

¹⁰⁰³ VAGTC, *Submission 34*, 3, 16.

¹⁰⁰⁴ AAEGT, *Submission 28*, 3; Mr Wayne and Mrs Meredith Burton, *Submission 17*, 6; Ms Kim Kirkpatrick, *Transcript of evidence*, above n 995, 8; Belgrave Parent Support Group for Gifted and Talented Students, *Submission 60*, 3; Catholic Education Office, Diocese of Sale, *Submission 66*, 3; Name withheld, *Submission 75*, 3; Gifted Support Network, *Submission 49*, 9; Maroondah Gifted Children's Parents' Association, *Submission 98*, 10.

A number of contributors highlighted the need for a designated gifted education coordinator to have time release and appropriate resources to undertake their role effectively. For example, Ms Gabrielle Leigh, President of the Victorian Principals Association, which represents primary school principals and leaders, argued that teachers are under considerable pressure and need support if they are to meaningfully fulfil the role of gifted coordinator:

Somebody might nominally have the name of a gifted and talented coordinator, but they also might be the maths coordinator, the SOSE [studies of society and environment] coordinator, the bus duty coordinator and about five other things ... And teach as well, of course.¹⁰⁰⁵

The Committee heard of a number of teachers who are already successfully providing in-school support and advice to their colleagues in relation to gifted education. Ms Vanessa Reynolds, Box Hill High School's Gifted and Talented Coordinator, told the Committee that her role involves supporting parents, students and staff. She described the support she provides to teachers:

It involves supporting the staff with professional development ... So running professional development within the school, encouraging people to participate in professional development outside of the school and working with staff to try and often just to discuss the issues around the needs of the gifted children and how they approach them with their class and so forth. With the parents, it involves running meetings and we call it the Parent Support Group.¹⁰⁰⁶

Mr John Forsythe, Principal of Red Hill Consolidated School, told the Committee that his primary school plans to create a position of gifted expert within the school, which will help build the capacity of all teachers:

one of our teachers works two days a week with various children. Next year our thoughts would be that she would not work with any children at all. She would actually work with grades and work with the teacher, and her job would be to skill the teacher in their ability to work with the children who are actually within their classroom. The children are not to be withdrawn, but the teacher would increase her knowledge ...¹⁰⁰⁷

MLC has established a mechanism for supporting and advising teachers on gifted education through the school's Compass Centre. Expert staff from the Centre are available to visit classrooms and observe students and provide advice to teachers. MLC's submission highlighted the benefit of this arrangement: 'This provides expert advice and mentoring in situ at the time it is most effective.'¹⁰⁰⁸

The Committee believes all Victorian teachers need ready access to advice about gifted education within their school. This role could be played by a specialist teacher or gifted education coordinator whose duties should include organising and promoting professional learning opportunities, advising other teachers and participating in external gifted education networks. Other potential functions of this role include contributing to the development of personalised learning strategies for gifted students (see chapter five) and providing a contact point for parents (see chapter ten).

¹⁰⁰⁵ Ms Gabrielle Leigh, *Transcript of evidence*, above n 1001, 19. See also Victorian Association of State Secondary Principals, *Submission 27*, 4.

¹⁰⁰⁶ Ms Vanessa Reynolds, Gifted Education Coordinator, Box Hill High School, *Transcript of evidence*, Box Hill, 29 August 2011, 9.

¹⁰⁰⁷ Mr John Forsythe, Principal, Red Hill Consolidated School, *Transcript of evidence*, Melbourne, 12 September 2011, 11.

¹⁰⁰⁸ Methodist Ladies' College, *Submission 84*, 6.

The Committee considers that the effectiveness of the role of the gifted education coordinator can be enhanced through providing time release and access to professional learning opportunities.

Recommendation 50: Policy support for gifted education coordinators in schools

That Victorian Government, through the model school policy on the education of gifted students, emphasise the importance of schools having a gifted education coordinator.

Recommendation 51: Supporting gifted education coordinators in schools

That the Victorian Government support schools to have a gifted education coordinator.

Recommendation 52: Supporting professional learning for gifted education coordinators

That the Victorian Government support school gifted education coordinators to undertake professional learning and postgraduate study in gifted education.

9.3.2 Access to external expert advice

Several Inquiry participants advocated for the provision of specialist teachers or advisors who could give expert advice and support on gifted education across a region, cluster of schools or the entire state.¹⁰⁰⁹ Ms Louise Broadbent, President of the Gifted Support Network, a support group for parents with gifted children, told the Committee that access to such advice would give teachers confidence in dealing with gifted children:

A teacher needs to feel that they are able to push these children to something that is above and beyond what the rest of the class is doing. I think they feel very nervous about doing that. ... Whether there is a cluster system and an expert in gifted education for a number of schools, or whether there is a working party in the Department that comes straight to the teacher ... the teacher needs to be able to go somewhere and get that help when they have that child in their classroom, as opposed to every single teacher somehow magically becoming gifted experts.¹⁰¹⁰

Similarly, Mrs Deborah DeBuhr, a teacher and education consultant, suggested that DEECD could provide expert staff who would visit schools throughout the state:

The primary role of these staff would be to conduct professional development sessions/workshops and provide mentoring and encouragement to teachers as they learn to help their G&T [gifted and talented] students.¹⁰¹¹

A few schools appear to already have access to external advice and support in relation to gifted education. For example, Ms Monica Jago, the SEAL Program Coordinator at Wangaratta High School informed, the Committee that the school receives regular support from an officer within DEECD's Hume Region. She commented:

¹⁰⁰⁹ Ms Henriette Boonen-Hackett, *Submission 26*, 3; Australian Council of State School Organisations, *Submission 32*, 6; Dr Leonie Kronborg, Coordinator of Gifted Education Assessment Clinic, Krongold Centre, *Transcript of evidence*, Melbourne, 12 September 2011, 3; Ms Marlene Laurent, *Transcript of evidence*, above n 1001, 4; Goldfields Local Learning and Employment Network, *Submission 86*, 11.

¹⁰¹⁰ Ms Louise Broadbent, President, Gifted Support Network, *Transcript of evidence*, Melbourne, 12 September 2011, 5.

¹⁰¹¹ Mrs Deborah DeBuhr, *Submission 46*, 15.

This assistance has been excellent in terms of regular regional SEAL meetings, individual advice to schools and assisting with organising and providing some funding for the professional development for the SEAL teachers in the three Hume Region Schools.¹⁰¹²

Evidence to the Committee suggests that schools in the Catholic sector currently have greater access to expert advice and support about gifted education. The Catholic Education Office Melbourne employs an Education Officer, Gifted and Talented who provides support to schools across the state in terms of identification, assessment of needs and programming.¹⁰¹³ In addition, in 2010 the Office established a gifted think tank, comprised of senior educators, principals and consultants, which supports the development of gifted education initiatives within the Catholic school sector.¹⁰¹⁴

In other Australian jurisdictions too, more support is available for teachers and schools. For example, the Australian Capital Territory employs a gifted and talented education consultant who assists schools in implementing the Territory's gifted education policy and provides support in developing resources for schools and school clusters.¹⁰¹⁵

The Committee agrees that there would be great benefit in teachers and schools having access expert information and advice about gifted education when they need it. In chapter three the Committee recommended the establishment of a specific unit within DEECD to help coordinate gifted education policy in Victoria and to provide information, resources and support to teachers, schools and parents. The Committee believes that this unit should include an expert gifted education advisor who can provide teachers and schools with tailored information and support about identifying and catering for gifted students. This is in addition to the practical resources to assist teachers in these areas that the Committee recommended in chapters four and five. Advice and support from the gifted education advisor should be freely available on an as-needs basis, including by telephone, online, as well as in person.

The Committee also envisages that the gifted educator advisor will provide information and advice to the parents of gifted students. This aspect of the gifted education advisor's role is discussed in detail in chapter ten.

Recommendation 53: Gifted education advisor

That the Victorian Government employ a gifted education advisor, whose role is to provide expert information, support and advice to teachers, schools and parents about identifying and catering for gifted students.

9.4 Access to information, research and other resources

Victorian teachers currently have very limited access to information, research and other resources to help them understand and cater for gifted students. Some Inquiry participants were critical of the information presently available from DEECD. One parent

¹⁰¹² Ms Monica Jago, SEAL Program Coordinator, Wangaratta High School, *Submission 48*, 4.

¹⁰¹³ Catholic Education Office Melbourne, *Submission 87*, 3. See also Ms Carmel Meehan, President, VAGTC, *Transcript of evidence*, Melbourne, 25 July 2011, 9; Names withheld, *Submission 9*, 7.

¹⁰¹⁴ Catholic Education Office Melbourne, *Submission 87*, 7–8; Mr David Huggins, Assistant Director, Student Services, Catholic Education Office Melbourne, *Transcript of evidence*, Melbourne, 12 September 2011, 6.

¹⁰¹⁵ ACT Education and Training Directorate, 'Information about the implementation of the ACT Gifted and Talented Students Policy (2008)', included in *Submission 20 Attachment C*, 1.

who attended the Committee's Parents' Forum was frustrated by the fact that the lack of information available from the Department meant that schools were relying on parents:

At our school we are really lucky; we have a principal who is really supportive ... She is happy to work with us in what we want to do at the school, but we are just parents. She is just the principal, and she has no support at all. She says, 'I do not know what to do. I go to the Department and I look on its website. There is nothing there, or whatever is there is out of date. I am coming to you, as parents, asking you to tell me what to do'. We have to go back ourselves and read all sorts of literature—all sorts of books—and we are trying to come back to her and offer suggestions when that is not really our job.¹⁰¹⁶

Psychologist, Dr Gail Byrne, who previously compiled detailed information for DEECD's website, expressed disappointment that this material is no longer available and argued that teachers need access to up-to-date information and articles on giftedness.¹⁰¹⁷ Box Hill High School's submission called for DEECD to establish a research unit to conduct research on gifted education, as well as to play a role in disseminating best practice international research.¹⁰¹⁸

There was also strong support for centrally available practical resources to help teachers cater for gifted students. Academic, Dr Barbara Black, told the Committee that resources need to be developed to help teachers differentiate the curriculum for gifted learners 'because teachers are very busy, and if it is too difficult for them to prepare materials, it will not happen'.¹⁰¹⁹ Ms Moragh Tyler, an educator from Wonthaggi, agreed:

I think you could set up a system where teachers could access very easily the resources that are available. There are resources out there; it is just having the time to source them. If somebody else did the sourcing for teachers, they could get prepared lessons, there could be activities and there could be cooperative learning experiences. The work could be done for the teachers ...¹⁰²⁰

The Committee's view is that providing ready access to a wide range of information about giftedness and gifted education strategies, including up-to-date research and practical teaching tools, will provide invaluable assistance to all Victorian teachers in better catering for their gifted students. The Victorian Government should make such information freely available and accessible to all Victorian teachers and schools, including online where possible.

Recommendation 54: Access to information, research and resources for teachers

That the Victorian Government provide information, research and practical resources on gifted education for Victorian teachers and schools, including online where possible.

¹⁰¹⁶ Forum participant 2, parent, *Transcript of evidence*, Melbourne, 19 September 2011, 16.

¹⁰¹⁷ Dr Gail Byrne, Psychologist, Exceptional Children, *Submission 63*, 2. See also Country Education Project, *Submission 79*, 5; Alec, parent, *Transcript of evidence*, Melbourne, 19 September 2011, 22.

¹⁰¹⁸ Box Hill High School, *Submission 81*, 8.

¹⁰¹⁹ Ms Barbara Black, *Transcript of evidence*, above n 985, 3.

¹⁰²⁰ Ms Moragh Tyler, *Transcript of evidence*, above n 995, 3. See also Ms Henriette Boonen-Hackett, *Supplementary submission 26B*, 3; Dr John Munro, Associate Professor Exceptional Learning and Gifted Education, Melbourne Graduate School of Education, The University of Melbourne, *Submission 96*, 12; Faculty of Education, Australian Catholic University, *Submission 13*, 10; Parents Victoria, *Submission 82*, 5; Victorian Affiliated Network of Gifted Support Groups, *Submission 100 Appendix B*, 3.

9.5 Supporting schools with teacher recruitment

The significant impact that each teacher has on the educational experiences of students means that recruiting the right staff is crucial, especially for schools with a specialised program for gifted students.

Schools reported varying experiences recruiting teachers with appropriate skills to provide gifted education. Schools with a strong reputation for catering for high-achieving students reported strong demand for teaching positions. Mr Roger Page, the Principal of Nossal High School, a new selective entry school, told the Committee that he has not encountered difficulty recruiting appropriate staff:

lots of teachers would like to work at Nossal. When we advertise jobs we have a significant pool of applicants and a significant pool of good applicants to draw upon, and we do exactly that. However, as part of a selection process we look carefully at their academic ability and experience, and we will select them based on a range of criteria, one of which is an ability or potential to work within a school like Nossal and to deliver a program to gifted students.¹⁰²¹

A unique feature of the school's recruitment process is that students are involved in the interview and decision-making process. Mr Page commented that student participation in staff selection has 'broadened our expertise and our field of selection'.¹⁰²²

However, other schools reported considerable difficulty recruiting appropriate staff, particularly in rural and regional areas. Mr James Mulcahy, the Principal of Lucknow Primary School, a school in Bairnsdale which runs a weekly withdrawal program for gifted students, informed the Committee, 'In my experience accessing suitably qualified staff to provide guidance or delivery of a gifted program has been impossible.'¹⁰²³ The practice at his school has been to recruit staff with an interest in gifted education and to up-skill them by providing access to professional learning activities, most of which are in Melbourne.

The difficulty recruiting teachers to work in rural and regional areas is not just limited to gifted education. Mr Brown, Executive Officer of the Country Education Project, a community organisation that works to support and develop education in rural Victoria, commented:

The whole issue of recruitment and retention to rural schools is huge and that is right across the spectrum. In a lot of our school communities we are seeing positions being advertised, even at a principal level, three, four times where they are unsuccessful.¹⁰²⁴

The Country Education Project is currently running a number of pilot programs aimed at addressing this issue, including engaging with pre-service teachers and supporting new graduates in rural and regional areas.

The Victorian College of the Arts Secondary School, a specialist school providing education to dance and music students, emphasised that technical experience is more

¹⁰²¹ Mr Roger Page, Principal, Nossal High School, *Transcript of evidence*, Berwick, 26 July 2011, 3.

¹⁰²² *ibid.*

¹⁰²³ Mr James Mulcahy, Principal, Lucknow Primary School, *Submission 16*, 2. See also Ms Gabrielle Leigh, *Transcript of evidence*, above n 1001, 23; Ms Meredith Fetting, Assistant Principal, Bendigo Senior Secondary College, *Transcript of evidence*, Bendigo, 20 September 2011, 6; Mr Dale Pearce, Principal, Bendigo Senior Secondary College, *Transcript of evidence*, Bendigo, 20 September 2011, 5–6.

¹⁰²⁴ Mr Phil Brown, *Transcript of evidence*, above n 995, 9. See also Ms Lynette Sudholz, *Submission 107*, 1.

valuable than formal teaching qualifications for some specialist teaching roles. The school's Principal, Mr Colin Simpson, told the Committee:

The ability of the Victorian Institute of Teaching to provide flexibility in the hiring of teachers is so important to a school like ours. Typically dance educators who will have outstanding dance careers and great abilities as dance teachers will not have teaching degrees and our view would be they shouldn't have and shouldn't need to because they have been pursuing very active careers and schools like ours need to be able, in a fairly flexible way, to hire dance and music staff that don't typically meet the norms we expect in other schools ... If the system got too strict on hiring and locked those individuals out of schools it would only be to schools like ours loss.¹⁰²⁵

The Committee acknowledges the value of flexibility in recruitment for specialist schools, allowing them to recruit staff with a strong industry background. It is satisfied that the current mechanisms allow offer sufficient flexibility to allow the recruitment of such staff where appropriate.

The Committee also recognises the difficulties that some schools, particularly those in rural and regional Victoria, encounter in recruiting appropriately qualified staff for gifted education programs. This reinforces the importance of supporting schools by providing ready access to quality professional learning opportunities in gifted education, as discussed in chapter eight, as well as access to expert advice and tailored information and resources as discussed in this chapter. The implementation of the Committee's recommendations in these areas will ensure that schools that recruit teachers who do not have gifted education experience will be supported to up-skill those new staff members.

¹⁰²⁵ Mr Colin Simpson, Principal, Victorian College of the Arts Secondary School (VCASS), *Transcript of evidence*, Southbank, 15 August 2011, 10. See also Mr Tim Storey, Head of Dance, VCASS, *Transcript of evidence*, Southbank, 15 August 2011, 10.

Chapter 10: Supporting gifted students and their families

Key findings

- Gifted students have unique social and emotional needs, which need to be addressed in addition to their academic needs.
- Gifted students benefit from access to information and counselling, as well as opportunities to connect and socialise with like-minded peers.
- Parenting a gifted child can be extremely challenging. Parents and carers of gifted children need access to a broad range of information and advice about giftedness and gifted education.
- The parents of students from backgrounds of educational disadvantage, the parents of twice exceptional students and parents who home school, may require tailored support to help them raise and educate their gifted children.
- The parents of gifted students can gain significant support and information through connecting with other parents of gifted children.
- Collaborative partnerships between schools and students' families are essential, providing a strong foundation on which tailored provisions can be made to meet the needs of a gifted student.
- Negative attitudes to gifted students and gifted education generally are widespread in both school communities and the general community. Such attitudes create barriers to the wider provision of opportunities for gifted students.
- Targeted interventions are required at the school level to promote more positive attitudes to giftedness and gifted students. In particular, there needs to be increased emphasis on creating school cultures that recognise and celebrate student success in all areas.

Supporting gifted students and their families

The journey through the educational system can be long and difficult for both gifted students and their families. This chapter considers the support that gifted students and their parents and carers need to assist them on this path. It also explores negative attitudes towards gifted students, their families, as well as giftedness and gifted education more broadly, and identifies strategies for addressing these.

10.1 Supporting gifted students

Ensuring that the academic needs of gifted students are met has been a strong focus of this report. However, evidence to this Inquiry demonstrates that, in addition to their academic needs, gifted students often have specific social and emotional needs that must be met in order for these students to fulfil their potential.

10.1.1 Why do gifted students need social and emotional support?

Many participants in this Inquiry highlighted that gifted students may be extremely emotionally sensitive. For example, the Victorian Association for Gifted and Talented Children, a voluntary organisation that supports educators and parents, submitted:

Giftedness has an emotional as well as an academic component. Research has demonstrated that gifted students display heightened intellectual complexity as well as emotional hypersensitivity. They ... experience their world in a more absorbing, vivid, intense way than their age peers ... Gifted and talented students ponder the big questions, feel genuine empathy for the marginalised of the world and also feel disenfranchised because they feel so much more intensely than their peers do.¹⁰²⁶

Similarly, Dr John Munro, Associate Professor Exceptional Learning and Gifted Education at Melbourne University's Graduate School of Education, emphasised the extreme emotional vulnerability of many gifted students:

Some gifted students will really worry about events; they will worry about things going on in the world. They are worrying at an abstract level in terms of their abstract verbal understanding of the issue, but because they do not have the experiential knowledge to come into play to say 'This will be all right' ... Their self-talk has become quite negative when they really need just to be able to see an alternative point of view. This is because the human is composed of multiple

¹⁰²⁶ Victorian Association for Gifted and Talented Children (VAGTC), *Submission 34*, 5. See also Pam Lyons, Coordinator, Able Learners' Enrichment Program, La Trobe University 'Emotional sensitivities and intensities of gifted children', included in *Submission 71 Appendix B*, 2–7.

interacting systems, and some children are much stronger verbally, say, than non-verbally or vice versa, and those things can lead to problems.¹⁰²⁷

The Committee also heard that gifted students often have a strong sense of justice. For instance, Ms Pam Lyons, Coordinator of the Able Learners' Enrichment Program, an annual school holiday program held at La Trobe University, commented, 'They will be the child who, if the teacher is telling off someone else in the class, will get upset or decide it is not fair.'¹⁰²⁸

The fact that gifted students are often so different from their peers may make them susceptible to isolation, loneliness, and even bullying.¹⁰²⁹ In addition, boredom, frustration and social issues at school may have negative impacts on the mental health of a gifted young person.¹⁰³⁰ These issues were all discussed at length in chapter three.

The evidence shows that some students in gifted education programs may feel enormous pressure to keep up with their peers and perform at a high level. For instance, Rosebud Secondary College, a school offering the Select Entry Accelerated Learning (SEAL) Program, submitted:

Some students felt overwhelmed at various times by the workload expected in some subject areas. These feelings often related to the subject areas students felt least capable in ... The students were very self critical and looked at any medium rated performance on their part as tantamount to failure.¹⁰³¹

Finally, gifted students may also experience significant parental pressure to continually excel. Georgina, a Year 12 student at selective entry school, The Mac.Robertson Girls' High School, told the Committee:

a lot of parents with very high-achieving children have very high ambitions for their high-achieving children, and they push and push. Some girls spend 6 hours at school each day, then go to 2 hours of maths tutoring and then go to 2 hours of English tutoring. There is no time in their day to relax. I think the pressure that a lot of girls get from their parents is one of the really decisive factors in causing anxiety, stress and things like that.¹⁰³²

¹⁰²⁷ Associate Professor John Munro, Exceptional Learning and Gifted Education, Graduate School of Education, The University of Melbourne, *Transcript of evidence*, Melbourne, 19 September 2011, 8.

¹⁰²⁸ Ms Pam Lyons, Coordinator, Able Learners' Enrichment Program, La Trobe University, *Transcript of evidence*, Bendigo, 20 September 2011, 3. See also Ms Carmel Meehan, President, VAGTC, *Transcript of evidence*, Melbourne, 25 July 2011, 13.

¹⁰²⁹ Ms Felicity Walker, *Submission 69*, 3–4; Ms Susan Wight, *Submission 93*, 2; Gifted Support Network, *Submission 49*, 10; Principals' Association of Victorian Catholic Secondary Schools (PAVCSS), *Submission 74*, 5; Ms Pat Slattery, Director, WiseOnes Australia, *Transcript of evidence*, Melbourne, 25 July 2011, 2.

¹⁰³⁰ Dr John Munro, Associate Professor Exceptional Learning and Gifted Education, Melbourne Graduate School of Education, The University of Melbourne, *Submission 96*, 15; Ms Carolyn Priest, Secretary, Gifted Support Network, *Transcript of evidence*, Melbourne, 12 September 2011, 3; Karen, parent, *Transcript of evidence*, Melbourne, 19 September 2011, 22; Ms Rhonda Allen, *Submission 14*, 1.

¹⁰³¹ Rosebud Secondary College, *Submission 50*, 5. See also Ms Lynette Sudholz, *Submission 107*, 2; Tina, Year 9 student, Box Hill High School, *Transcript of evidence*, Box Hill, 29 August 2011, 7; Georgina, Year 12 student, The Mac.Robertson Girls' High School, *Transcript of evidence*, Melbourne, 26 July 2011, 5; Anna, Year 12 student, The Mac.Robertson Girls' High School, *Transcript of evidence*, Melbourne, 26 July 2011, 4, 5; Brunswick Secondary College, *Submission 40*, 3.

¹⁰³² Georgina, *Transcript of evidence*, above n 1031, 6. See also Ms Jane Garvey, Principal, The Mac.Robertson Girls' High School, *Transcript of evidence*, Melbourne, 26 July 2011, 4; Ms Hilary Bland, Assistant Principal, Victorian College of the Arts Secondary School (VCASS), *Transcript of evidence*, Southbank, 15 August 2011, 12; Mr Neil Hamley, SEAL Engagement, Box Hill High School, *Transcript of evidence*, Box Hill, 29 August 2011, 11.

Case study 11: '[S]chool is very stressful for a gifted child'¹⁰³³

'I am a parent of gifted children, and in 2000 our family made the decision to withdraw them from the school system and they have been educated at home ever since. The simple reason for this is that the trauma involved in being a gifted child in school means that school does them more harm than good ...

The school which my children attended was, I still believe, the best available school for gifted children in our region. Yet despite this and the efforts of a dedicated principal and one talented teacher, my eldest son suffered for much of his four years at school and my second son's experience was far from positive.

James entered school excited about learning and left it in a state of misery close to depression. He started school reading novels and was bewildered by the reading readiness activities. He had always liked playing with numbers at home and, when he began school, we were told his Maths was at Grade Four level. He wanted to work with fractions and was presented with the numbers from one to ten. At the same time the school-yard was all confusion and fear.

James school experience had begun the way it would continue. There was a constant problem of inadequate provision, sometimes no provision at all and there were continual problems with bullying (ranging from exclusion and verbal abuse to being chased around the yard with a lump of wood studded with protruding nails). Some hostile teachers appeared to believe he was the product of a pushy parent and took it out on him. In Grade Prep he visited Grade Four once a week for Maths. He didn't actually learn anything new there but enjoyed the experience both playing around with Maths and interacting with older children. It was the highlight of his school week but was cancelled when other parents complained their children felt inadequate sitting next to a five-year-old who could do the work so easily. James was disappointed and confused when this provision was withdrawn and he was sent back to Grade Prep to glue glitter on a poster of the number four.

Skipping from Grade Prep to Grade Two the following year, he was excited and hopeful of more challenging work. Instead the level of the work was barely different and he struggled with the physical demands of producing more written work without any intellectual challenge or incentive. There was also an attitude that, once he had been grade-skipped, he had been 'dealt with' and no further provision was necessary ...

When my second son, Matthew, commenced school, I was hopeful that, given his different and more sociable personality, he would fare better. Matthew skipped Grade Prep and went confidently into Grade One ... He experienced no problems socially but the lack of challenge in the work rendered grade-skipping worthless and he found school very unstimulating ... While his teacher reported Matthew to be a "model student", his behaviour at home deteriorated rapidly. He was taking out his boredom and frustration on us ...

¹⁰³³ Ms Susan Wight, *Submission 93*, 1–5.

In the interest of our children's mental and emotional well-being we therefore made yet another radical decision and withdrew the two school-age children from the system. Our third son has never attended school at all. The process of undoing the damage done at school took time but resulted in much happier, more co-operative children who regained their natural love of learning.'

10.1.2 Enhancing support for gifted students

The Committee heard that gifted students need to be supported through the provision of information, counselling and opportunities to socialise with like-minded peers.

Information about giftedness

A small number of participants in this Inquiry told the Committee that gifted students need to have access to information about giftedness. For example, WiseOnes, a private provider of educational withdrawal programs for gifted students in schools, commented, 'The gifted can accept the way they are if they know about it and take measures to help themselves.'¹⁰³⁴ Similarly, Ms Lyons said:

I have found over years of talking to parents of gifted children, and also gifted adults, that if the gifted are given information and explanations there is visible relief and acceptance of themselves.¹⁰³⁵

Box Hill High School, a SEAL school, submitted that any student identified as gifted should be provided with information about giftedness as a matter of course.¹⁰³⁶

Counselling and other practical support

Many Inquiry participants called for gifted students to be provided with ready access to counselling support to assist them to deal with the particular social and emotional challenges they face.¹⁰³⁷ One participant went so far as to argue that all schools should have a counsellor with training in giftedness.¹⁰³⁸ Others suggested that teachers should be educated about the emotional needs of gifted students so they are able to better support these students.¹⁰³⁹

Some schools, particularly those with gifted education programs, do currently provide significant student welfare support. For example, Ms Jane Garvey, Principal of The Mac.Robertson Girls' High School, told the Committee her school has a 'very big welfare team' and highlighted that, as there are few behavioural issues at the school, these

¹⁰³⁴ WiseOnes Australia, *Submission 18*, 9.

¹⁰³⁵ Ms Pam Lyons, Coordinator, Able Learners' Enrichment Program, La Trobe University, *Submission 71*, 4.

¹⁰³⁶ Box Hill High School, *Submission 81*, 6.

¹⁰³⁷ Department of Education (Tasmania), *Submission 10*, 7; Dr John Munro, *Submission 96*, above n 1030, 15; Ms Moragh Tyler on behalf of Wonthaggi interest group for gifted and talented children, *Submission 64*, 3; PAVCSS, *Submission 74*, 9; Box Hill High School, *Submission 81*, 8; Catholic Education Office Melbourne, *Submission 87*, 7; Mr John Geary, Director of Teaching and Learning, Catholic College Bendigo, *Transcript of evidence*, Bendigo, 20 September 2011, 6; Ms Henriette Boonen-Hackett, *Supplementary submission 26B*, 4.

¹⁰³⁸ VAGTC, *Submission 34*, 5.

¹⁰³⁹ Box Hill High School, *Submission 81*, 9; Catholic Education Office Melbourne, *Submission 87*, 7; *ibid.*; Rabbi David Samson, Founder and Dean, Atid School System, *Transcript of evidence*, Melbourne, 20 February 2012, 6.

personnel focus on providing social and emotional support to the school's high-performing students.¹⁰⁴⁰

Few Victorian primary schools currently provide access to counselling for gifted students. The Victorian Association for Gifted and Talented Children expressed frustration about this and contended that counselling needs to be available early in a child's educational journey, particularly at the time giftedness is first identified.¹⁰⁴¹

In addition to counselling, the Committee heard that gifted students sometimes need other practical support to help them cope with the pressures of study. Mr Neil Hamley, who is responsible for SEAL engagement at Box Hill High School, told the Committee that students in specialist programs often benefit from assistance with their organisational skills:

A lot of these kids have flown through high school. They fly through, it is so easy, they never have to think about being organised and taking books home because ... they do it so quick at school they've never had to take a book home in their life.¹⁰⁴²

Greg, a Year 10 student at Nossal High School, a selective entry school, told the Committee that he had benefited from a program at his school designed to help students to manage their workloads.¹⁰⁴³

Counselling and one-on-one support may be particularly important for gifted students who have a disability. The Committee was told that twice exceptional students may need personalised support in areas such as social skills and emotional coping strategies.¹⁰⁴⁴ Ms Garvey expressed the view that twice exceptional students enrolled in gifted programs 'need to be able to be managed one-on-one' and added that, at her school, 'The level coordinators and the heads of schools have spent hours and hours supporting those students.'¹⁰⁴⁵

Opportunities to connect with other gifted students

The Committee has already noted the social and academic benefits of gifted students linking with like-minded students (see chapters three and five). Further to this, many participants in this Inquiry emphasised that connecting with like-minded peers can provide valuable emotional support to gifted students. Parent, Ms Felicity Walker, commented:

Emotional support may well be more important than academic assistance. It's often the case that gifted children have extreme emotional sensitivity as well, making them a common target for bullies ... Schools seem very keen to promote and reward sporting ability, but this is an area where many gifted kids fail to shine. This often leaves gifted kids feeling isolated and with low self esteem. If they are the only gifted child in their peer group, it can be hard to understand why they seem so different to other kids, and this can also damage their self

¹⁰⁴⁰ Ms Jane Garvey, *Transcript of evidence*, above n 1032, 8. See also Box Hill High School, *Submission 81*, 3.

¹⁰⁴¹ VAGTC, *Submission 34*, 5.

¹⁰⁴² Mr Neil Hamley, *Transcript of evidence*, above n 1032, 11.

¹⁰⁴³ Greg, Year 10 student, Nossal High School, *Transcript of evidence*, Berwick, 26 July 2011, 5. See also Genevieve, School Captain, Year 12 dance student, VCASS, *Transcript of evidence*, Southbank, 15 August 2011, 6–7.

¹⁰⁴⁴ Associate Professor John Munro, *Transcript of evidence*, above n 1027, 8; Dr Leonie Kronborg, Senior Lecturer, Coordinator of Post Graduate Studies in Gifted Education, Faculty of Education, Monash University, *Transcript of evidence*, Melbourne, 12 September 2011, 7.

¹⁰⁴⁵ Ms Jane Garvey, *Transcript of evidence*, above n 1032, 7. See also Mr Neil Hamley, *Transcript of evidence*, above n 1032, 11.

image. Linking likeminded kids together and encouraging them to value their abilities is crucial.¹⁰⁴⁶

Similarly, Ms Maxine Cowie, Director of Starjump, an organisation that works with children with learning disabilities, told the Committee:

The statistics say that the most important thing is social time with like minds. If you can hold a child together emotionally then they are going to find their way through into a productive adult life.¹⁰⁴⁷

Susan, a participant in the Committee's Parents' Forum agreed, stating that the social connections made through a voluntary support group 'saved my daughter's sanity'.¹⁰⁴⁸

Ms Cowie stressed that opportunities to connect with like-minded peers are especially important for twice exceptional students:

It builds confidence. It is a place where they can practise their social skills. It is a place where they learn to understand their different processing systems and their different needs.¹⁰⁴⁹

Participants in this Inquiry suggested that gifted children could be provided with increased opportunity to connect with like-minded peers through clubs, holiday camps or networks between clusters of schools.¹⁰⁵⁰

Finally, the Committee heard that gifted students living in rural and regional areas are often particularly isolated. The Country Education Project, a community organisation that works to support education in rural Victoria, submitted:

Having access to peer and social networks is critical to talented students ongoing development and learning. Within a rural community, there may only be one or two students, which then means they don't have access to social networks for support, information, dialogue and development. While there are many talented student networks within regional and metropolitan centres, rural families are required to travel (often long distances) to access this support.¹⁰⁵¹

Many participants viewed technology as having significant potential to reduce the isolation of gifted students in rural and regional areas. For instance, Ms Bronwyn Stubbs, Principal of the Distance Education Centre Victoria, which provides distance education to students throughout the state, commented, 'The ability to connect is crucial for rural and regional students, and the online environment is the way to go.'¹⁰⁵²

¹⁰⁴⁶ Ms Felicity Walker, *Submission 69*, 3–4. See also Ms Moragh Tyler on behalf of Wonthaggi interest group for gifted and talented children, *Submission 64*, 3; Dr Michael Faulkner, Lecturer, School of Education, La Trobe University, *Transcript of evidence*, Bendigo, 20 September 2011, 7; Pieta, parent, *Transcript of evidence*, Bendigo, 20 September 2011, 8; Ms Moragh Tyler, Wonthaggi interest group for gifted and talented children, *Transcript of evidence*, Melbourne, 19 September 2011, 3.

¹⁰⁴⁷ Ms Maxine Cowie, Director, Starjump, *Transcript of evidence*, Melbourne, 10 October 2011, 4.

¹⁰⁴⁸ Susan, parent, *Transcript of evidence*, Melbourne, 19 September 2011, 15.

¹⁰⁴⁹ Ms Maxine Cowie, *Transcript of evidence*, above n 1047, 4.

¹⁰⁵⁰ Ms Henriette Boonen-Hackett, *Supplementary submission 26B*, 4; *ibid.*; Ms Tonya Hackett, parent, Wonthaggi interest group for gifted and talented children, *Transcript of evidence*, Melbourne, 19 September 2011, 4; Ms Kate Fieldew, parent, Wonthaggi interest group for gifted and talented children, *Transcript of evidence*, Melbourne, 19 September 2011, 4–5.

¹⁰⁵¹ Country Education Project, *Submission 79*, 5.

¹⁰⁵² Ms Bronwyn Stubbs, Principal, Distance Education Centre Victoria, *Transcript of evidence*, Melbourne, 10 October 2011, 4. See also Mr Phil Brown, Executive Officer, Country Education Project, *Transcript of evidence*, Melbourne, 10 October 2011, 3–4; Mr Dale Pearce, Principal, Bendigo Senior Secondary College, *Transcript of evidence*, Bendigo, 20 September 2011, 7; Faculty of Education, Australian Catholic University, *Submission 13*, 12; Country Education Project, *Submission 79*, 8; Dr John Munro, *Submission 96*, above n 1030, 13–14; Ms Moragh Tyler, *Transcript of evidence*, above n 1046, 3; Ms Kate Fieldew, *Transcript of evidence*, above n 1050, 3.

Enhancing support for gifted students—The Committee’s view

The Committee recognises that meeting the social and emotional needs of gifted and talented students is just as important as meeting their academic needs. The evidence suggests that these needs are currently being ignored in many parts of the Victorian education system.

The Committee considers that there are three key components to meeting the social and emotional needs of gifted students. Firstly, it is important that gifted students have access to information about giftedness to help them better understand themselves and their needs. Secondly, gifted students may benefit from access to professional counselling, and a variety of other practical support such as assistance with study or organisational skills. Thirdly, the Committee considers it vital that gifted students have the opportunity to meet and socialise with their gifted peers. This fosters a sense of belonging, and allows these students to make friends and benefit from the accompanying emotional support.

The Committee recommends that the Victorian Government give the social and emotional needs of gifted students prominence by highlighting them in the new state-wide gifted education policy and the accompanying model school policy, which the Committee recommended in chapter three.

The Committee also considers that the Victorian Government needs to support gifted students by providing them with tailored information about giftedness. This should be widely available, including through schools and online.

The Committee believes it is critical that all gifted students throughout Victoria have opportunities to meet and socialise with like-minded peers. The Committee considers that the Victorian Government should play an active role in working with schools to provide opportunities for gifted students to meet and socialise. In particular, it recognises that technology has the potential to provide increased opportunities for gifted students, especially those in rural and regional areas, to connect socially with other students. This will complement the online opportunities for academic collaboration that the Committee recommended in chapter five.

Lastly, the Committee believes that improved education, training and information for teachers, as recommended in chapters eight and nine, will ensure that Victorian educators are in a better position to meet the social and emotional needs of gifted students in their classrooms on a daily basis.

Recommendation 55: Policy support for supporting social and emotional needs of gifted students

That the Victorian Government, through the Victorian policy and the model school policy on the education of gifted students, emphasise the importance of addressing the social and emotional needs of gifted students, including through information, counselling and networks of 'like minds'.

Recommendation 56: Information about giftedness for gifted students

That the Victorian Government provide information about giftedness for gifted students, including through schools and online.

Recommendation 57: Providing opportunities for gifted students to connect with like minds

That the Victorian Government work with schools to provide opportunities for gifted students to meet and connect with each other, including online.

10.2 Supporting the parents and carers of gifted children

This section explores the pressures on the parents and carers of gifted children and the support they need to raise and educate their offspring.

10.2.1 What is it like to parent a gifted child?

Parenting a gifted child can be extremely challenging. Many of the difficulties faced by parents and carers have been touched on in previous chapters of this report. These include:

- providing constant challenge and stimulation for a gifted child, which may place a significant financial burden on parents (see chapters three and five)
- advocating continually on their child's behalf, especially in relation to receiving appropriate provisions at the primary school stage (see chapters three and six)
- dealing with an emotionally sensitive child and, in particular, coping with the negative impacts when a child's educational needs are not met, such as behavioural and mental health issues (see chapter three and section 10.1).

When a parent identifies or suspects that their child is gifted, it is often the start of a steep learning curve. For example, Ms Larelle Parker told the Committee:

Naturally I then [after identification] desperately tried to educate myself. I read many books, went to lectures, joined groups and searched computers to try to understand Giftedness over the next five years. I wish I had more support at this time to make this journey easier.¹⁰⁵³

¹⁰⁵³ Ms Larelle Parker, *Submission 11*, 1. See also Gifted Support Network, *Submission 49*, 7; Ms Tonya Hackett, *Transcript of evidence*, above n 1050, 5; Alec, parent, *Transcript of evidence*, Melbourne, 19 September 2011, 22.

Just as gifted children may feel lonely and isolated in the educational community, so too may their parents. Several parents of gifted children commented on the negative attitudes that other parents often show towards them. Ms Walker, lamented:

Having a gifted child can be a very isolating experience, as it's not something you can tell other parents about. It's all right to say that little Johnny kicked a goal at footy on Saturday, but if you say little Johnny won a prize in an academic competition it's seen as boasting.¹⁰⁵⁴

The Gifted Support Network made a similar point:

A 'diagnosis' of 'gifted' is not usually celebrated and broadcast from the rooftops. Many Gifted Support Network families have not told their extended families, and those who have, often find the 'diagnosis' is not accepted. Parents are unable to share this information with friends or parents from school in any meaningful way, as the parenting experience is quite removed from parenting the non-gifted child. It can be a very isolating experience in the beginning.¹⁰⁵⁵

Many parents feel that teachers and school leaders hold negative attitudes towards them. As noted in chapter four, while generally parents are reliable identifiers of giftedness in their children, they are often brushed off or labelled as pushy when they suggest their child is gifted.¹⁰⁵⁶ Similarly, when advocating for appropriate provisions for their gifted children, parents are frequently not taken seriously. Sonia, a parent participating in the Committee's Parents' Forum, stated, 'Often professionals think that especially mothers advocating for their highly gifted children are actually a little bit crazy.'¹⁰⁵⁷

Raising a gifted child may be especially tough for some parents. The parents of twice exceptional students have the dual challenge of coping with their child's giftedness, while also managing the child's disability.¹⁰⁵⁸ Parents from backgrounds of educational disadvantage may have limited understanding of giftedness and have no idea how to educate and support a gifted child. For example, Mr Richard Potok, Director of The Aurora Project, an organisation that delivers programs and services in relation to Indigenous education, told the Committee that often Indigenous parents 'know they have bright kids, but they do not know how to get them to university'.¹⁰⁵⁹ Parents from backgrounds of educational disadvantage may also have limited capacity to pay for the many gifted education programs that are user-pays, and lack the confidence and ability to advocate on behalf of their gifted children.¹⁰⁶⁰

A small number of parents choose to educate their gifted children at home. As noted in chapter three, parents often make the decision to home school because of extreme dissatisfaction with the way their children are catered for at school. Challenges faced by home schooling parents include the need to develop teaching skills and the fact that

¹⁰⁵⁴ Ms Felicity Walker, *Submission 69*, 4.

¹⁰⁵⁵ Gifted Support Network, *Submission 49*, 16.

¹⁰⁵⁶ Mr David Southwick MP, Chair, Education and Training Committee, *Transcript of evidence*, Melbourne, 19 September 2011, 6; Ms Maya Panisset, *Submission 31*, 3; Ms Sonia Fullerton, *Submission 33*, 3; Names withheld, *Submission 45*, 4; Names withheld, *Submission 29*, 2.

¹⁰⁵⁷ Sonia, parent, *Transcript of evidence*, Melbourne, 19 September 2011, 5. See also Ms Maree Germech, Victorian Affiliated Network of Gifted Support Groups, *Transcript of evidence*, Melbourne, 10 October 2011, 2–3.

¹⁰⁵⁸ Ms Pieta McLean, *Submission 44*, 1–2.

¹⁰⁵⁹ Mr Richard Potok, Director, The Aurora Project, *Transcript of evidence*, Melbourne, 19 September 2011, 6. See also Ms Jirra Harvey, Victorian State Coordinator, The Aspiration Initiative, *Transcript of evidence*, Melbourne, 19 September 2011, 5; Mr Lionel Bamblett, General Manager, Victorian Aboriginal Education Association Incorporated, *Transcript of evidence*, Melbourne, 12 September 2011, 4, 5; Victorian Catholic Schools Parent Body, *Submission 51*, 3.

¹⁰⁶⁰ Mr Wayne and Mrs Meredith Burton, *Submission 17*, 4; Names withheld, *Submission 29*, 4; Names withheld, *Submission 45*, 5.

they have very little time off from their children.¹⁰⁶¹ In addition, home schooling parents who contributed to this Inquiry told the Committee that home education imposes a significant financial burden, as parents must pay to access appropriate resources and stimulating experiences for gifted children. The financial burden is often exacerbated by the fact that home schooling parents may be forced to forgo paid employment in order to educate their children.

10.2.2 What support is currently available for parents?

At present Victorian Government support for the parents and carers of gifted and talented students is limited to some basic information on the DEECD website.¹⁰⁶² In the absence of any more comprehensive government support, the parents and carers of gifted children mostly obtain information and support from volunteer organisations and from individual schools and programs.

There are a broad range of voluntary groups and organisations that provide support for the families of gifted children. Many of these groups made significant contributions to this Inquiry. These groups provide services such as:

- conferences, workshops and seminars on giftedness and gifted education
- information and resources on giftedness
- information about gifted education programs and opportunities
- opportunities for parents to meet informally
- referrals to counselling
- answers to parent queries.¹⁰⁶³

Many of the schools participating in this Inquiry also emphasised the support they provide to the parents of gifted students. For example, Box Hill High School informed the Committee:

Parents of SEAL students are supported through regular Parent Support Group meetings, held six times a year in the evenings. These meetings have guest speakers, raise questions for discussion, offer readings and research articles for consideration and give parents a strong connection to the school and a forum for discussion and support. Parents also have unlimited

¹⁰⁶¹ Alison, parent, *Transcript of evidence*, Bendigo, 20 September 2011, 5, 6; Susan, *Transcript of evidence*, above n 1048, 5; Pieta, *Transcript of evidence*, above n 1046, 5–6.

¹⁰⁶² Department of Education and Early Childhood Development (DEECD), *For parents*, <<http://www.education.vic.gov.au/studentlearning/programs/gifted/forparents/default.htm#2>> viewed 7 March 2012.

¹⁰⁶³ VAGTC, *Submission 34*, 9; Gifted Support Network, *Submission 49*, 4; Victorian Affiliated Network of Gifted Support Groups, *Submission 100*, 1; Gifted Resources, *Submission 113*, 2; Ms Carmel Meehan, *Transcript of evidence*, above n 1028, 6; Ms Louise Broadbent, President, Gifted Support Network, *Transcript of evidence*, Melbourne, 12 September 2011, 2; Ms Rhonda Collins, Coordinator, Victorian Affiliated Network of Gifted Support Groups, *Transcript of evidence*, Melbourne, 10 October 2011, 3; Ms Moragh Tyler, *Transcript of evidence*, above n 1046, 2.

access by phone, email or personal meeting with the Gifted Education Co-ordinator. No other SEAL school offers such extensive parent support.¹⁰⁶⁴

Teachers at Maribyrnong College highlighted that the school provides a significant amount of information and support to parents of students enrolled in the school's Sports Academy, including through its website, newsletters, parents' nights and regular meetings. Mr Rob Carroll, Director of the Sports Academy, told the Committee that support is particularly important for the parents of students in specialist programs:

We tend to support the parents because whatever message we give to the students at school an important part of the partnership is with the parents. They have to be the taxi and the driver and the cooks. If we are to give nutrition messages to the students it is irrelevant if it is not enacted at home where most of the meals are served. We would run support services for the athlete parents in weekly meetings ... We also talk to them around how to report injuries to us so we can better manage it with athletes.¹⁰⁶⁵

Other schools contributing to the Inquiry indicated they provide support to parents through newsletters, information sessions and regular opportunities to meet with teachers, as well as by promoting parent support groups.¹⁰⁶⁶

However, the extensive parental support provided by schools participating in this Inquiry appears to be the exception rather than the norm. Many parents were dissatisfied with the level of information and support they received from their child's school. For instance, Ms Walker commented:

I certainly had no input from any school in terms of resources or support, probably because they weren't aware of any. I found all these things for myself by asking questions of other gifted parents or via the internet.¹⁰⁶⁷

Some gifted programs offered outside the school environment also incorporate education and support for parents. For example, the Able Learners' Enrichment Program includes parent support as well as activities for gifted young people. Dr Michael Faulkner, a Lecturer in the School of Education at La Trobe University, explained:

while children were participating in their 2.5 hour workshops, we provided parents with guest speakers on aspects of gifted and talented child development, ways they could optimize the parenting of their children. Parents consistently reported value in this ...¹⁰⁶⁸

His colleague, Ms Lyons, emphasised the important networking and socialising opportunities that the Program provides for parents:

¹⁰⁶⁴ Box Hill High School, *Submission 81*, 3. See also Mr Jennifer Grant, parent, Box Hill High School, *Transcript of evidence*, Box Hill, 29 August 2011, 5; Ms Wendy White, parent, Box Hill High School, *Transcript of evidence*, Box Hill, 29 August 2011, 5.

¹⁰⁶⁵ Mr Rob Carroll, Director, Sports Academy, Maribyrnong College, *Transcript of evidence*, Maribyrnong, 29 August 2011, 9. See also Mr Martin Cusack, Assistant Sports Director, Leading Teacher (Academic/Strategy), Maribyrnong College, *Transcript of evidence*, Maribyrnong, 29 August 2011, 9; Mr Mark Smyth, High Performance Manager, Sports Academy, Maribyrnong College, *Transcript of evidence*, Maribyrnong, 29 August 2011, 9.

¹⁰⁶⁶ Ms Jane Garvey, *Transcript of evidence*, above n 1032, 8; Mr Peter Corkill, Principal, John Monash Science School, *Transcript of evidence*, Melbourne, 12 September 2011, 8; Mr Bruce Cunningham, Principal, Camelot Rise Primary School, *Transcript of evidence*, Glen Waverley, 15 August 2011, 10; Ms Anne-Marie Hermans, School Council member and parent, Nossal High School, *Transcript of evidence*, Berwick, 26 July 2011, 4.

¹⁰⁶⁷ Ms Felicity Walker, *Submission 69*, 4. See also Parents Victoria, *Submission 82*, 3, 4; Forum participant 2, parent, *Transcript of evidence*, Melbourne, 19 September 2011, 16.

¹⁰⁶⁸ Dr Michael Faulkner, Lecturer, School of Education, La Trobe University, *Submission 95*, 1. See also Ms Maxine Cowie, *Transcript of evidence*, above n 1047, 4.

A big part of the Able Learners' Program is for parents who have come in from long distances to get to talk to other parents so that they can see that their children are not as different as they would look if they were in a normal school.¹⁰⁶⁹

10.2.3 Enhancing support for the parents and carers of gifted students

Many participants in this Inquiry called for substantially increased support for the parents of gifted children.

Access to information

At present, parents often struggle to find out information to help them raise and educate their gifted child.

Information about giftedness

The Committee heard that parents need ready access to information about giftedness to help them understand and better parent their gifted child. The Gifted Support Network highlighted:

Parenting a gifted child is often exhausting because of their energy and highly sensitive emotions. Aside from the academic issues, parents need to be given appropriate information on why their child is like this. Understanding the child as a whole enables parents to make better choices for themselves and their families.¹⁰⁷⁰

A number of participants called for parents to be provided with information about giftedness at the time their child is identified as gifted.¹⁰⁷¹ A range of professionals were seen as being well placed to provide information to parents at this time, including psychologists, maternal and child health nurses and teachers. Two participants stressed that the provision of information is particularly vital for the parents of gifted students with a learning disability.¹⁰⁷²

Access to information about educating gifted children

Making decisions about a child's education can be stressful for all parents. For the parents of a gifted child, such decisions may be even more problematic. Many parents participating in this Inquiry were desperate for information about how best to educate their gifted child.

Firstly, a small number of participants highlighted that parents, particularly parents of primary school children, are very uncertain about what schools should be doing to cater for gifted students. Parents frequently feel that their child's school is not doing enough to provide for their gifted child, but are uncertain what it is reasonable to ask of a school.¹⁰⁷³

¹⁰⁶⁹ Ms Pam Lyons, *Transcript of evidence*, above n 1028, 3.

¹⁰⁷⁰ Gifted Support Network, *Submission 49*, 16. See also Ms Maxine Cowie, *Transcript of evidence*, above n 1047, 3; Ms Pam Lyons, *Submission 71*, above n 1035, 2–3.

¹⁰⁷¹ Ms Larelle Parker, *Submission 11*, 1; Gifted Support Network, *Submission 49*, 16; Box Hill High School, *Submission 81*, 4.

¹⁰⁷² Gifted Support Network, *Submission 49*, 16; VCASS, *Submission 56*, 12.

¹⁰⁷³ Gifted Support Network, *Submission 49*, 17.

Mr Burrage of DEECD acknowledged that it is important that his Department communicate with parents so they have appropriate expectations of schools.¹⁰⁷⁴

Secondly, many parents were hungry for information about educational options for their gifted children. Just as the lack of information about current programs and provisions hindered the Committee's attempts to fully gauge the extent of gifted education provision in Victoria (see chapter three), so too parents struggle to access information to help them make informed choices about their child's future. The Australian College of Educators, which represents educators from all sectors, submitted:

Information to families and the broader community is also highly variable in quality and availability and often dependent on a few 'champions'.

Gifted and talented students need to be made aware of programs that exist to match their knowledge. Currently, access to knowledge of such programs is somewhat random ...¹⁰⁷⁵

Similarly, the parents of a gifted child submitted:

It is possible that some schools offer better choices and opportunities within their schools. However, there is no way to tell unless you are part of that school. As a parent, there is no methodical way to know which schools are doing this and to what extent they are successful.¹⁰⁷⁶

The evidence to this Inquiry suggests that the need for information about educational options is particularly acute at the primary school stage and, as discussed in chapter six, at the time of transition to secondary school.

Improving access to information

Participants in this Inquiry felt that DEECD's website should be significantly expanded to incorporate a wide range of information and resources for parents.¹⁰⁷⁷ As well as information about giftedness and gifted education options, it was suggested that this website should contain the latest research, frequently asked questions and details of support groups. DEECD acknowledged that it could do more to provide information to the families of gifted students.¹⁰⁷⁸

The relevant government departments in some other Australian jurisdictions, do provide a greater amount of information to the parents of gifted students. For example, the New South Wales Department of Education and Training, maintains a comprehensive website and, in addition, has produced a comprehensive parent support package. The package contains extensive information, including about giftedness, the state's gifted education policy, gifted education options, frequently asked questions and where to obtain assistance.¹⁰⁷⁹

¹⁰⁷⁴ Mr Ian Burrage, General Manager, Education and Policy Research Division, DEECD, *Transcript of evidence*, Melbourne, 25 July 2011, 13.

¹⁰⁷⁵ Australian College of Educators (Victorian Branch), *Submission 21*, 5. See also VAGTC, *Submission 34*, 6; Mr Michael Bond, Vice President, VAGTC, *Transcript of evidence*, Melbourne, 25 July 2011, 9.

¹⁰⁷⁶ Names withheld, *Submission 29*, 4. See also Name withheld, *Submission 75*, 3; Maroondah Gifted Children's Parents' Association, *Submission 98*, 8.

¹⁰⁷⁷ Dr Leonie Kronborg, *Transcript of evidence*, above n 1044, 8; Catholic Education Office, Diocese of Sale, *Submission 66*, 3; Faculty of Education, Australian Catholic University, *Submission 13*, 12; Country Education Project, *Submission 79*, 8; Dr John Munro, *Submission 96*, above n 1030, 16.

¹⁰⁷⁸ Mr Ian Burrage, *Transcript of evidence*, above n 1074, 13; DEECD, *Submission 58*, 10–11.

¹⁰⁷⁹ Department of Education and Training (New South Wales), *Policy and implementation strategies for the education of gifted and talented students. Support package: Parent information* (2004) DET (NSW).

Access to advice

The parents of gifted children often have many questions about their child's giftedness and educational options for their child. At present, these parents generally turn to voluntary groups such as the Victorian Association for Gifted and Talented Children or the Gifted Support Network.

A number of participants in this Inquiry called for DEECD to play a greater role in providing tailored information and advice to the parents of gifted students. For example, Susan, a parent who home schools her three gifted children, commented:

it would be really good to have a gifted unit within the Department and as part of that to have phone support for parents, teachers and home-educators of gifted students so that there would be a central point we could ring, or people coming behind us could ring, for advice and to find out what resources are available.¹⁰⁸⁰

Ms Carmel Meehan, President of the Victorian Association for Gifted and Talented Children, told the Committee that the Catholic school sector offers more support for parents through its Gifted Education Coordinator:

Parents can ring her up and say, 'I have this problem', and she has a network of people she can direct these people towards, whether it is an educational psychologist or a school.¹⁰⁸¹

Again, the Committee heard that parents are better supported in some other Australian jurisdictions. For example, the Gifted and Talented Selection Unit within the Western Australian Department of Education provides advice to the parents of gifted children on an ongoing basis.¹⁰⁸²

Partnerships between parents and schools

The importance of positive relationships between parents and schools is well established. A fact sheet produced by the Australian Association for the Education of the Gifted and Talented, a national association representing the interests of gifted children, posits:

Research has shown that the best outcomes for gifted students occur when there is a successful partnership between school and home. Parents and teachers are in a unique position to share their observation of gifted students, enabling them to support each other in developing the talents of the students.¹⁰⁸³

Many participants in this Inquiry felt that schools were not doing enough to support and collaborate with the parents of gifted students. In particular, they called for schools to be

¹⁰⁸⁰ Susan, *Transcript of evidence*, above n 1048, 8. See also Alison, *Transcript of evidence*, above n 1061, 7; Ms Rhonda Collins, *Transcript of evidence*, above n 1063, 3; Heike, parent, *Transcript of evidence*, Melbourne, 19 September 2011, 15; Gifted Support Network, *Submission 49*, 18.

¹⁰⁸¹ Ms Carmel Meehan, *Transcript of evidence*, above n 1028, 9.

¹⁰⁸² Letter from Minister for Education (Western Australia), to Chair, Victorian Parliament Education and Training Committee, 10 November 2011, 5.

¹⁰⁸³ Australian Association for the Education of the Gifted and Talented (AAEGT), 'AAEGT information statement', included in *Submission 28 Appendix A*, 4. See also Goldfields Local Learning and Employment Network, *Submission 86*, 10; Ms Kathy Harrison, Compass Centre Coordinator, Methodist Ladies' College, *Transcript of evidence*, Melbourne, 19 September 2011, 6.

more proactive in providing information about giftedness and gifted programs, keeping parents updated and providing a contact point for parent queries.¹⁰⁸⁴

The Committee heard that other jurisdictions have more emphasis on strong relationships between parents and schools in relation to the education of gifted students. The New South Wales gifted education policy places a positive obligation on schools to foster collaborative partnerships with the parents and carers of gifted students.¹⁰⁸⁵ These partnerships are based on building strong communication channels, with both schools and parents expected to communicate openly and regularly.¹⁰⁸⁶

Visiting Israeli gifted education expert, Rabbi David Samson, told the Committee that in his country teachers and parents are supported and educated to work together to develop the talents of gifted children.¹⁰⁸⁷

Opportunities to connect with other parents

Many of the parents participating in this Inquiry are members of parent support groups. The Committee heard that such groups offer invaluable support and assistance to parents, providing access to information and advice, as well as alleviating the isolation frequently felt by the parents of gifted students. Parent, Ms Walker, commented:

Ever since my son was 2 years old I have belonged to a local group for parents of gifted children, and at times the wisdom and support of that group has been my lifeline to sanity. Most of them had already been through something similar ... and even if they hadn't, they could suggest solutions or resources I could access for assistance.¹⁰⁸⁸

The parent support groups are all run by volunteers and currently receive no government assistance. Home schooling parent, Susan, told the Committee that running a parent support group can be extremely taxing:

My experience of a parent support group in gifted is that the parents burn out. For a long time I was involved in the Parents Association for Children of Special Abilities, and what ended up happening was that the committee were basically resourcing parents who contacted us, rather than receiving any support ourselves. We had no funding and no resources. We were just trying to help other parents. It does become very tiring, and it is very emotional listening to people's problems and not having the power or the authority to help them.¹⁰⁸⁹

Other parents reported similar experiences and suggested that these groups should receive government support.¹⁰⁹⁰

¹⁰⁸⁴ Dr Karen Ward, *Transcript of evidence*, Bendigo, 20 September 2011, 4–5; Belgrave Parent Support Group for Gifted and Talented Students, *Submission 60*, 3; Maria, parent, *Transcript of evidence*, Melbourne, 19 September 2011, 16; Ms Larelle Parker, *Submission 11*, 2; Parents Victoria, *Submission 82*, 4–5.

¹⁰⁸⁵ Department of Education and Training (New South Wales), *Policy and implementation strategies for the education of gifted and talented students* (2004) DET (NSW), 7.

¹⁰⁸⁶ Department of Education and Training (New South Wales), *Support package: Parent information*, above n 1079, 8–9.

¹⁰⁸⁷ Rabbi David Samson, *Transcript of evidence*, above n 1039, 6.

¹⁰⁸⁸ Ms Felicity Walker, *Submission 69*, 4. See also Mrs Jo Freitag, Coordinator, Gifted Resources, *Transcript of evidence*, Melbourne, 19 September 2011, 4; Methodist Ladies' College, *Submission 84*, 5; Dr Danuta Chessor, Lecturer, School of Psychology, University of Western Sydney, *Submission 76*, 3.

¹⁰⁸⁹ Susan, *Transcript of evidence*, above n 1048, 9.

¹⁰⁹⁰ Mrs Deborah Patterson, Principal, Mill Park Heights Primary School, *Transcript of evidence*, Melbourne, 12 September 2011, 19; Victorian Affiliated Network of Gifted Support Groups, *Submission 100*, 2; VAGTC, *Submission 34*, 9; Susan, *Transcript of evidence*, above n 1048, 15.

Governments in some other Australian jurisdictions do provide more assistance to parent groups. For instance, as part of the rollout of the a new gifted education policy in the Australian Capital Territory, a once-off grant was made to a support group in that jurisdiction.¹⁰⁹¹

Some participants also suggested that schools or clusters of schools should be more proactive in establishing and supporting parents groups,¹⁰⁹² or that at a minimum, schools should advise parents about groups that can provide support.¹⁰⁹³

As with gifted education opportunities, parent support groups are predominately located in metropolitan Melbourne. The Gifted Support Network highlighted that parents living in rural and regional areas are especially isolated:

In the city, there are opportunities to participate in seminars and network with other gifted families through various support groups. This normalises the experience for many. Rural families are unable to participate in these activities which further exacerbates their sense of isolation.¹⁰⁹⁴

Again the Committee heard that technology has the potential to overcome the tyrannies of distance, providing links and support to parents of gifted students throughout the state.¹⁰⁹⁵

Access to dispute resolution and advocacy

A small number of participants in this Inquiry suggested there should be a process for resolving issues between parents and schools in relation to gifted education. Dr Munro of Melbourne University suggested there should be a gifted education ombudsman who could resolve disputes constructively through mediation:

Again and again I see the situation where the parents say, 'The school is hopeless. The school is doing no good', and the school says, 'The parents are unreasonable. They think their child is wonderful. We're doing the best we can'.¹⁰⁹⁶

Another suggestion was that there should be an advocate within DEECD who could intervene to resolve disputes between parents and schools.¹⁰⁹⁷

Enhancing support for the parents and carers of gifted students—The Committee's view

The evidence presented to this Inquiry makes it clear that parenting a gifted child has many challenges. While attempting to stimulate their child's thirst for learning and meet their child's social and emotional needs, these parents must navigate an educational system that is often hostile to the needs of their child.

¹⁰⁹¹ ACT Education and Training Directorate, 'Information about the implementation of the ACT Gifted and Talented Students Policy (2008)', included in *Submission 20 Attachment C*, 1. See also Department of Education (Tasmania), *Submission 10*, 3.

¹⁰⁹² Ms Henriette Boonen-Hackett, *Supplementary submission 26B*, 4; Maria, *Transcript of evidence*, above n 1084, 16.

¹⁰⁹³ Ms Larelle Parker, *Submission 11*, 1.

¹⁰⁹⁴ Gifted Support Network, *Submission 49*, 15.

¹⁰⁹⁵ Faculty of Education, Australian Catholic University, *Submission 13*, 12; Country Education Project, *Submission 79*, 8; Ms Lynette Sudholz, *Submission 107*, 1; Ms Moragh Tyler, *Transcript of evidence*, above n 1046, 3; DEECD, *Submission 58*, 11.

¹⁰⁹⁶ Associate Professor John Munro, *Transcript of evidence*, above n 1027, 11. See also Name withheld, *Submission 90*, 3.

¹⁰⁹⁷ Ms Maree Germech, *Transcript of evidence*, above n 1057, 4.

The Committee considers that the parents of gifted children need ready access to support, advice and information. At present this information and support is mostly provided by volunteer groups. The Committee feels that these groups currently bear an unfair burden in supporting parents and believes that a more comprehensive, coordinated approach is required, with DEECD and schools playing a much more central role.

The Committee considers that parents need easy access to a broad range of information and resources about giftedness and gifted education. This should include information about available gifted education offerings (see recommendation two) educational options and details of parent support groups. The Victorian Government should make such information freely available and accessible to all Victorian parents, including online.

The Committee is impressed by the comprehensive parent support package that has been developed by the New South Wales Government and recommends that a parent support package based on this model be developed in Victoria. This would complement the toolkit for parents on identifying giftedness recommended in chapter four and form the cornerstone of a broader suite of information and resources specifically tailored for parents.

The Committee recognises that some parents may require additional support in raising and educating their gifted children. In particular, the Committee is aware of the extra difficulties that may face families experiencing educational disadvantage, the families of twice exceptional children and families who home school their gifted children. The Committee did not receive any detailed information about the particular support that these parents need, however, it recommends the Victorian Government give consideration to the specific needs of these groups when developing information and resources for the parents of gifted children.

The evidence also makes it clear that parents need access to personalised advice to answer the many questions they may have about educating their gifted child. In chapter nine the Committee recommended that schools be supported to have a gifted education coordinator (recommendation 51). The Committee envisages that, as well as providing expert advice to teachers, this coordinator will be a valuable resource for parents, providing a contact point within the school for information and advice. Further, the Committee considers that the improved education, training and resources it recommended for teachers in chapters eight and nine will help equip classroom teachers to better inform and advise the parents of gifted children.

It is the Committee's view that parents also need access to broad ranging and tailored information and advice from within DEECD. The Committee has already recommended that the Victorian Government employ a gifted education advisor (recommendation 53). This advisor will have an important role in ensuring that parents can access personalised advice about gifted education on an as-needs basis. As discussed in chapter nine, the coordinator will also have a role in advising teachers and schools in relation to gifted education.

The Committee believes that positive relationships between schools and parents and carers are essential, providing a strong foundation for addressing the needs of each gifted student. The Committee recommends that both the Victorian gifted education policy and the model school policy emphasise the importance of collaborative partnerships between schools and parents. The Committee considers that open communication is at the core of solid relationships between parents and schools.

The Committee acknowledges the volunteer organisations and groups that are tirelessly working to support gifted students and their families. The Committee considers that the Victorian Government should recognise the contribution of these organisations and support their ongoing functioning. This could include by providing funding or in kind support, such as the provision of office space.

Finally, the Committee notes that a handful of participants in this Inquiry called for a formal mechanism for resolving disputes between the parents of gifted children and schools. Based on the limited evidence received on this matter, the Committee has concluded that these issues are best addressed informally. In particular, the Committee is hopeful that the mechanisms for improved communication between schools and families and the increased advice and support for families recommended in this chapter, will reduce conflict and provide a positive basis for parents and schools to work together to meet the needs of gifted students.

Recommendation 58: Access to information, research and resources for parents

That the Victorian Government provide information, research and resources for parents on giftedness and gifted education, including online where possible.

Recommendation 59: Toolkit for parents on educating gifted children

That the Victorian Government develop a comprehensive toolkit for parents incorporating a broad range of information about giftedness and educating a gifted child.

Recommendation 60: Tailored information and resources for parents facing particular challenges

That the Victorian Government, in developing information and resources for the parents of gifted children, give special consideration to the needs of the parents of gifted students from backgrounds of educational disadvantage, the parents of twice exceptional children and parents who are home educating their gifted children.

Recommendation 61: Policy emphasis on collaborative partnerships between schools and parents

That the Victorian Government, through the Victorian policy and the model school policy on the education of gifted students, emphasise the importance of collaborative partnerships between schools and parents.

Recommendation 62: Support for gifted education support groups

That the Victorian government provide support for groups and organisations that support the parents of gifted students.

10.3 Overcoming negative attitudes to giftedness

This section discusses negative attitudes towards giftedness and identifies strategies for promoting more positive attitudes to gifted students and giftedness in Victorian schools and society.

10.3.1 Common negative beliefs and attitudes about giftedness

Throughout the course of this Inquiry, the Committee repeatedly heard of misconceptions about giftedness and negative attitudes towards gifted students. Such attitudes and beliefs appear to be relatively widespread in school communities, as well as among the community as a whole.

One of the most common myths associated with giftedness is that gifted students will succeed at school without any special provisions or assistance. The Committee considered this issue in chapter three where, based on overwhelming evidence, it concluded that gifted students have distinct learning needs that require tailored learning strategies. Closely connected to this myth are views that specifically providing for gifted students is a form of elitism. For instance, the parent of two gifted children commented:

The general opinion that gifted kids do not need extra help is still rife within the community. Not only do people believe that these kids should not be given additional accommodation, people are actively negative towards both parents and children when special consideration is requested. They perceive it as the kids at the top being given even more.¹⁰⁹⁸

Lara, a Year 12 student at Bendigo Senior Secondary College who is participating in a school-based program for high-achieving students, told the Committee:

I guess there is always a hint of jealousy or confusion when people find out you are in such a program, and there is a negative connotation to being gifted, especially in smaller communities such as Bendigo or rural areas. You do not really want to tell people that or focus on that. The reaction may be negative because some people may feel that you are favoured, and you do not feel accepted in that way.¹⁰⁹⁹

Other common misconceptions about giftedness identified in the literature, as well as in evidence to this Inquiry, include:

- All children are gifted.
- Gifted students are always studious and well-behaved.
- Students are always better off learning with peers of the same age.
- Gifted students come from well-off backgrounds.
- Gifted students never experience learning difficulties.¹¹⁰⁰

The Committee heard that pervasive negative attitudes and misconceptions are a significant barrier to gifted programs being implemented or continued in schools. They may result in parents dismissed by teachers and other parents as 'pushy parents' or 'tiger mothers' when they advocate on behalf of their gifted children (see section 10.2.1).

¹⁰⁹⁸ Names withheld, *Submission 45*, 3. See also Names withheld, *Submission 9*, 4; Mrs Deborah DeBuhr, *Submission 46*, 13–14; Ms Caelli Greenbank, *Submission 67*, 2; PAVCSS, *Submission 74*, 4; AAEGT, *Submission 28*, 1; WiseOnes Australia, *Submission 18*, 10–11.

¹⁰⁹⁹ Lara, Year 12 student, Bendigo Senior Secondary College, *Transcript of evidence*, Bendigo, 3. See also Stephanie, Year 10 student, Nossal High School, *Transcript of evidence*, Berwick, 26 July 2011, 2.

¹¹⁰⁰ Senate Employment, Workplace Relations, Small Business and Education References Committee, *The education of gifted children* (2001) Commonwealth of Australia, 32–33; Ellen Winner, *Gifted children: Myths and realities* (1996) BasicBooks, 307–313; National Association for Gifted Children, *Common myths in gifted education*, <<http://www.nagc.org/commonmyths.aspx>> viewed 25 April 2012.

In addition, as noted in chapter three, in the school ground, intolerance of difference may result in gifted students being isolated or even bullied by their peers. Finally, such attitudes may influence which students are identified as gifted, meaning that some highly gifted students never have their abilities recognised (see chapter four).

10.3.2 Promoting positive attitudes to giftedness

Participants in this Inquiry made a number of suggestions for overcoming the widespread negative attitudes towards giftedness and gifted students.

Creating school cultures that value high performance in all areas

Many contributors to the Inquiry expressed the view that the key to promoting positive attitudes to giftedness is creating school cultures that recognise and value high-level performance in all domains.

The Committee heard that many Victorian schools are not good at honouring the successes of gifted students, other than those who excel at sport. Ms Maya Panisett, the parent of two gifted children, told the Committee:

Most principals and school communities celebrate sports prowess, but belittle or ignore academic abilities. Instead, so many children are given “encouragement awards” to promote better behaviour, while my kids feel shunned for being able.¹¹⁰¹

Another parent, Ms Kate Fieldew, voiced similar views:

every single week at school there is some sort of sporting achievement that is celebrated at assembly or whatever the forum happens to be, yet it is only in Science Week, or Maths Week or some sort of one-off special event where a lot of gifted kids get to shine and show their talents.¹¹⁰²

The tendency of schools to downplay success was seen by some a manifestation of the broader Australian tall-poppy syndrome.¹¹⁰³

A number of Inquiry participants proposed that Victorian schools should actively work to build cultures that value success. Publicly lauding and rewarding all achievements were seen as the first steps in instilling such cultures within schools. Karen, a participant in the Committee’s Parents’ Forum, commented:

there are very simple ways that schools can show their support of these kids. When there is a kid getting a certificate at assembly each week for being nice to other kids or for representing the school in football or basketball, give the kid who is the best in math a certificate for being best in math.¹¹⁰⁴

Ms Patricia Pace, Leading Teacher at Mill Park Heights Primary School, expressed the view that school values lay the foundation for positive attitudes to achievement:

¹¹⁰¹ Ms Maya Panisett, *Submission 31*, 3.

¹¹⁰² Ms Kate Fieldew, *Transcript of evidence*, above n 1050, 4.

¹¹⁰³ Names withheld, *Submission 9*, 4; Dr Susan Nikakis, Education Officer, Gifted and Talented, Catholic Education Office Melbourne, *Transcript of evidence*, Melbourne, 12 September 2011, 6; Ms Kim Steere, *Submission 61*, 3; Ms Carmel Meehan, President, *Transcript of evidence*, above n 1028, 3.

¹¹⁰⁴ Karen, *Transcript of evidence*, above n 1030, 14. See also Australian Science Innovations, *Submission 102*, 8; Ms Louise Broadbent, *Transcript of evidence*, above n 1063, 9.

When you have a good, strong values system within the school it makes it safe for those children to put themselves out there and feel comfortable and be able to show what they can really do.¹¹⁰⁵

She added that building a school culture that celebrates all forms of student achievement can take a long time, and that teacher attitudes are key.

Finally, several participants spoke of the importance of nurturing a school environment that embraces diversity. Education of the school community was seen as a vital first step in achieving this. For example, Ms Tonya Hackett, a parent who gave evidence on behalf of an interest group for gifted children based in Wonthaggi, stated:

I think especially for rural children, a lot of these gifted children are very different—they are very different in the way they think, they are very different in the kinds of interests they have and all sorts of things—and it is very difficult in a rural school sometimes if you are different ... I think there needs to be education within schools that it is okay to be different and it is actually very important to be different.¹¹⁰⁶

Embedding gifted education as part of the usual business of schools

The Committee heard that embedding gifted education as part of the usual business of every Victorian school will also help engender more positive attitudes to giftedness. Several participants viewed government as having a leading role in normalising gifted education by setting policy and providing programs. For example, the parents of a gifted primary school student stated:

Changing attitudes can be support immensely by clear policy from government. It can help compel teachers, schools, parents and the community to reconsider their pre-conceptions about gifted and talented education and provide a platform for altering them.¹¹⁰⁷

Ms Myra Karantzas, a WiseOnes licensee, told the Committee that government policy and support for low-achieving students led cultural change in relation to these students:

many years ago you had your lower achieving students almost stigmatised, shunned and looked at as being dummies if they got any additional assistance or were dealt with differently than the norm in the classroom ... once it was okay for the lower achievers to be seen to have integration aides ... Once it was okay and there was some government funding to allow for that. It was like the government was giving its stamp of approval and saying, 'It is okay to give them that assistance'.¹¹⁰⁸

Other participants suggested that individual schools can normalise gifted education by using mechanisms such as ability grouping as part of their regular timetable,¹¹⁰⁹ and by

¹¹⁰⁵ Ms Patricia Pace, Leading Teacher, Mill Park Heights Primary School, *Transcript of evidence*, Melbourne, 12 September 2011, 14.

¹¹⁰⁶ Ms Tonya Hackett, *Transcript of evidence*, above n 1050, 3. See also Patrick Leader, Student Council, Year 12 student, Bendigo Senior Secondary College, *Transcript of evidence*, Bendigo, 20 September 2011, 3; Ms Moragh Tyler on behalf of Wonthaggi interest group for gifted and talented children, *Submission 64*, 3; Parents Victoria, *Submission 82*, 5.

¹¹⁰⁷ Names withheld, *Submission 29*, 6. See also Dr Glenison Alsop, Psychologist and Counsellor, *Supplementary submission 54A*, 2; Ms Louise Broadbent, *Transcript of evidence*, above n 1063, 9; Distance Education Centre Victoria, *Submission 24*, 2.

¹¹⁰⁸ Ms Myra Karantzas, Education Manager, WiseOnes Australia licensee, *Transcript of evidence*, Melbourne, 25 July 2011, 7.

¹¹⁰⁹ Mr Frank Sal, President, Victorian Association of State Secondary Principals, *Transcript of evidence*, Melbourne, 25 July 2011, 7–8.

making sure that the school community understands the aims of any gifted education provisions.¹¹¹⁰

Community education

A number of Inquiry participants suggested that the general community needs to be educated about giftedness in order to promote greater acceptance and more positive attitudes in the broader sphere.¹¹¹¹ The Committee attempted to obtain concrete suggestions for what such an education campaign would look like. However, even in response to direct questions posed at public hearings, the Committee did not receive any specific ideas.

Promoting positive attitudes to giftedness—The Committee’s view

The Committee is concerned by the negative attitudes towards gifted students and giftedness generally that appear pervasive both in school communities and the broader community. Such attitudes create barriers to the introduction or continuance of gifted programs and provisions in schools. For individual gifted children these attitudes may have devastating consequences such as isolation and bullying. Therefore the Committee considers that urgent action is required to address these negative attitudes.

The Committee has already acknowledged that some teachers and school leaders may have negative attitudes towards giftedness and made recommendations to address this through improved information and training (see chapter eight). Beyond this, the Committee believes there is a need for targeted interventions at the school level to promote more positive to attitudes to giftedness.

The Committee is very concerned by evidence that many Victorian schools do not recognise and acknowledge all achievement equally. In particular, it notes a tendency for schools to celebrate non-academic achievements, such as a sporting accomplishment, while downplaying academic achievements. In the Committee’s view, it is essential that Victorian schools encourage and support students to shine in all areas of endeavour. To this end, both the Victorian policy and the model school policy on gifted education should highlight the need to uphold student excellence in all domains.

The Committee considers that the implementation of the recommendations in this report, especially the introduction of a state-wide gifted education policy (see recommendation four), will significantly contribute to the emergence of more positive attitudes to giftedness by giving the issue prominence in schools. The Committee believes that increased understanding of giftedness and the rationale behind gifted education provisions, will help break down some of the misconceptions and myths that are so common. Therefore, the Committee recommends the development of an education campaign targeted at schools to help promote understanding of giftedness. This should be supported by an emphasis in the model school gifted education policy on explaining the aims of gifted education programs and provisions.

The Committee acknowledges that there was some stakeholder support for a broad social education campaign about giftedness. However, in the absence of any specific

¹¹¹⁰ Department of Education and Children’s Services (South Australia), *Submission 3*, 6.

¹¹¹¹ Methodist Ladies’ College, *Submission 84*, 6; Ms Rhonda Collins, *Transcript of evidence*, above n 1063, 2; Ms Moragh Tyler on behalf of Wonthaggi interest group for gifted and talented children, *Submission 64*, 3; Dr Debora Lipson and Ms Barbara Black, *Submission 78*, 4.

evidence about what such campaign should entail, the Committee does not feel able to make any recommendations in this regard.

Recommendation 63: Policy emphasis on creating school cultures that celebrate achievements in all domains

That the Victorian Government, through the Victorian policy and the model school policy on the education of gifted students, emphasise the importance of schools celebrating high achievement in all domains.

Recommendation 64: Education campaign for schools about giftedness

That the Victorian Government, in consultation with students, parents, teachers, schools and other relevant stakeholders, develop and implement an education campaign for schools about giftedness.

Recommendation 65: Policy emphasis on promoting understanding of the aims of gifted education provisions

That the Victorian Government, through the model school policy on the education of gifted students, emphasise the importance of educating the entire school community about the aims of any provisions for gifted students.

Conclusion

In this report the Committee sets out a vision for the future in which the innate abilities of all students are recognised, supported and stimulated, thus enabling every gifted young person to reach his or her full potential. A fundamental pillar of the Committee's vision is that such opportunities must be provided to all gifted students in Victoria, no matter where they live and regardless of their family background.

The recommendations set out in this report provide a pathway through which these aims can be achieved. In particular, the implementation of the Committee's recommendations will ensure:

- There is a strong policy foundation for gifted education in Victoria.
- Processes for identifying all gifted students are embedded in the education system.
- Every gifted student in every Victorian classroom in every Victorian school is provided with personalised learning opportunities to meet his or her individual needs.
- There are targeted strategies in place to ensure that gifted education opportunities are equally available and accessible to gifted students from all backgrounds.
- All Victorian teachers have a thorough understanding of giftedness and have the support they need to confidently and competently cater for gifted students in their classrooms, in particular through the use of curriculum differentiation.
- Gifted students and their families are continuously supported as they navigate the education system.
- Both schools and the general community embrace and celebrate giftedness in all its forms.

It is the right of all students to access an education that meets their needs. The Committee urges the Victorian Government to address the issues raised in this report, thereby laying the foundations for an education system in which all gifted and talented students can shine.

Adopted by the Education and Training Committee

Parliament House, East Melbourne

4 June 2012

Appendix A: List of submissions

	Individual or organisation	Date received
1	Dr Nathan Hoffan, Coordinator, Edith Cowan University Maths Problem Solving Program	3 April 2011
2	Mr David Lyons, Student Welfare Officer, Trafalgar High School	5 April 2011
3	Department of Education and Children's Services (South Australia)	21 April 2011
4	Humanist Society of Victoria	11 May 2011
5	Belmont High School	12 May 2011
6	Department of Education and Training (Queensland)	12 May 2011
7	Australian Mathematics Trust	13 May 2011
8	Victorian Curriculum and Assessment Authority	13 May 2011
9	Names withheld	15 May 2011
9A	Supplementary submission	19 September 2011
10	Department of Education (Tasmania)	16 May 2011
11	Ms Larelle Parker	16 May 2011
12	Queensland University of Technology	20 May 2011
13	Faculty of Education, Australian Catholic University	20 May 2011
14	Ms Rhonda Allen	23 May 2011
15	Mr Paul Double	25 May 2011
15A	Supplementary submission	11 August 2011
16	Mr James Mulcahy, Principal, Lucknow Primary School	25 May 2011
17	Mr Wayne and Mrs Meredith Burton	25 May 2011
18	WiseOnes Australia	25 May 2011
19	Mr Marcus L'Estrange	24 May 2011
19A	Supplementary submission	1 October 2011
20	Department of Education and Training (Australian Capital Territory)	26 May 2011

21	Australian College of Educators (Victorian Branch)	26 May 2011
22	Victorian Independent Education Union	26 May 2011
23	Mr Chris Earl	26 May 2011
24	Distance Education Centre Victoria	27 May 2011
25	Ms Ruby Hackett	27 May 2011
26	Ms Henriette Boonen-Hackett	27 May 2011
26A	Supplementary submission	31 May 2011
26B	Supplementary submission	19 September 2011
27	Victorian Association of State Secondary Principals	27 May 2011
28	Australian Association for the Education of the Gifted and Talented	27 May 2011
29	Names withheld	28 May 2011
30	Name withheld	28 May 2011
31	Ms Maya Panisset	29 May 2011
31A	Supplementary submission	31 May 2011
31B	Supplementary submission	31 May 2011
32	Australian Council of State School Organisations	29 May 2011
33	Ms Sonia Fullerton	29 May 2011
34	Victorian Association for Gifted and Talented Children	29 May 2011
35	Minerals Council of Australia (Victorian Division)	30 May 2011
36	Mill Park Secondary College	30 May 2011
37	Ms Julie Skeyhill	30 May 2011
38	Faculty of Science, The University of Sydney	30 May 2011
39	Serpell Primary School	30 May 2011
40	Brunswick Secondary College	30 May 2011
41	Ms Annette Spence, High Potential Learning Coordinator, Lalor Secondary College	30 May 2011
42	Mr Ross Huggard, Senior School Leader, Cranbourne Secondary College	30 May 2011
43	Tournament of Minds (Vic)	30 May 2011

44	Ms Pieta McLean	30 May 2011
45	Names withheld	30 May 2011
46	Mrs Deborah DeBuhr	30 May 2011
47	Lilydale High School	31 May 2011
48	Ms Monica Jago, SEAL Program Coordinator, Wangaratta High School	31 May 2011
49	Gifted Support Network	31 May 2011
50	Rosebud Secondary College	31 May 2011
51	Victorian Catholic Schools Parent Body	31 May 2011
52	Victorian Institute of Sport	31 May 2011
53	The University of Melbourne	31 May 2011
54	Dr Glenison Alsop, Psychologist and Counsellor	31 May 2011
54A	Supplementary submission	17 August 2011
55	Ms Carolyn Ferguson	31 May 2011
56	Victorian College of the Arts Secondary School	31 May 2011
57	Nossal High School	31 May 2011
58	Department of Education and Early Childhood Development (Victoria)	31 May 2011
59	Ms Katherine Pomeroy and Mr Nigel Cunningham	31 May 2011
60	Belgrave Parent Support Group for Gifted and Talented Students	31 May 2011
61	Ms Kim Steere	31 May 2011
62	Glen Eira College	31 May 2011
63	Dr Gail Byrne, Psychologist, Exceptional Children	31 May 2011
64	Ms Moragh Tyler on behalf of Wonthaggi interest group for gifted and talented children	31 May 2011
65	Dr Maria Adams	31 May 2011
66	Catholic Education Office, Diocese of Sale	31 May 2011
67	Ms Caelli Greenbank	31 May 2011
68	The Mathematical Association of Victoria	31 May 2011

69	Ms Felicity Walker	31 May 2011
70	Ms Debbi Daff, SEAL and Enhancement Coordinator, Sale College	31 May 2011
71	Ms Pam Lyons, Coordinator, Able Learners' Enrichment Program, La Trobe University	31 May 2011
72	Modern Language Teachers' Association of Victoria	31 May 2011
73	Box Hill High School Council	31 May 2011
74	Principals' Association of Victorian Catholic Secondary Schools	31 May 2011
75	Name withheld	31 May 2011
76	Dr Danuta Chessor, Lecturer, School of Psychology, University of Western Sydney	31 May 2011
76A	Supplementary submission	31 May 2011
77	CHIP Foundation	31 May 2011
78	Dr Debora Lipson and Ms Barbara Black	31 May 2011
79	Country Education Project	31 May 2011
80	Mr Ranasinghe Bandara	31 May 2011
81	Box Hill High School	31 May 2011
82	Parents Victoria	1 June 2011
83	The Mac.Robertson Girls' High School	1 June 2011
84	Methodist Ladies' College	1 June 2011
85	Suzanne Cory High School	2 June 2011
86	Goldfields Local Learning and Employment Network	2 June 2011
87	Catholic Education Office Melbourne	2 June 2011
88	Australian Council for Educational Research	2 June 2011
89	The Aurora Project	2 June 2011
90	Name withheld	2 June 2011
91	Name withheld	3 June 2011

92	Dr Leonie Kronborg, Senior Lecturer, Coordinator of Postgraduate Studies in Gifted Education, Faculty of Education, Monash University Dr Margaret Plunkett, Senior Lecturer, Faculty of Education, Monash University	3 June 2011
93	Ms Susan Wight	3 June 2011
94	Name withheld	3 June 2011
95	Dr Michael Faulkner, Lecturer, School of Education, La Trobe University	4 June 2011
96	Dr John Munro, Associate Professor Exceptional Learning and Gifted Education, Melbourne Graduate School of Education, The University of Melbourne	7 June 2011
97	Ms Jennifer Grant, Gifted Education Specialist, WiseOnes Australia teacher	9 June 2011
98	Maroondah Gifted Children's Parents' Association	9 June 2011
99	Department of Education and Communities (NSW)	9 June 2011
100	Victorian Affiliated Network of Gifted Support Groups	10 June 2011
101	Mr Nick Pastalatzis	14 June 2011
102	Australian Science Innovations	15 June 2011
103	The University of Newcastle	16 June 2011
104	Dr Leonie Kronborg, Coordinator of Gifted Education Assessment Clinic, Krongold Centre, Faculty of Education, Monash University	17 June 2011
105	Victorian Principals Association	17 June 2011
106	Australian Education Union (Victorian Branch)	23 June 2011
107	Ms Lynette Sudholz	24 June 2011
108	Name withheld	26 June 2011
109	Name withheld	26 June 2011
110	Ms Rhonda Collins	23 June 2011
111	Victorian Association of Catholic Primary School Principals	28 June 2011
112	Mr Andrew Lockwood-Penney	4 July 2011
113	Gifted Resources	5 July 2011

114	Mrs Michele Whitby	25 July 2011
115	Ms Mauren Theobald	10 September 2011
116	Victorian Aboriginal Education Association Incorporated	12 September 2011
117	Name withheld	16 September 2011
118	Ms Kirily Greenbank	20 October 2011

Appendix B: List of witnesses

Melbourne, 25 July 2011

Name	Position	Organisation
Mr Ian Burrage	General Manager, Education and Policy Research Division	Department of Education and Early Childhood Development (Victoria)
Ms Carmel Meehan	President	Victorian Association for Gifted and Talented Children
Mr Michael Bond	Vice President	Victorian Association for Gifted and Talented Children
Mr Paul Double	Committee member	Victorian Association for Gifted and Talented Children
Mr Mark Smith	Committee member	Victorian Association for Gifted and Talented Children
Dr Gail Byrne	Chair	CHIP Foundation
Dr Glenison Alsop	Committee member	CHIP Foundation
Dr Sandra Lea-Wood	Committee member	CHIP Foundation
Professor Geoff Masters	Chief Executive Officer	Australian Council for Educational Research
Mr Ralph Saubern	Director, Assessment Services	Australian Council for Educational Research
Mr Frank Sal	President	Victorian Association of State Secondary Principals
Ms Pat Slattery	Director	WiseOnes Australia
Ms Myra Karantzas	Licensee Education Manager	WiseOnes Australia

Ms Pat Truscott	Licensee	WiseOnes Australia
	Education Manager	Access Re-Ed Services
Ms Jill Lawrence	Director	G.A.T.E.WAYS
Ms Win Smith	Director	G.A.T.E.WAYS

The Mac.Robertson Girls' High School, Melbourne, 26 July 2011

Name	Position	Organisation
Ms Jane Garvey	Principal	The Mac.Robertson Girls' High School
Ms Margaret Akins	Assistant Principal	The Mac.Robertson Girls' High School
Ms Janet McCutcheon	Assistant Principal	The Mac.Robertson Girls' High School
Ms Amy Porter	Assistant Principal	The Mac.Robertson Girls' High School
Ms Veronica Hayes	Leading Teacher	The Mac.Robertson Girls' High School
Anna	Year 12 student	The Mac.Robertson Girls' High School
Georgina	Year 12 student	The Mac.Robertson Girls' High School
Kayla	Year 12 student	The Mac.Robertson Girls' High School
Lorraine	Year 12 student	The Mac.Robertson Girls' High School
Zoe	Year 12 student	The Mac.Robertson Girls' High School

Nossal High School, Berwick, 26 July 2011

Name	Position	Organisation
Mr Roger Page	Principal	Nossal High School
Ms Toni Meath	Assistant Principal	Nossal High School
Professor Leon Piterman	Pro Vice-Chancellor, Berwick and Peninsula campuses	Monash University

Dr Leonie Kronborg	Senior Lecturer, Coordinator of Postgraduate Studies in Gifted Education, Faculty of Education	Monash University
Ms Franceska Blaney	Teacher	Nossal High School
Ms Michelle Desaulniers	Teacher	Nossal High School
Mr Stuart Fankhauser	Teacher	Nossal High School
Mr Wayne Howarth	Teacher	Nossal High School
Aswin	School Captain Year 10 student	Nossal High School
Theresa	School Captain Year 10 student	Nossal High School
Emma	Year 10 student	Nossal High School
Greg	Year 10 student	Nossal High School
Kavinda	Year 10 student	Nossal High School
Neha	Year 10 student	Nossal High School
Praveen	Year 10 student	Nossal High School
Shevin	Year 10 student	Nossal High School
Stephanie	Year 10 student	Nossal High School
Genevieve	Year 9 student	Nossal High School
Nathan	Year 9 student	Nossal High School
Mr Gavin Swayn	School Council President Parent	Nossal High School
Mr Bruce Verity	School Council member Parent	Nossal High School
Ms Anne-Marie Hermans	School Council member Parent	Nossal High School
Mr Murray Jones	Parent	Nossal High School

Camelot Rise Primary School, Glen Waverley, 15 August 2011

Name	Position	Organisation
Mr Bruce Cunningham	Principal	Camelot Rise Primary School
Ms Cris Stavrou Martyn	Year 2 Teacher	Camelot Rise Primary School

Victorian College of the Arts Secondary School, Southbank, 15 August 2011

Name	Position	Organisation
Mr Colin Simpson	Principal	Victorian College of the Arts Secondary School
Ms Hilary Bland	Assistant Principal	Victorian College of the Arts Secondary School
Mr Paul Nucci	Head of Academic	Victorian College of the Arts Secondary School
Mr Michael Sargeant	Head of Music	Victorian College of the Arts Secondary School
Mr Tim Storey	Head of Dance	Victorian College of the Arts Secondary School
Mr Neil Adam	Head of Student Services	Victorian College of the Arts Secondary School

Genevieve	School Captain Year 12 dance student	Victorian College of the Arts Secondary School
Mati	President, Student Representative Council Year 12 music student	Victorian College of the Arts Secondary School
Bella	Member, Student Representative Council Year 11 dance student	Victorian College of the Arts Secondary School
Amanda	Year 10 music student	Victorian College of the Arts Secondary School
Nicola	Year 9 dance student	Victorian College of the Arts Secondary School
Robbie	Year 8 music student	Victorian College of the Arts Secondary School

Maribyrnong College, Maribyrnong, 29 August 2011

Name	Position	Organisation
Mr Nick Scott	College Principal	Maribyrnong College
Mr Rob Carroll	Director, Sports Academy	Maribyrnong College
Mr Martin Cusack	Assistant Sports Director	Maribyrnong College
	Leading Teacher (Academic/Strategy)	
Mr Darren Clark	Sporting Pathways Manager	Maribyrnong College
	Leading Teacher	
Mr Mark Smyth	High Performance Manager, Sports Academy	Maribyrnong College
Mr Peter Fleming	Professional Development and Athlete Wellbeing Coordinator	Maribyrnong College
	7–9 Leading Teacher	
Mrs Maureen Spencer-Gardner	Sports Academy Admissions Officer	Maribyrnong College
	US College Pathway Consultant	
Ms Erin Carroll	Athlete Wellbeing 10–12	Maribyrnong College
	Physical Education Teacher	
Ms Angela Field	Geography and SOSE Teacher	Maribyrnong College
	High Achievers Program Manager	
Mr Aaron Hester	Physical Education and Health Teacher	Maribyrnong College
	Senior Programs Manager	
	Year 12 Coordinator, Leading Teacher	
Sarah	Year 12 student, hockey	Maribyrnong College
Sophie	Year 12 student, soccer	Maribyrnong College

Hannah	Year 11 student, volleyball	Maribyrnong College
Liam	Year 11 student, soccer	Maribyrnong College
Kieran	Year 10 student, cricket	Maribyrnong College
Rebecca	Year 10 student, lacrosse	Maribyrnong College
Akim	Year 9 student, soccer	Maribyrnong College
Nabi	Year 9 student, soccer	Maribyrnong College
Jack	Year 7 student, basketball/AFL	Maribyrnong College
Libby	Year 7 student, netball/hockey	Maribyrnong College
Monique	Year 7 student, basketball	Maribyrnong College

Box Hill High School, Box Hill, 29 August 2011

Name	Position	Organisation
Mr Neil Davis	Acting Principal	Box Hill High School
Ms Theresa Iacopino	Acting Assistant Principal	Box Hill High School
Ms Vanessa Reynolds	Gifted Education Coordinator	Box Hill High School
Ms Meryl Andrews	SOSE, Coordinator, specialising in SEAL classes	Box Hill High School
Mr Neil Hamley	SEAL Engagement	Box Hill High School
Mr Martin Jellinek	Science Teacher, specialising in SEAL classes	Box Hill High School
Mr Kris Johnson	Year 8 Coordinator	Box Hill High School
Mrs Kate Mitchell	Regional Network Leader School Councillor	Box Hill High School

Keely	Year 11+ student	Box Hill High School
Marley	Year 11 student	Box Hill High School
Daniel	Year 9 student	Box Hill High School
Tina	Year 9 student	Box Hill High School

Evangeline	Year 8 student	Box Hill High School
Rockson	Year 7 student	Box Hill High School
Mr Greg Hunt	School Council President Parent	Box Hill High School
Mr Mark Karklins	School Councillor Parent	Box Hill High School
Ms Jennifer Grant	Parent	Box Hill High School
Ms Wendy White	Parent	Box Hill High School

Melbourne, 12 September 2011

Name	Position	Organisation
Ms Louise Broadbent	President	Gifted Support Network
Ms Carolyn Priest	Secretary	Gifted Support Network
Ms Colleen Carapetis	Past committee member	Gifted Support Network
Mr David Huggins	Assistant Director, Student Services	Catholic Education Office Melbourne
Dr Susan Nikakis	Education Officer, Gifted and Talented	Catholic Education Office Melbourne
Ms Bernadette Sierakowski	Athlete Career and Education Coordinator	Victorian Institute of Sport
Ms Monette Russo	Past gymnast athlete	Victorian Institute of Sport
Mr Tyler Cowley	Year 12 student, St Helena Secondary College Australian hockey squad representative	Victorian Institute of Sport
Mr Lionel Bamblett	General Manager	Victorian Aboriginal Education Association Incorporated
Ms Lowana Moore	Programs Manager	Victorian Aboriginal Education Association Incorporated

Ms Matilda Darvall	Policy and Research Manager	Victorian Aboriginal Education Association Incorporated
Mr Peter Corkill	Principal	John Monash Science School
Ms Gabrielle Leigh	President	Victorian Principals Association
Mr John Forsythe	Principal	Red Hill Consolidated School
Mr Greg Lacey	Principal	Lyndhurst Primary School
Ms Marlene Laurent	Principal	Glenferrie Primary School
Ms Claire McInerney	Principal	Plenty Parklands Primary School
Mrs Deborah Patterson	Principal	Mill Park Heights Primary School
Ms Patricia Pace	Leading Teacher	Mill Park Heights Primary School
Dr Leonie Kronborg	Senior Lecturer, Coordinator of Postgraduate Studies in Gifted Education, Faculty of Education	Monash University
Dr Margaret Plunkett	Senior Lecturer, Faculty of Education	Monash University
Dr Leonie Kronborg	Coordinator of Gifted Education Assessment Clinic	Krongold Centre

Melbourne, 19 September 2011

Name	Position	Organisation
Ms Caelli Greenbank	Student	
Mrs Jo Freitag	Coordinator	Gifted Resources
Ms Moragh Tyler		Wonthaggi interest group for gifted and talented children

Ms Tonya Hackett	Parent	Wonthaggi interest group for gifted and talented children
Ms Kate Fieldew	Parent	Wonthaggi interest group for gifted and talented children
Alec	Parent	
Emma	Parent	
Felicity	Parent	
Forum participant 1	Parent	
Forum participant 2	Parent	
Heike	Parent	
Henriette	Parent	
Jocelyn	Parent	
Julie M	Parent	
Julie S	Parent	
Karen	Parent	
Kim	Parent	
Maria	Parent	
Melissa	Parent	
Phil	Parent	
Sonia	Parent	
Susan	Parent	
Wayne	Parent	
Mr Richard Potok	Director	The Aurora Project
Ms Jirra Harvey	Victorian State Coordinator	The Aspiration Initiative
Dr Debora Lipson		
Ms Barbara Black		

Associate Professor John Munro	Exceptional Learning and Gifted Education, Melbourne Graduate School of Education	The University of Melbourne
Ms Kathy Harrison	Compass Centre Coordinator	Methodist Ladies' College
Ms Beth Gerondis	Director of Learning Support	Methodist Ladies' College
Ms Annette Rome	Director of Staff Learning	Methodist Ladies' College

Bendigo, 20 September 2011

Name	Position	Organisation
Dr Michael Faulkner	Lecturer, School of Education	La Trobe University
Ms Pam Lyons	Coordinator, Able Learners' Enrichment Program	La Trobe University
Pieta	Parent	
Alison	Parent	
Susan	Parent	
Mr Dale Pearce	Principal	Bendigo Senior Secondary College
Ms Meredith Fetting	Assistant Principal	Bendigo Senior Secondary College
Patrick	Leader, Student Council Year 12 student	Bendigo Senior Secondary College
Lara	Year 12 student	Bendigo Senior Secondary College
Oscar	Year 11 student	Bendigo Senior Secondary College
Ms Trudi Jacobson	Assistant Principal	Kennington Primary School
Ms Kim Kirkpatrick	Grade 5 Teacher	Kennington Primary School

Miss Natalie Sellick	Grade 4 Teacher	Kennington Primary School
Mr John Geary	Director of Teaching and Learning	Catholic College Bendigo
Ms Sarah Cody	Teacher	Catholic College Bendigo
Dr Karen Ward		

Melbourne, 10 October 2011

Name	Position	Organisation
Ms Rhonda Collins	Coordinator	Victorian Affiliated Network of Gifted Support Groups
Ms Maree Germech		Victorian Affiliated Network of Gifted Support Groups
Ms Bronwyn Stubbs	Principal	Distance Education Centre Victoria
Mr Phil Brown	Executive Officer	Country Education Project
Ms Maxine Cowie	Director	Starjump

Melbourne, 20 February 2012

Name	Position	Organisation
Rabbi David Samson	Founder and Dean	Atid School System
Mr Bezalel Gleiser	Director	Aliyah Department, Australia and New Zealand

Canberra, Tuesday 20 March 2012

Name	Position	Organisation
Ms Lynn Redley	Manager, Curriculum	Australian Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting Authority

Appendix C: List of site visits and events attended

Organisation	Event	Date
The Mac.Robertson Girls' High School	Site visit	26 July 2011
Nossal High School	Site visit	26 July 2011
Camelot Rise Primary School	Site visit	15 August 2011
Victorian College of the Arts Secondary School	Site visit	15 August 2011
Maribyrnong College	Site visit	29 August 2011
Box Hill High School	Site visit	29 August 2011
Victorian Association for Gifted and Talented Children	Unmasking the Possibilities Conference	8–9 September 2011
Victorian Association for Gifted and Talented Children	Twilight Seminar with Professor François Gagné	26 March 2012
Centre for Strategic Education	The Big Equity Challenge Conference	8–9 May 2012

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