INQUIRY INTO THE EDUCATION OF GIFTED AND TALENTED STUDENTS

- How the concepts of ‘giftedness’ and ‘talent’ should be defined

‘Gifted’ refers to aptitude or potential significantly above the expected level for the student’s chronological age. ‘Talented’ is when the gift is translated into high performance or achievement. It is possible for students with disabilities or learning difficulties in one area to be gifted in another.

- The key benefits and issues surrounding programs for gifted and talented students, including any gaps identified in current programs.

Acceleration is not a learning program in itself. When students are accelerated consideration also needs to be given to the social and emotional needs of the student and the impact these needs may have on learning. This is particularly the case with key transition phases of learning such as Prep and Year 6 into Year 7 and the transition to a VCE program.

Sometimes students are identified as gifted on the basis of behaviour rather than aptitude.

Programs such as SEAL may cater well for highly able students but may not provide sufficient challenge for gifted students.

SEAL programs are effectively streaming of students. Frequently, programs such as SEAL have the expectation that the students in the program are gifted in all areas of the curriculum. Gifted and talented students still require a differentiated approach within these programs.

Students gifted in the Arts are not well catered for by the school system.

- Any relevant projects currently underway specific to the education of gifted and talented 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 (DECV). Curriculum compaction is also an option.

Distance Education Centre Victoria has developed an online philosophy program for students from years 7-10, leading into VCE Philosophy should students choose. The program fosters high level thinking. Other schools can enrol students in Years 7-10 Philosophy at the DECV as an extension subject and is very popular. This happens to a lesser extent in other subject areas.

- Equity of access to programs for all gifted and talented students in Victoria.

Many existing programs for Gifted and Talented students involve travel or attending sessions out of the local context. This is an equity issue, particularly for rural students but also others
for whom travelling to different venues is difficult eg students with disabilities, financial hardship or simply lack of an available adult to accompany them.

- **Addressing the issue of underperformance among gifted and talented students.**

  Differentiation of the curriculum is essential as opposed to the practice of offering additional work. This can be perceived by students as a punishment for their giftedness and often extends students laterally rather than enriching the learning program.

  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 contraints

- **Overcoming negative attitudes and misconceptions surrounding giftedness and talent.**

  Students who are gifted and talented have specific learning needs and have a right for those needs to be supported educationally. There is an attitude that the needs of these students are a lower priority than those with learning difficulties or those who are at the expected level. Changing this attitude requires education for teachers and parents and also policies which inform and guide practice along with adequate resourcing.

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

  Development and provision of easy to administer tools that assist with the identification of giftedness.

  Professional Learning for teachers in order to increase the understanding of gifted and talented and how to move students from gifted to talented.

- **Any broader implications for school communities arising from the education of gifted and talented students.**

  School organization limits flexible provision for students. In general, all students are allocated to a class and the class has a timetable. This constrains all students to a one-size-fits-all model. In order to provide the best options for all students, schools need to be organised more flexibly, and use a variety of delivery models to enable students to access the most appropriate learning options.