VPA Submission to the Parliamentary Enquiry into the Education of Gifted and Talented Students

a) The effectiveness of current policies and programs for gifted and talented students:

1. Identification of gifted and talented students:
All students have the right to develop to their full potential. Students with exceptional abilities and talents have specific requirements that need to be addressed within school programs. Such students may be classed as ‘gifted and talented’. Gifted and talented students, once identified, may be extended through a variety of avenues. Once students have been identified schools try to resource appropriate programs within the existing structures.

2. The key benefits and issues surrounding programs for gifted and talented students:
The purpose of a gifted and talented program is to:
- Provide a program that supports the learning and development of students identified as those who are achieving well above expected levels in specific learning areas.
- Develop staff understanding and expertise in relation to teaching students who are identified as gifted and talented.
- We believe that the definition of giftedness needs to be expanded to embrace the full range of areas in which students can excel, including creative and social skills.
- We believe that all schools should be resourced to enable all students to fulfill their potential.
- In the absence of a clearly enunciated policy in relation to gifted education, a number of ad hoc “solutions” have evolved within the Victorian government school system.
- Schools need a set of guidelines and resources to develop programs to support gifted and talented students within each school.

3. Equity of access to quality educational choices for gifted and talented students and their families:
- Some schools have a Gifted and Talented coordinator but others do not have this resource due to lack of expertise in the staff makeup or necessary funding. Access to programs for gifted and talented students is inconsistent across primary schools.
- Programs for gifted students could also be delivered online which may provide personalised online programs for students at all achievement levels.
- There is also inequality in the resources and facilities provided for gifted students: most schools get no special resources to support their “gifted” programs in primary. In secondary schools there is funding for areas of specialization.
• Many classroom teachers of Gifted and Talented students have Individual Learning Development Plans, to facilitate program planning, delivery, evaluation and communication.
• Expressions of interest usually are sought from staff, to coordinate special interest groups such as a writers group, ITC, TOM, Chess Club or to run extension activities in school.
• Students are encouraged to access external competitions (Tournament of the Minds, Chess competition, Trivia Challenge, Maths/Science/ Computer/ English competitions, etc.), sporting events, exhibitions, visual and performing arts, etc to encourage the extension of their talents and opportunities for social development.
• Some schools enlist providers such as the GATEways organization which runs programs occasionally at individual schools. Otherwise students may travel to participate in a GATEways program.
• Opportunities for celebration of students’ special abilities and talents are usually provided through school-based and outsourced gifted and talented programs.
• Special events can be held to showcase the skills and talents of gifted and talented students and role models.
• Gifted and talented activities often require additional funding by schools or parents therefore limiting opportunities for students in low socio-economic areas.

4. Impact on the learning, development and wellbeing of gifted and talented students

If there is a staff member identified as the Gifted and Extension Program coordinator, he/she will be responsible for leading and overseeing the program. The amount of allocated time to coordinate the program varies enormously between schools.

The Gifted and Extension program coordinator, in collaboration with outside professional support (e.g. Educational Psychologist) provide support to all staff in identifying students, writing individual learning development plans for students and delivery of aspects of the program.

Student profiles will be established using school-based assessment schedules which include RAVENS results, WISC results, Teacher & Parent checklists, off level testing results e.g. Explore test, NAPLAN results, Maths, English, Computer and Science competition results and any other relevant material.

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

This is very inconsistent across the state. It is very dependent on staff expertise and interest.

There is not really coordinated training and Professional Learning available to support the coordination of a Gifted and Talented program.
Equally each class teacher needs assistance in how to address the individual learning needs of this cohort.

c) Opportunities and strategies for enhancing support for gifted and talented students, their parents and carers, teachers and school leaders

- With an official statewide program for gifted students, online programs could be developed which could be accessed all over the state. Video streaming of classes by expert practitioners could also provide teachers with professional learning in how to meet the needs of gifted students.
- More importantly, we need to develop enrichment/extension activities for all mainstream students as a regular part of curriculum differentiation, rather than relying on acceleration as the primary strategy for gifted students.
- We also need funding to provide time release for co-ordination of programs and, most importantly, training of teachers to differentiate the curriculum to extend the skills of all students.

d) Opportunities for improved educational offerings for gifted and talented students through collaboration across all school sectors and with community, business and industry.

- Some areas have greater local access to business/industry than others.
- Support in primary schools could be actively developed in order to acknowledge the diversity of learning styles utilized by students in primary schools.

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Attachments:
Gifted and Talented policies from 2 primary schools
A report which shows exemplary practice at Mill Park PS