Mr David Southwick MP
Chairman
Victorian Parliament’s Education and Training Committee
Enquiry into Education of Gifted and Talented Students
27 May 2011

Dear Mr. Southwick,

The Victorian Association for Gifted and Talented Children Inc. (VAGTC) welcomes the opportunity to respond to the Parliamentary Inquiry into the Education of Gifted and Talented Students, and is most willing to consult with the Enquiry Committee in any aspects of this work that the Committee deems appropriate.

The VAGTC Committee members work in all sectors of education in Victoria (Catholic, Government and Independent) and are therefore well placed to provide a comprehensive view of the programs and provisions operating in all sectors of Victorian Education.

The Committee views the future directions of gifted education with optimism, in view of the anticipated outcomes of this enquiry, and believes that it is well placed to provide an overarching perspective of the strengths and challenges that need to be addressed in order to make the Victorian policies for gifted and talented children realistic, achievable and consistent in their implementation across all sectors of Victorian education.

The VAGTC Committee cordially invite the chairman and members of the Enquiry Committee to attend their meetings, and engage in conversations regarding its recommendations and its vision for the future directions of gifted and talented education. In particular, conversations around the issues of teacher training and support, implementation of policies, student wellbeing, ethnic and indigenous understandings, rural and regional educational provisions, and curriculum writing and implementation.

We commend the initiative of the (ETC) Committee and wish it well in this vital work, namely improving educational outcomes for Gifted and Talented Students in Victoria.

We look forward to working with you in the future.

Yours sincerely

Carmel Meehan
President
Thursday, May 26, 2011

Introduction:

The Victorian Association for Gifted and Talented Children Inc. (VAGTC) defines its critical work as centred on the following aspects of support and education for gifted and talented children in Victoria. The VAGTC’s committee members are engaged in demanding employment in a multiplicity of educational institutions which has by necessity limited the work it can achieve. The committee identified teacher professional learning as its area of greatest influence and has made that its major focus.

The committee are engaged in the following activities as a matter of justice for gifted and talented children, their families and teachers.

The V.A.G.T.C:

- Currently acts as a conduit for the development of extension education across all school sectors: Government, Private and Catholic.
- Have in-serviced thousands of teachers over many years with very limited resources, this work is ongoing and demanding.
- Committee members believe that it is a justice issue that all students are enabled to reach their true potential.
- Committee members are a highly qualified and experienced group of educators who willingly give of their time and talents to ensure that gifted and talented students have access to the best possible education for their special needs.
- Is committed to extend its services to rural and remote locations to assist schools to better provide for gifted and talented children.
- Is experiencing an increasing demand for its services, beyond its current capacity as volunteers who have full teaching loads in their respective schools.
- Urges the government to facilitate the inclusion of reporting of every student’s participation in Extension Programs as part of the VELS reporting documentation.
- Strongly endorses the DEECD policies regarding provision of education for the special needs of gifted and talented students.
- Is an important facilitation support to ensure that DEECD policies and practices are aligned.
The committee cordially invite the chairman and members of the enquiry to attend their meetings and engage in conversations regarding its recommendations and its vision for future directions. The VAGTC committee believes that it is well placed to provide an overarching perspective of the strengths and challenges that need to be addressed in order to make the Victorian policies for gifted and talented children realistic, achievable and consistent in their implementation across all sectors of Victorian education.
Terms of Reference
The Parliament of Victoria has referred to the Education and Training Committee a reference 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:

- There exists a significant lack of consistency between and within educational sectors in appropriately acknowledging and accepting responsibility to educate gifted and talented students.

- The importance of extension education within schools’ leadership teams is also extremely variable. Consequently serious inconsistencies are apparent in schools’ capacity to provide effective differentiated learning for gifted and talented students, who learn more quickly and deeply than their age peers.

- The VAGTC provides a unified and consistent position regarding gifted and talented education, based on empirical data and research of internationally acknowledged experts.

- It is apparent that schools have approached the provision of programs catering for gifted and talented students from a wide spectrum of perspectives. Many provide no programs at all, professing to a belief that if they are ‘differentiating the curriculum’ then that is sufficient to proclaim that their school caters for gifted and talented students. Without specific training, the majority of teachers admit that their efforts all far short of what is desired. The VAGTC provides a range of different professional learning and development packages, showcasing gifted education best practice in hands-on practical workshops.

- It is important to note that while some schools timetable a gifted and talented co-ordinator, this position requires no formal training. Furthermore time and resource allocation for these co-ordinators receive is extremely variable and highly inadequate.

- The best models for gifted and talented students’ education are currently delivered by some independent and some SEAL schools, which have full time dedicated gifted education teachers. It is of urgent and significant concern that the provision of these services is highly variable, inconsistent and under-resourced.

- The current situation is that many of the teachers who staff SEAL schools possess no formal gifted and talented qualifications whatsoever. The VAGTC recommends strongly that the current situation be addressed in this Parliamentary Enquiry’s recommendations.
(i) **identification of gifted and talented students;**

- Formal gifted education teacher training is essential at an undergraduate level to ensure credible identification of gifted and talented students. This is a keystone to the provision of effective extension education. Currently undergraduate training at our universities is approached as electives only for an alarmingly low percentage of trainee teachers. Most new teachers enter classrooms knowing very little about differentiating their curricula in to address the needs of their gifted and talented student. This is a serious and fundamental flaw in Victorian teacher training requirements, and needs immediate attention.

- 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.

(ii) **equity of access to quality educational choices for gifted and talented students and their families; and**

Equity and access to exemplary gifted and talented education depends on many factors that most families are powerless to influence or control, including:

- The attitude of school leadership to the importance of employing teachers qualified in gifted education, able to effectively address the needs of gifted and talented students.

- The availability of stimulating programs and mentors in their geographic area. Country students who are gifted or talented experience a significant disparity of access to appropriate programs.

- Socio-economic issues, cultural restrictions, community priorities, gender issues and the ever present Australian “tall poppy” stigma combine to significantly hamper equitable access to appropriate education for all gifted and talented students.

- Better resourced independent schools, with clear prioritisation of gifted education provision, are catering more effectively for these students’ special needs, and successfully target talented students through scholarship programs. Government non-selective schools are significantly negatively impacted by this. The VAGTC is committed to redress this inequity, through its teacher, parent and student support programs in online and workshop settings.
(iii) impact on the learning, development and wellbeing of gifted and talented students;

- The learning behaviours of all students are significantly influenced by the degree of relevance and engagement that they experience in their curricular and learning environments.

- 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 that their age peers. Academic prowess is sometimes masked by asynchronicity: heightened ability in one area, and deficiency in another.

- The school environment can be extremely variable for gifted and talented students, depending on the degree of understanding they receive from their peers, teachers and mentors. 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.

- Teachers, parents and school counsellors need to be trained to teach gifted and talented students to accept their emotions and ensure that they feel understood and supported. Educators need to understand that these intense feelings are normal for gifted children.

- All schools therefore need to employ a school counsellor who has formal training in understanding and supporting gifted students. This is a glaring deficit in many schools, especially primary schools, where the foundational work needs to occur.

- Teachers and parents need to be supported and trained to use appropriate discipline and routines that promote a sense of security and self-discipline in gifted and talented students. These students need to be encouraged to use their heightened awareness to develop self-discipline and self-acceptance. This seldom happens in schools.

- The VAGTC believes that assessment and reporting procedures should be expanded to include documented evidence of all students’ involvement in extension activities and programs.
(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;

- Many gifted and talented indigenous and regionally isolated students’ needs are not being met.

- The VAGTC currently provides assistance to regional areas of Victoria through providing website resources, education articles in our magazine: Vision, and a wide range of professional learning and development resources.

- The AGQTP funded teacher-training program achieved a credible level of access to some level of gifted education training for teachers in urban, rural and remote schools. Curriculum differentiation for gifted and talented students was a key component of this resource. The extent to which this resource is currently has become increasingly limited.

- The national body for gifted education (the AAEGT, which has the VAGTC as a member), is producing a video that will showcase best practice in gifted education across primary and secondary schools in all areas of Australia. The VAGTC has committed to support this worthwhile project, and will work toward imbedding this resource in all schools.

- It is important to note that ongoing support for the teachers who achieve training in gifted education is essential. Too often these teachers report that their impact in their schools has been minimal and they have found it difficult to change entrenched traditional ‘anti gifted education’ teacher thinking, teaching styles and the culture of a school singlehandedly. Ongoing consultancy support, peer support and work place mentoring is essential and needs government support.

- Parents of gifted and talented students have great difficulty discovering the scope and depth of a school’s commitment to catering for their child. Schools lack consistency concerning gifted education curriculum depth and scope. Acceleration and curriculum compacting is rarely offered to gifted students, as schools generally do not exhibit common understandings of these concepts. Even the term ‘gifted and talented’ has not achieved a common understanding across the educational community.
(c) opportunities and strategies for enhancing support for gifted and talented students, their parents and carers, teachers and school leaders; and

- The VAGTC is committed to up-skilling teachers in best practice in all aspects of extension education.

- ‘One size fits all’ should not apply for gifted and talented students, who often flounder in mainstream classrooms. They often underachieve, engage in school refusal, ‘dumb down’ their achievement and interests, or become discipline problems for the teachers. In ever-increasing numbers, gifted and talented students are becoming depressed because they cannot find like-minded peers. Unfortunately, evidence shows that some even become suicidal.

- Tangible support for teachers, parents and students needs to be affordable and easily accessible. The present situation is that should a parent wish to have an I.Q. test performed on their child, they need to either wait a very long time for the school’s Educational Psychologist to administer the test, or opt for an independent assessment at considerable out of pocket expense. The VAGTC is currently filling the gap of serving these families needs on a voluntary bases. Government support is required for us to expand and continue these high demand services.

- The “Bright Futures Program” was considered one of the most useful support programs within gifted education. This program achieved tiered levels of support for teachers, school leadership, and regional networks. This model was a blue print for our current professional learning. 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.
(d) opportunities for improved educational offerings for gifted and talented students through collaboration across all school sectors and with community, business and industry.

- Developing conversations across the educational community is an important goal of the VAGTC. We have facilitated Regional clusters and networks as well as parent clusters through our regular Twilight Seminars and Conferences.

- One of the most important structures or frameworks that support VAGTC professional learning activities or events, is passion and enthusiasm of our presenters and participants. For example: in order to attend cluster and network meetings, schools have to timetable and employ substitute teachers so that people can attend these events. This expanding area of our provision for gifted education requires urgent financial support.

- Research clearly shows that mentoring is a most effective way to support gifted and talented students in their learning, and to enhance their wellbeing. Consequently, the VAGTC has devoted two Twilight professional sessions this year to the topic of mentoring. Many schools across Victoria have taken advantage of these workshops. Articles explaining the implementation of mentoring programs in schools have been featured in the latest edition of its magazine “Vision”, and on our website. In this way, we are achieving our goal of supporting the wider education community.
(e) The current practices of the VAGTC regarding programs offered to Gifted and Talented students.

- The VAGTC currently has no permanent premises and relies on the generosity of schools to provide a meeting venue.

- The VAGTC has no permanent office and relies on the generosity of the VAGTC secretary to store archives in her home and to also operate from there. All correspondence is addressed to a post office box or via our website: www.vagtc.asn.au. Funds generated by seminars and conferences are used to offset costs and to pay the secretary an hourly rate. All members of the committee are volunteers and work in various sectors of the educational community (Independent, Catholic and State). We believe it is imperative that the VAGTC be given government support, in the form of a central office, in order that we to continue and expand our support of government gifted education policy.

- The VAGTC believes that it can achieve the best outcomes for gifted and talented students by up skilling teachers. It aims to achieve this through exposing teachers and consultants to innovative research (from Australia and overseas) and best practice teaching strategies, by through our conferences and seminars. Currently, our committee members willingly respond to calls from schools across Victoria to conduct workshops and lectures. Our highly experienced and trained educators deliver these services voluntarily.

- Parent clusters and networks also regularly invite VAGTC members to provide professional development for their members; usually the discussions centre on best parenting practice and improved learning methods for gifted and talented students. These meetings often take the form of dissemination of information as appropriate to the needs of the group. e.g. coping with the emotional needs of gifted and talented children.

- As part of the VAGTC September conference, a parent seminar has been organised. Its foci are on providing methods to assist parents to unmask the abilities of twice-exceptional children: gifted and learning disabled.
(f) VAGTC Experiences of students participating in programs:

- Students report that they prefer to participate in practical, hands-on, high level programs that are “real” and have real applications that they know and understand will assist them in their future endeavours.

- The VAGTC has collected extensive data, demonstrating that students who are invited to participate in mentoring programs experience significant achievement gains and improve self confidence. When students are matched with mentors that have similar interests, or have achieved goals that gifted and talented students aspire to in the future, become highly motivated.

- Research also shows that intellectual isolation, overuse of lower order thinking tasks and drill have a highly negative impact on gifted and talented students. Conversely, curriculum compacting, access to cutting edge learning and interacting with like-minded people have a positive effect on gifted and talented students.

- Gifted and talented students enjoy challenging and high level learning, and the opportunity to be intellectually stretched to their capacity.
VAGTC views on how the concepts of giftedness and talent should be defined.

- Giftedness is not elitist. It cuts across all social-economic, ethnic and national groups. Gifted and talented children often have hidden learning disabilities (‘dual exceptionalties’). In all cultures there are children who are developmentally advanced. They have a capacity for greater abstract reasoning and cognitively develop at a faster rate than their peers. Gifted children’s academic and social characteristics are often asynchronous. Their development tends to be uneven and they often feel that they are not ‘in sync’ with their peers. Gifted children have heightened awarenesses (hypersensitivity) and are worried about world events that they do not have the emotional resources to cope with. They need to have their differences respected in all environments.

- The Victorian educational community has accepted the Francoys Gagne’s Model of Talent Development as being appropriate for its needs. Gagne defines talent as “The ability to perform at a level significantly beyond what might be expected from one’s age – peers, in any domain of human ability. A child might be gifted in any one of the cognitive, creative, socio-affective or sensory-motor domains- or in several, or in all.” He or she might be gifted in areas of human ability which we do not yet understand well enough to categorise by domains. Sensory perception is one area that is yet to be researched fully.

- The VAGTC supports Gagne’s theory, that central to talent development is the quality of the teaching that the child receives. This development requires motivation, perseverance, self confidence and self-esteem.
Figure 1. Gagne’s Model of Giftedness

- The Columbus Group’s (An American group of psychologists led by Linda Silverman) definition of giftedness is also supported by the VAGTC: “Intellectual giftedness (usually high cognitive development) itself leads to personalogical differences. Giftedness is 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 to develop optimally” (Silverman. 1993, p.3).
(h) Mechanisms to improve the capacity of teachers to identify and adequately respond to Gifted and Talented students.

- The VAGTC in the strongest possible terms recommends that undergraduate teachers undertake compulsory studies in Gifted and Talented identification, and acquire skills that raise their awareness of the cognitive, social, emotional, and physical needs of gifted and talented students.

The VAGTC believes that elements that are critical to developing a school culture, which recognises and celebrates the achievement and wellbeing of all students include:

- Strong leadership that is committed to a culture of achievement.
- Formal professional learning for all staff, focussing on excellence for all students.
- Staff willingness to embrace the learning needs of all students, including the highly able.
- Formalised reporting on students’ participation in extension programs.

The VAGTC endorses the goals stated in Melbourne Declaration on Educational Goals for Young Australians (December, 2008). In particular, the VAGTC wishes to acknowledge goals 1 and 2.

**Goal 1**
Australian schooling promotes equity and excellence. ...encourages parents, carers, families, the broader community and young people themselves to hold high expectations for their educational outcomes....promote a culture of excellence in all schools...promote personalised learning that aims to fulfil the diverse capabilities of each young Australian.

**Goal 2**
Develop their capacity to learn and play an active role in their own learning...are committed to national values of democracy, equity and justice and participation in Australia’s civic life...promote world-class curriculum and assessment...provide them with rich learning, personal development and citizenship opportunities...
(i) Any broader implications for school communities arising from the education of Gifted and Talented students.

- Improved student academic outcomes nationally
- Improved student academic outcomes on an international stage
- Retention of high ably students within the government system
- Increased application of ICT into all aspects of curriculum
- Increased application of higher order thinking skills into all aspects of curriculum
- Increased application of creative problem solving and innovation into all aspects of curriculum
- Improved discipline, therefore less teacher stress
- Improved teacher satisfaction due to increased student engagement
- School promotion via academic accomplishments
- Community engagement via mentoring programs
- Happier and healthier students due to their skills and knowledge being valued and promoted.
- Satisfied and happy parents who know that their gifted and talented students are self motivated and engaged.
- Increased enrolments due to school’s high profile in the community.
- A cohesive culture on a learning community is achieved.
Response to the existing DEECD policy

(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;

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<tr>
<th>DEECD policy statement</th>
<th>Critical questions and reflections</th>
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<tr>
<td>“We have endeavoured to present a commonly-accepted position of what it is to be a gifted student in Victorian schools.”</td>
<td>Without research, how is this a ‘commonly-accepted position’ of what it is to be a gifted student in Victorian schools, seeing how the experience is so varied and inconsistent?</td>
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<tr>
<td><img src="https://example.com/deecd-policy-statement" alt="Content" /></td>
<td>The effectiveness of current DEECD policies and programs regarding gifted education is haphazard, inconsistent, not specific, too broad, and lacks a current literature focus.</td>
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<tr>
<td><img src="https://example.com/naplan-data" alt="Content" /></td>
<td>NAPLAN data is not appropriate data for gifted identification.</td>
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<tr>
<td>![Content](<a href="https://example.com">https://example.com</a> identify gifted students)</td>
<td>There is little consistency in the way gifted programming and identification of gifted students occurs between SEAL schools, nor between government, independent and catholic schools.</td>
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<td>“We identify gifted students because all students should be given the opportunity to achieve their potential during their time at school. ..... Special provisions should be made in regular classrooms so that these students can experience the challenge and excitement of an appropriate learning experience, a learning experience that is equal to their high potential.”</td>
<td>Why does this ‘should’ not mean a commitment via action to resources, training and recognition within the reporting framework?</td>
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<td><img src="https://example.com/identify-gifted-students" alt="Content" /></td>
<td>In the independent system, programs’ funding is self-generated. Across all systems, gifted programs depend on ‘in-house’ leadership initiatives. Programs are therefore varied in approach, and continuity cannot be guaranteed.</td>
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<td>“It is important to realise that ‘giftedness’ is a construct and is not directly measurable. What this means is that the instruments used to assess giftedness and to identify gifted persons attempt to measure the</td>
<td>Where is this being measured and by whom?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><img src="https://example.com/giftedness-is-a-construct" alt="Content" /></td>
<td>This is highly variable between schools.</td>
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behaviours and characteristics which we associate with the construct.”

“Any conception of giftedness must take into account the diversity of abilities and the psychological characteristics displayed by gifted children throughout their education.”

Implicit in this is an assumption of teachers’ ability identify and characterise these differences. Where is their training to do this?

Independent schools typically advertise for staff for gifted education far more commonly than government schools.

“Inclusive and comprehensive identification must be appropriate for the diversity of children in Victorian classrooms”

But first, this must be identification available. I see no evidence that this is so.

Independent schools assess new enrolments for ability, whereas this data is less available in government schools.

**Gifted Education Professional Learning Program 2009:** This is the fourth professional learning day for gifted coordinators and select entry accelerated learning coordinators for 2009 and will be held on 23 November 2009 at the MCG.

This is available for all gifted coordinators in schools and select entry accelerated learning coordinators. However, other than the 40 or so select entry schools, very few government schools have gifted coordinators. How could four days a year be sufficient training for these coordinators regarding gifted ed.? Furthermore, if gifted ed. is meant to available for any gifted student in any class, doesn’t every teacher need this training at undergrad and post grad levels?

Currently the independent and catholic systems have significantly more central staffing support for gifted education than the government system.

(ii) equity of access to quality educational choices for gifted and talented students and their families;

“Different communities may view giftedness differently, reflecting their cultural values. While characteristics of giftedness may be consistent across cultures the way these characteristics are manifested and valued may vary significantly.”

How and where are these issues covered in the way we teach? How is it researched? How is it trained for?

Access to quality educational choices for Victoria’s gifted students is haphazard, inconsistent, unpredictable, and varied in
effect, content, and cost. Often it is a ‘user pays’ system, and therefore not accessible to lower socio-economic families. Furthermore, this access to gifted education choices is inconsistent between and within institutions.

**Selective Entry Schools**
There are four Victorian selective entry schools that cater for high achieving, academically gifted students in Years 9 to 12.

**Schooling options for your child**
A number of schooling options are available for gifted students. These include early entry into school, SEAL, single subject acceleration, curriculum compacting, telescoping, concurrent enrolment, year level advancement, mentoring, virtual mentoring, Connections – out of hours extension programs, VCE Extension Studies programs, early admission into tertiary education. A number of schooling options are available for gifted and high potential students. You should consider the following options in partnership with your child’s school:

**Mentoring**
A mentoring arrangement would have your gifted or high potential child partnered with an ‘expert’ or professional in your child’s specific area of interest. The support of mentors may be more general rather than academic in nature. Mentoring may also be arranged to support your child if they may be at risk of disengaging at school. The mentor provides important support to your child as they endeavour to ‘get back on track’.

There are some researchers who believe that a mentoring arrangement should not be entered into until you and your child have exhausted the resources at the

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<th>Considering these options, why is there such limited training and resources for teachers in these schools? Why is specialist training not mandatory for select entry school teachers? Geographic isolation affects access to gifted education, as does low socio-economic pressures. Regional areas have no staffing specifically for gifted education within the DEECD.</th>
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<td>This type of mentoring program depends very much on the training, understanding and perceptions of the teachers. To instigate such a program, teachers would have first have had to identify appropriate students and mentors. This is a very limited understanding of what a mentoring program could and should entail. For example, a mentoring program could staffed by a school’s existing teachers and students. Funding and training for mentoring programs should automatically be part of the resourcing of every primary and secondary school. This would be the case if gifted and extension education were</td>
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secondary school level, and until the student is ‘mature’ enough to maximise the time spent with the mentor.

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<tr>
<th>Virtual mentoring</th>
<th>Why should this be considered as an option only for geographically isolated children? Giftedness imposes its own isolation on students, and most students and schools are currently IT capable.</th>
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| Virtual mentoring is particularly suitable if your child is from geographically isolated schools in country Victoria.  
This schooling option would require the teacher to work with a tertiary institution to find suitable tertiary students to become mentors for your child. Under supervision, your child would work with the mentor to agree on a research project which your child would then work on. The idea of the program is to extend your child’s capacity for independent research in an area of interest negotiated between them and the mentor. |  |

(iii) impact on the learning, development and wellbeing of gifted and talented students;

| 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 assumption needs research and auditing, resourcing and centralized networking. How can DEECD support them without training and resources? |
| opportunities and strategies for enhancing support for gifted and talented students, their parents and carers, teachers and school leaders; and | This goal requires consistent leadership, planning and long-term DEECD commitment |
| opportunities for improved educational offerings for gifted and talented students through collaboration across all school sectors and with community, business and industry. | This goal needs independent coordination and tri-partisan(Government, Catholic and Independent) resourcing, with clear goal setting |
VAGTC Committee

President - Carmel Meehan
Carmel is an Independent Educational Consultant. She is a former primary school principal with twenty years’ experience in both Victoria and NSW. Carmel’s particular interests are in school and curriculum development that allows gifted students to reach their true potential. Carmel joined the VAGTC after completing a Post Graduate Certificate in Gifted Education at Monash University in 2003. She also has a Master of Education, a Graduate Diploma in Religious Education and Counselling and Infant Teacher training.

As a principal some of the most alarming and challenging conversations I had with my bright students occurred after they were removed from their classrooms for what was termed “disruptive behaviour”. It was obvious that they were disengaged on a personal and academic level and for me it became a justice issue, that I become involved in learning how to deliver exemplary educational practice that would engage all Gifted and Talented students. The answer is as unique as the children we serve and for me the search for solutions has become a lifelong passion.

Vice President - Michael Bond
Michael is the Gifted and Talented Education Coordinator in the Junior School (K-6) at Oxley College. He has also worked as a Gifted and Talented Education Special Project Manager. He advocates for gifted education on the Teaching and Learning Committee at Oxley College and has assisted in the development of a Gifted and Talented Education Program at the College through serving on a Gifted and Talented Education Working Party. Michael has worked in Government and Independent schools and has taught in Australia and the United States of America. He has a Master of Science in Education specialising in K-6 Education. Upon graduating, Michael was recognised as the ‘Most Outstanding Student in the College of Education’. He also has a Bachelor of Information Systems degree and a Diploma from the Australian Institute of Company Directors. Michael developed a passion for gifted education after completing the ‘Gifted and Talented Education Professional Development Package for Teachers’, which was developed by GERRIC. He has also completed the extension and specialization modules. Michael has professional interests in curriculum development, upper primary and middle years of formal education, identification of gifted and talented students and also the use of standardized testing in education.

Secretary - Dr. Susan Nikakis
Dr Susan Nikakis works at the Catholic Education Office Melbourne. Her role is Senior Gifted Education Programs Officer. Her Doctoral thesis was entitled ‘What makes an expert teacher of the gifted?’

Susan develops curriculum for the gifted, present’s workshops on differentiating the curriculum for gifted students at both primary and secondary Catholic schools around the state, assisting with pilot projects for gifted clusters as well as lecturing, tutoring and mentoring at the Australian Catholic University. She works with the National Gallery of Victoria as a ‘critical friend’ in the gifted
programs Her book entitled ‘Expert Educators’ was published in 2009 and her next book ‘Justice for Gifted Students’ is nearly ready for the publishers.

She is available for staff decision making processes re gifted students and is always keen to be part of any discussion re gifted students and education of all students.

Susan has taught in six Catholic secondary and primary schools, holding the positions of Individual Differences Coordinator, Director of Studies, Director of Learning, Director of Welfare and Discipline and Deputy Principal. She is an Executive member of the Victorian Association of Gifted and Talented Committee. She sees catering for the needs of gifted students as a matter of justice.

Treasurer - Pam Lyons
Pam has been involved in the field of gifted education since 1998 and is currently the Coordinator of the Able Learners’ Enrichment Program at La Trobe University, Bendigo. This program has been running for ten years and in 2004 received a two year Telstra Community development Grant. She has advocated for gifted children in schools in Melbourne since 1998 and continues this advocacy in schools in rural Victoria. She is currently a sessional teacher in the School of Education at La Trobe, Bendigo. Pam is a qualified secondary science teacher with post graduate qualifications in Special Education and Human Services, completing two research projects in gifted education as part of this qualification. She is currently completing a Masters degree in education. In 2007 Pam helped establish a teachers’ network in Bendigo across all sectors providing professional development for teachers and professionals. In 2008 Pam was awarded the Pauline Toner Award by La Trobe University for her significant contribution in social issues and education through her work with the Able Learners’ enrichment Program and gifted education in general.

AAEGT Representative - Christine Ireland
Christine has been a full-time Secondary Teacher of English, Science, Geography and History for twenty years. Christine also lectures part time at Melbourne University in the Gifted Education units of the Master of Education. She has completed her Master of Education, a post graduate Certificate of Gifted Education, and two Harvard Certificates of Education. Christine is currently completing a PhD in Gifted Education. Christine has been President of the Victorian Association of Gifted and Talented Children for five years, and has published several academic education papers. Christine’s passion is providing educational opportunities that allow children to reach their full potential.

Lisa Dooley
Lisa Dooley is a teacher of Psychology, English, History and English as a Second Language and is currently teaching at Carey Baptist Grammar School. She has taught in public and private schools in Victoria, interstate and overseas and has worked as a corporate trainer. What excites her about working with Gifted and Talented children is the sheer surprise and excitement that they offer their teachers daily, in their responses to the world, knowledge, skill development and discovery.

Jennifer Scholes
Jennifer obtained her Bachelor of Education before starting teaching in 1977 and has specialised in English, Drama and Literature. She has taught at Mt. Waverley Secondary College for the past 17 years, including serving as the Gifted and Talented Co-ordinator. She helped establish the need for
the gifted and talented program and a range of extension activities. Jenny’s work is focused on identifying gifted students and building support and understanding within the school culture.

Mark Smith
Mark is the creator and co-ordinator of Altitude, a multi-faceted enrichment and extension program for highly able primary students that has been running at Carey Baptist Grammar School, Kew Campus for the past eight years. Mark has a Master of Education, specialising in gifted and talented education, his research thesis completed as part of his Monash studies focused on a combined mentoring and inquiry learning process as a means of catering for highly able students through investigative research. Mentoring is a particular area of professional interest for Mark who coordinates a large mentoring program for highly able students at Carey. Other areas of professional strength include individual programming, student acceleration, community projects and innovative program development for the highly able.

Paul Double
Paul is Head of Learning Support at Camberwell Grammar School where he is involved in a wide range of curriculum extension and enrichment units. He is also convenor of the Boroondara Secondary Schools’ Gifted Cluster and is an advocate of schools coming together (Government, Independent and Catholic) to provide support for each other and offer students enrichment day and half day immersion with like minds.

Paul has worked in Government and Independent schools locally and internationally (Australia, Italy, United Kingdom and the Bahamas). He has a Master of Education specialising in Children of High Intellectual Potential (CHIP) as well as primary qualifications and a Graduate Diploma in Educational Administration. Paul has a specific interest in the Middle Years (5-10) of formal education and has worked in this area for over 25 years.

Joy Garratt
Joy currently works as a School Adviser with the Catholic Education Department Melbourne–WR in the area of Student Services. She provides services to schools for students with additional needs and this is inclusive of learning difficulties as well as highly able students. Her teaching background has been in a variety of settings-mainstream teaching and specialist teaching in primary schools, subject teaching and student support in secondary settings. She has experience working overseas as she worked in an international school in China and has worked in both country and city schools in Victoria. In the past she has taught highly able students and facilitated a program for highly able students in a primary setting. As well she has undertaken leadership roles in schools. Joy says that following her initial training, she has completed further studies in education and attained a Master of Education in 2005. She has a Certificate 1V - Coaching in the Workplace. Joy’s professional interest is in the area of collaborating with teachers to provide practical support and strategies for working with students with additional needs. Joy’s qualifications are: Master of Education, Postgraduate Diploma in Early Literacy Intervention, Postgraduate Diploma in Educational Studies (Learning Disabilities), and Bachelor of Education.
References


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