In my submission papers I have railed against many policies but in particular the following State Government policies which clearly damage the gifted or talented student. The state is leaving gifted students, particularly from disadvantaged backgrounds, behind and sad to say, John Brumby summed up why so many are left behind when he said:

"Typically, the kids who are being failed by failing schools are Labor kids in Labor areas."

**Policy (1): Automatic Promotion**

Automatic Promotion is where simply every student goes from one year to the next without having done any of the set work, followed any of the schools discipline policies or above all acquired any of the skills needed to cope with the next years work. This leads to the teacher having to run 5-6 different classes within a period leaving only a minute or so of individual tuition for each student, if that. The gifted or talented child clearly suffers from this distribution of teachers time.

**Policy 2: Mixed ability classes.**

Because of automatic promotion classes can be composed of students of many different levels. In say a Yr 9 class some students can be of Grade 3/4 primary school level. This leads to the problems outlined above. No one wins, everybody looses, with mixed ability classes.

**Policy 4: Seal selection.**

It is my understanding that selection for SEAL classes is done or based on a student's performance in English and Maths. This is far too limited a basis for selection.

**Policy 4: Indiscipline.**

Each school has their own discipline policy which is supposed to be based on the framework provided by DEECD. The printed policies look great but then so did the old USSR Constitution. It was regarded, on paper, as being the most liberal document ever. Trouble is it was never implemented for the masses. Likewise with an innumerable number of school's discipline policies which are administered on a very ad hoc, illogical basis, if at all. The best way to understand DEECD's discipline policies is to read the extract below by Professor Minogue.
‘The whole problem is that the policies are based on the doctrine of niceness. Everything is a matter for negotiation rather than obedience -Yet the very idea of such negotiation is ridiculous, as if the adult and the young child were equal partners. The pathos of nine and ten year old boys being asked to ‘make choices’ about the behaviour, when they have yet to acquire the integrated mentality for that sophisticated act, is truly piteous to behold.

It is little wonder bewilderment and anger so often follow, deepening the cycle of disruption. This is all a world away from the climate of calm that existed in schools before the social revolution of the late Sixties that ushered in the era of state enforced ‘niceness’.

I worked as a supply teacher in South London in those days. Then, children had defined places in a classroom. There was no question of their choosing whether or not to behave because there was an order of conduct enforced by the teacher. The teacher was a figure of respect and inspired a certain amount of fear, part of which depended on the possibility of physical punishment. Although such punishment was seldom used, its very existence was part of a system which inculcated the values of discipline and responsibility into children.

In my time as a teacher, I had only one occasion to call for the cane, which was sent straight from the headmaster's office. There was no sense of cruelty as I prepared to strike the wayward pupil's hands. Children had yet to be indoctrinated with the modern language of rights and understood very well that they lived under the rule of law.

The idea of meaningful punishment, even criticism, is now anathema in all too many schools. ‘Niceness’ requires pupils to be constantly praised - never challenged or upset. Exams are subjected to continual grade inflation to ensure pass marks are not too demanding. We see the same trend in the nonsensical Government slogan: ‘Excellence for all.’ Yet if everyone is attaining excellence, what does average mean?

The same is true of the eagerness to abolish competitive sports, on the grounds that losing could damage children's self-esteem. In a classic example of this pattern, the National College for School Leadership, the Government's training body for heads and senior teachers, has announced its support for a programme to 'establish positive relationships' between pupils and staff. One proposal suggests that teachers should give children high-fives before lessons. Another says pupils should gather in a circle and applaud a classmate. As part of this policy, the head teacher would say 'John, we appreciate you' and everyone cheers John. The aim, apparently, is to get children to 'relax and think: somebody believes in me'.

Andrew Day, a deputy head from Ealing, West London, says that in this way, 'they know you care'. The truth is that this is the language of politicised virtue that predominates in state schooling, with the implication that compassion can be demonstrated only by enveloping pupils in the warm glow of endless appreciation - hardly a process that equips them for the real world. A key element of this growing fashion for 'niceness' is the feminisation of the classroom, reflected in the fact the vast majority of the recruits to the teaching profession are women, particularly in the primary sector, where men are almost an extinct species. Though the politically correct brigade likes to pretend there are no differences between the genders, the truth is that women are, in general, more given to feelings of compassion than men, preferring co-operation to discipline. In this feminised educational order, girls have tended to thrive, but, correspondingly, many boys have opted out. That is why male adolescents, especially those from deprived backgrounds or fatherless homes, are doing much worse.

Instead of the gentler generation that the politicised compassion of this 'niceness' movement promised to usher in, we have only misery. Ultimately, moral vices prosper having dressed themselves up as virtues. Niceness presents itself as benevolence, but often it is merely an evasion of the hard decisions that the realities of human nature require.

• Kenneth Minogue is Professor Emeritus at the Department of Government, London School of Economics. Adapted from an article in this month's Standpoint magazine.

A summary
The pilot program is the greatest load of bollocks since time began. As soon as we got rid of the strap and replaced it with nothing except pleading discipline started its relentless decline to the point now everything is optional for the student.

Everything now is a matter for negotiation rather than obedience—Yet the very idea of such negotiation is ridiculous, as if the adult and the young child were equal partners. The pathos of students being asked to 'make choices' about the behaviour, when they have yet to acquire the integrated mentality for that sophisticated act, is truly piteous to behold.

Discipline has been overthrown by the new-found tyranny of niceness such as restorative justice and this proposed program. In the UK 97% of teachers reported that they had disruptive students in their classroom.

The simple fact is that most students are not developed enough or old enough to understand the consequences of their bad behaviour. Professor Minogue in the UK has noted that 'to lose ones' grip on the centrality of deserved punishment is to destroy the crucial balance. Without the balancing severities of punishment and criticism praise and reward take on the aspect of bribes, which demeans those who give and those who receive.

In essence the gifted and talented child is robbed blind by the massive loss of class time currently expended by teachers in DEECD schools on indiscipline.

Yours sincerely,

Marcus L'Estrange