30 June 2011

Ms Kerryn Riseley
Executive Officer
Education and Training Committee
Parliament House
Spring Street
EAST MELBOURNE 3002

Dear Ms Riseley

Inquiry into the Education of Gifted and Talented Students

This letter is a submission to provide information about Mill Park Secondary College’s SEAL and Enrichment Program and to outline the function of the program and how it addresses and supports a need for gifted education in the local community.

This submission will include:

- Opening statement (Current 2011 SEAL & Enrichment Coordinator)
- The Inquiry ‘Terms of Reference’ address of criteria
- Mill Park Secondary College current practices
- Student Feedback - testimonials
- Curriculum & Transition Coordinator’s statement (Previous 2009 & 2010 SEAL & Enrichment Coordinator)
- Principal’s statement
- Appendices

The current program at Mill Park Secondary College is currently in its fifth year, with the first group of gifted students undertaking Year 11 this year (2011). Consequently, the program is still a relatively new program, with most of the evaluation of success and achievement being formative. An ‘Enrichment’ program or ‘Extension’ program has been in place for a longer time period and this program has included a combination of ‘gifted and talented’ students, as well as generally high achieving students. For the purpose of this submission, most of the discussion and evidence will focus on the current SEAL program.

Leesa Mereos
SEAL & Enrichment Coordinator
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Inquiry into the Education of Gifted and Talented Students – Mill Park Secondary College

OPENING STATEMENT

This submission will be made from both a personal and a professional position, as I believe at the heart of this program is the understanding that gifted and talented students (and their parents) have both welfare and achievement needs that can only be met by programs, such as the one offered at Mill Park Secondary College.

The SEAL program is still a new program to the College, as the original group of students is currently in Year 11; and feedback about VCE results will not be evident until the end of 2012. It has been modified from what was originally implemented, to suit the needs of the students and the rest of the school community. The current focus for 2011 will be to look at evaluating the program for future improvement and to ensure it continues to meet the needs of our client – the local community of Mill Park.

Being the largest secondary school in the area of Mill Park, it is essential that we provide a service for identified gifted and talented students; and that they have a program that attempts to meet their needs. There is a huge benefit for the students, their parents, college results and future employment opportunities for school graduates, as well as opportunities for teachers to obtain experience in gifted education and become advocates for these students.

I have come to realise that gifted and talented students are special needs students, in a similar way that low literacy or students with learning difficulties require a differentiated curriculum and teachers who understand their needs. The SEAL program groups students with enormous potential and creates the best possible environment, where they will not hide their talents or underachieve to fit in with their peers. There is an enormous amount of research that supports the need to provide a separate program for these students, as well as other college extra-curricular or leadership opportunities that compliment their personal development.

This is my first year coordinating the SEAL program at Mill Park Secondary College but I have taught most of the gifted groups, as I started at the College in the same year as the program began. Teaching was a career change for me, having completed a Bachelor of Education in both Primary and Secondary Education in 2006, after having numerous careers in other industries. My movement into gifted education was not pre-planned but the experience has taught me that this type of a program is essential for gifted students who possess enormous potential. Unlike, my own school experiences, where there was no extension or acceleration opportunities for an unidentified gifted and talented child. Through boredom, I soon became the biggest problem to the teachers who taught me – subsequently going from straight A’s to failing most subjects; until Year 11 when I had matured sufficiently to understand that my future would be relatively limited without a Year 12 graduation.

There are various problems relating to gifted programs, stemming from pragmatic viewpoints of those who do not fully understand the nature of gifted education, as well as the nature of gifted students themselves being complex and sometimes oppositional to qualities needed for guaranteed educational success. However problematic this type of program is, it has been my experience that it does provide an essential service and opportunity to our stakeholders and should continue as a permanent program for the benefit of all involved.

Leesa Mereos
SEAL & Enrichment Coordinator (2011)
**Effectiveness of current policies and programs for gifted and talented students**

Mill Park Secondary College’s Current SEAL program was introduced to the school in 2007, with the first group of ‘gifted’ students starting Year 7 after being tested at the end of Grade 6 – the first SEAL class is currently in Year 11 predominantly completing Year 12 subjects. The program was set up in accordance to the Department of Education and Early Childhood Development’s *Select Entry Accelerated Learning (SEAL) Guidelines* (Nov, 2007).

The program was introduced as an option for gifted or high achieving students, complimentary to the ‘extension’ program which has been successfully operating for a longer time period. As of 2007, Mill Park offered one extension and one SEAL class at Year 7, 8 and 9, with the extension class remaining together as a home group in Year 10 for some subjects. The SEAL group moves to senior campus\(^1\), after completing Years 7 – 10 in three years; and due to the wide variation in electives and Year 11 subjects to choose from, only remains together in one or two subjects.

The original structure of the program involved condensing one year’s curriculum into three terms but there were many problems associated with doing this. The current program starts with the assumption that as most of the students are at least 6 to 12 months ahead of their peers in Maths and English (as many students have been extended in programs through their primary schools), therefore Years 7 and 8 can be combined quite easily. At the end of Year 7, SEALs have met the Victorian Essential Learning Standards (VELS) for Year 8 and can complete a full Year 9 curriculum in the second year and a full Year 10 in the third year.

When our SEAL students enter their fourth year of schooling, they move to our Senior Campus (Years 10-12) in Epping. Here they accelerate into three year 11 subjects (English Language, Maths Methods or General Maths, and a third VCE choice) and complete three year 10 electives to broaden their exposure to senior areas of study. In their fifth year they complete a mixed year 11 and 12 load (with a maximum of three year 12 subjects), and in their final year they study all year 12 subjects, with the option of a University Extension subject. This 6 year approach provides students with consistent acceleration, mixed with diversity and choice. They can complete more than the required amount of VCE units, as a way of broadening their horizons, and hopefully maximising their ATAR score.

At this point in time, one extension class and one SEAL class is offered at each year level, meeting the needs of our local community. The identification and selection process we are using in conjunction with Departmental guidelines is effective.

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\(^1\) Mill Park Secondary College has a split campus. Middle Years Campus is in Mill Park and Senior Campus is in Epping.
Identification of gifted and talented students

Suitable students are tested and selected in Grade 6 from Primary schools in the region, as well as some schools just outside the region. Applications for the program are promoted through our ‘Showcase’ open night in March (Term 1) and in the newsletters for all schools, as well as the community newspapers. An information evening (27 April 2011) is provided for parents to seek more information as well as submit application forms and make the test payment. Parents are made aware of cut off dates for payment and forms, as well as the test date and possible secondary testing date.

We currently use the tools and the service provided by ACER, that involve the Higher Ability Selection Test (HAST) identification test that is comprised of FOUR sections: Mathematical Reasoning, Reading Comprehension, Abstract Reasoning and Written Expression. Mill Park Secondary College aims to select students who are academically gifted in most or all of these areas. The tests are conducted at the Middle Years Campus (Library) under suitable conditions, collated and sent back to ACER to be marked. The results are sent back in a ranked table, according to highest to lowest stanine results.

All results and forms are reviewed for best candidates and interviews may be organised and primary schools contacted for more information about students. Decisions for offers of placement are made by taking into consideration the overall profile of the student; and the class that would best suit their needs.

Equity of access to quality educational choices for gifted and talented students and their families

Mill Park Secondary College has a student population of over 1,700 over two campuses and is the only Government approved SEAL school that provides this program for the cities of Whittlesea and Nillumbik and surrounding regions. Until 2007, the school only offered an ‘extension’ class for enrichment and this was the only option for ‘gifted’ students and their families. The profile of gifted students is very different to students who are suitable for extension, mainly determined by a need for greater social development and academic engagement. The SEAL class enables gifted students to come together and offers the best opportunity for them to develop essential social skills and demonstrate and develop their identified potential and talents.

All SEAL groups have been comprised of children from a wide range of cultural and socio-economic backgrounds. The testing process does not appear to ‘favour’ one specific demographic group in the region. One example of this is the current Year 9 SEAL cohort that has a study population from 20 different cultural backgrounds. The only relationship to culture we have identified over the last 5 years, is that specific nationalities will use our program as a stepping stone to gain access to exclusive schools (such as Melbourne High and MacRobertson Girl’s High School); and that we do lose a small percentage of students, predominantly from specific cultures, to these schools.

Mill Park Secondary College advertises both the extension and SEAL programs to all schools in the local region and encourages candidates from outside the area, including students from varied educational settings. The loss of students to exclusive schools at Year 9 often results in the creation of vacancies that we are required to fill. The school promotes this as an opportunity for students in extension or mainstream classes who may have been identified as gifted and may benefit from the program.

1 Is a method of scaling test scores on a nine-point standard scale with a mean of five (5) and a standard deviation of two (2).
Once or twice a year, recommended students are tested using a ‘Middle Year’s Ability Test’ (MYAT) and their NAPLAN and On-Demand literacy and numeracy annual test results are reviewed to select the most suitable students to fill class vacancies. In this way, all students coming to the College, as well as existing students, have the opportunity to access the program if they meet the appropriate criteria for ‘giftedness’.

The school advocates ‘differentiation’ and maintains the philosophy that all students have access to the appropriate type of education to suit their needs and expectation of achievement – whether they are in a mainstream, extension or SEAL class.

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

Prior to the introduction of the SEAL program, gifted students were placed in the extension class which follows the same curriculum as all mainstream classes. Enrichment activities and extension of skills was possible but the likelihood of boredom or disengagement was high for truly talented students, who required acceleration and greater scope for individual development.

The grouping of gifted students has been extremely positive for many students who were ostracised at primary school or considered difficult within a normal classroom environment. The SEAL students have access to all the same extra-curricular activities as their peers but move through the curriculum at a faster pace which creates room for greater differentiation and individual choice of topic area to suit preferred learning styles.

The feedback from most parents has been positive in relation to the development of social skills and the preparation of students for higher year levels and VCE. The practise of keeping home groups together for the first three years is beneficial for these students who are often sensitive to change and need a home group teacher who understands the special needs of gifted students and will act as an advocate for the needs of individuals or the group as a whole.

Improvement required:

The program was not initially set up with adequate evaluation mechanisms in place to obtain essential information from students, teachers and parents in relation to the benefits of the program for students learning as well as overall well being. We are currently looking at selecting the most appropriate tools to collect information that will assist with improvement of the curriculum and overall program, as well as providing direction for professional development for staff. Current standard student feedback surveys, On-Demand tests (literacy and numeracy) and NAPLAN results provide only specific information that does not reflect the overall success and benefits of the SEAL program to gifted students and their families. This is one area that has been identified as requiring immediate attention, so that necessary data can be obtained and further improvements implemented.

Scope, Coverage and Effectiveness of current policies and programs

Our current policy of accelerating students in the first year of the SEAL program and completing straight Year 9 and 10 years in the second and third years appears to be more positively accepted by both teachers and students. The previous practise of completing a year in three terms and having students do exams at the end of three term intervals was disruptive to learning and difficult when there were teacher changes in a new year. This was definitely an improvement and allowed teachers to focus on higher level skills for longer.

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3 Home groups are the main learning group for the main disciplinary subjects. Students meet each morning with their home group teacher, who also teaches the class for one or two subjects.
Current SEAL program structure in comparison to mainstream structure

The year 10 program (third year of SEAL program completed on middle years campus) takes into consideration what would normally be covered in mainstream classes, in main disciplinary subjects in year 10 (senior campus). There is some correlation in regards to texts, assignments, learning activities and skills focus but the program is modified to take into consideration the giftedness of the students and to challenge them in preparation for the year 11 subjects that will be taken in the fourth year.
There has been further improvement to the program this year (2011), in relation to current Year 9 students being given a choice of Math subjects in the fourth year. Feedback from this year’s fourth year SEALs indicates that the same Math subject was not suitable for all students in the group, with many struggling with the content of this subject. Year 11 English language is suitable for all SEALs in the fourth year and they will still continue to select another year 11 subject but Mathematics continues to be an area where greater differentiation is needed.

Some of the issues associated with teaching SEAL groups, lies with the practise of filling spaces in the SEAL classes with students who must ‘catch up’ skill development when they are promoted to this class. The subject area of Mathematics is sequential in the way concepts are taught and skills developed and many students are left with skills deficits when they are promoted to a SEAL group – regardless of whether they have been strong in this subject area. Teachers on Middle Years Campus in the Maths/Science area have attempted to ‘bridge the gap’ by offering support through extra classes in their own time or setting work that will bring students up to speed. Unfortunately, this does result in greater work demands for both staff and students and this has been perceived as a negative aspect of the SEAL program.

**Improvement required:**
The SEAL coordinator (based on Middle Years Campus) is currently organising regular meetings with key teachers from Senior Campus to work on improving the learning experience for gifted students. Once students go to their fourth year, they are mixed with mainstream students; which is positive in relation to their social development but can be detrimental to their learning, as they may not be challenged according to their needs. Gifted students are not flagged or identified, unless they are grouped in a specific class which means they may be completing year 10 electives that are well below the level they are capable of. Differentiating for different learning styles or ability levels at senior campus, particularly with VCE subjects is not given priority over the desired outcomes of School Assessed Coursework (SACs) and exams.

The social and learning needs of gifted students, once they move to Senior Campus is one area that is being improved on. There are a small percentage of gifted students who require increased support for mental health issues, as they can find the changes resulting from moving from their original support group to mixing with other students relatively daunting. As most research suggests, gifted students fall into a ‘special needs’ category and the highly sensitive, sometimes selective and even disorganised nature of gifted young adolescents can result in underachievement in the senior years. Given the time constraints and high expectations of the higher years, this is one area that requires a team approach to ensure that what the program originally offered to gifted students is not lost through neglect of their special needs and an expectation of guaranteed success.

2011 has seen the introduction of regular meetings or workshops to educate teachers about the special needs of gifted students. This ‘in-house’ professional development has been beneficial in regards to providing a forum to discuss the needs of the students, enable teachers to share any concerns or make suggestions for future improvement, or to just obtain other perspectives or ideas about the teaching and learning that occurs with these groups. Many teachers do see the SEAL classes as more work (particularly at the end of the year, when exams need to be marked) and are reluctant to ask for one of these groups to teach in their subject area; however, we are starting to build a strong team of teachers who do understand their needs and are willing to develop their own pedagogy to meet the needs of gifted students. There is a strong, committed team developing who enjoy the intellectual challenge of SEAL classes and this team will continue to be encouraged to undertake further professional development in the area of gifted education.
Opportunities and strategies for enhancing support for gifted and talented students

The SEAL students have a number of opportunities available to support their development, such as:

- Scholarship program – At Years 7 and 9 SEAL students have the opportunity to apply for scholarships available in five areas: academic, community (citizenship), leadership, sporting and music.

- Annual Awards evening – In 2010, the SEAL program was acknowledged as completing a different program to the mainstream and extension classes. Curriculum leaders felt it was necessary to have separate curriculum awards for the main disciplinary subjects, so that the SEAL program would not impact on the achievements and recognition of other students. This was extremely positive, as there was a more even spread and greater number of students from all three types of class (SEAL, extension and mainstream) achieving awards. The SEAL students were still nominated with their year level peers for ‘House’ or ‘Genuine Endeavour’ awards, as all students were judged by the same effort and consistency criteria.

- Student Leadership Opportunities – There are currently numerous SEAL students in leadership positions, such as house captain or campus captain. They are involved in the organisation of fundraising initiatives and extra-curricular activities, as well as encouraged to assist teachers and work collaboratively as a group to improve various areas that affect student wellbeing and the learning experience. Students are encouraged to actively campaign for their positions and to gain the support and cooperation of the student body to act as a spokesperson and to communicate to all levels of the school community.

- Extra-curricular activities – SEAL students are extremely well represented in all extra-curricular activities (in comparison to mainstream students), particularly in debating, public speaking, the environmental group (The Lizards), music, sport, anime club and various writing competitions. Other activities that SEALs have been involved in are: school production, song and dance evenings, KOOL Schools recording project, dance groups, fundraising initiatives and various competitions.

- Involvement in college activities – SEALs are a large percentage of students who volunteer to run tours on ‘showcase’ evening, assist teachers on orientation days and family BBQ evenings, as well as assist with workshops and sporting activities. There are currently more than 10 SEALs who act as ‘peer mentors’ to Year 7 classes; which again is a significant number in comparison to other classes. The Year 9 SEALs were recently involved in a pilot program that involved ICT programs integrated with Science, students were involved in web design and collaboratively creating an online learning space.

- Competitions – SEALs participate in many competitions, such as: Mill Park Idol (Talent competition), writing competitions, public speaking and debating (inter-school) competitions, Sporting competitions, Art competitions, Science competitions. Mathematic competitions and various competitions run by the library or other college departments.

- Camps – SEAL and extension students attend the same Year 7, 8 and 9 camps as mainstream students, such as: Lake Nillacoote, Whittlesea, Tasmania, Outback (Uluru) and various locations for environmental conferences (Queensland, Rural areas etc).

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4 Open evening in April when the college runs tours for families of potential students and all faculty areas display student work and curriculum resources.

5 The peer mentor program involves training students at the end of Year 8, so in Year 9 they can support and conference with Year 7 students to overcome social issues or problems that may impact on learning.
Excursions – SEAL students are able to extend their learning by attending the same year level excursions as other students, as well as additional experiences to tie in with their curriculum. Past and recent excursions have included: Films – Harry Potter, Tomorrow, When the War Began, Ancient Civilisations – Ancient Egypt, Plays – Romeo and Juliet, Hamlet, Zoo day, University and Tertiary tours, Art exhibitions, Museum, Coastline for fieldwork (St Kilda Beach), The Stock Market, Medics Sans Frontiers (Doctors without borders) and the Holocaust Museum.

Incursions/Guest speakers – SEAL students have watched numerous presentations by guest speakers or participated in incursions that have enhanced their learning experience, such as: John Marsden (Author of Tomorrow, When the War Began), John Kilner (Media expert), Monty Boori Prior (Indigenous guest speaker), Myron Lysenko (Poet), Brainstorm Productions (Live performances about teen issues), Environmental workshops, Reptiles Alive (Live animal interactive exhibit) etc.

Year 9 City School program – SEAL students have the same opportunity to complete a research assignment and investigate the many experiences of the city of Melbourne. The program is targeted at developing life skills and developing student independence to take public transport and find their way around Melbourne.

Pathways - The Senior Campus offers the widest choice of the Victorian Certificate of Education (VCE), Vocational Education and Training (VET) and Victorian Certificate of Applied Learning (VCAL) courses in the northern metropolitan area. Students have consistently attained high results and gained prestigious awards and tertiary scholarships – all pathways are offered to SEAL students.

Pre-University subjects – SEAL students will have the opportunity to complete any of the pre-university subjects available through either Monash or Melbourne University (Extension Program); and there is an anticipation that our partnership with La Trobe University will provide greater opportunities for pre-university subjects for our Year 12 SEAL students from 2012 and beyond.

La Trobe University partnership program – This is a new partnership that will enable students from Year 9 onwards to have greater access to university resources and for the development of collaborative projects for further learning opportunities for SEALs. The potential of this partnership is still being negotiated.

Pastoral program facilitated by home group teacher – All students are part of a home group class and it is a common practise to retain the same home group teacher for Years 7, 8 & 9. For SEAL classes, the Pastoral program is an important support to their social development and welfare; and the home group teacher is a significant factor in monitoring the progress of groups.

Summer school program - In January 2011, Year 9 and 10 SEAL and Extension students attended a two week summer program run by teachers from the ‘Teach For Australia’ (TFA) program. This program was specifically organised to enable these teachers in training to gain experience with gifted students and for the students to develop knowledge derived from academically high achieving graduate teachers.

One-to-one e-learning – In 2009, the first Year 9 SEAL group was involved with a pilot program involving the integration of laptops to be used in all classes. The students were able to make suggestions and provide feedback about the use of laptops as a learning tool for future consideration.
Opportunities for improved educational offerings for gifted and talented students through collaboration across all school sectors and with community, business and industry.

The SEAL students have the same opportunities to be involved in the many programs offered to mainstream students. The students can choose educational pathways from the Victorian Certificate of Education (VCE), Vocational Education and Training (VET) and Victorian Certificate of Applied Learning (VCAL). They have access to leadership roles, extra-curricular activities and the Career Development Program. SEAL students have the benefit of completing more VCE units and can increase their results for a final improved ATAR\(^6\) score; and having a wider scope of subjects means greater choice in further education or careers.

In 2010, Mill Park Secondary College went into partnership with La Trobe University to develop programs for our students that will be beneficial to their learning and future skill development. The focus is on encouraging more students to consider academic pathways and broaden their career aspirations for improved vocational outcomes. This new partnership will enable students to understand what is required for various employment opportunities in relation to the local community and industry, as well as the business sector on both a national and international level. There is an expectation that this partnership will lead to improved educational opportunities for all students, as well as the SEALs and extension students.

As the first SEAL group is currently in Year 11, an evaluation of educational offerings beyond Year 12 is not possible. The current goal of implementing proper evaluative mechanisms for the SEAL program is to improve opportunities for greater collaboration with our stakeholders. To enable students to gain experience in initiatives that relate to community, local business and major industry. Proper evaluation will provide valuable information about how successful our program is, or could be in the future, by reviewing its purpose and achieved outcomes.

\(^6\) The ATAR refers to the Australian Tertiary Admissions Rank (formerly known as ENTER - Equivalent National Tertiary Entrance Rank) and is one factor used in selecting current Year 12 students for degree courses.
At this point in time it is a current practise to offer ONE extension and ONE SEAL class at each year level on the Middle Years Campus. The ACER HAST testing is conducted with Grade 6 students from our local primary schools. 75 primary students were tested for the 2012 intake, on the 13 and 19 May and letters of offer will be forwarded by late June. Prior to testing, the program is advertised in the local paper, as well as in the newsletters of all the schools in the region (and a few just outside the region). Students from other regions are welcome to apply for the testing and we often have enquiries from parents in regions where there may be another SEAL school – it is only occasionally that they may apply.

The individual choice of subjects from Year 10 makes it difficult to keep the SEAL and extension classes together beyond the Middle Years Campus; although they may be grouped in a few classes in the first year at senior campus. A new Year 10 elective along the lines of ‘Innovation and Enterprise’ incorporating ICT, workplace skills and project management, with a focus on community benefit and sustainability is currently being considered for future SEAL groups. We have identified that these students require a subject that will challenge their abilities and enable them to stay together and continue to learn from each other as a group.

There have been three workshops this year, to provide teachers with a forum for discussion of concerns, a group for support or a means of becoming more knowledgeable in the area of giftedness. These workshops have also been a way of identifying individual teachers who are willing to be key support people, in either the area of student welfare or curriculum development – all participants in workshops have been eager to look at the various ways the program could be improved for increased benefits for all stakeholders. The general attitude towards the SEAL program has significantly improved, as greater numbers of teachers better understand the special needs of this group or have had the experience of teaching the students (and can compare to other classes). As many SEAL students are involved with extra-curricular activities, they are no longer seen as learners who are only academically gifted.

The rest of 2011 will be focused on implementing the appropriate evaluation methods and tools to obtain data and feedback from all of our stakeholders for future improvement. Student, teacher and parent surveys will be devised and completed by all parties involved. Data and feedback information will be collated, reviewed and necessary changes put into a proposal for the Principal team. There have already been some changes implemented for 2012, such as changes to the Math curriculum choices for students; as well as student interviews conducted with SEALs at senior campus by the coordinators, to ensure that the transition and subject selection process is significantly improved, as well as identifying how senior subjects can be modified to suit the gifted learner.

The emphasis for 2011 is to develop a strong team of teachers who can advocate for gifted learners and develop an improved curriculum to suit their needs. It appears there are many teachers who perceive the teaching of SEAL classes as an opportunity for their own pedagogical development, as well as an important service we provide to the students and their families.
REFERENCES


Higher Ability Selection Tests (HAST – Secondary)

http://www.millparksc.vic.edu.au/about/cid/1/parent/1/t/about
Mill Park Secondary College(Prospectus)

SEAL Program Brochure link
STUDENT TESTIMONIALS

Date: 29 April 2011

To Whom It May Concern,

My name is Emily Stambanis and I am a Year 9 student in the Select Entry Accelerated Learning program at Mill Park Secondary College. I believe that the program has been able to provide a structured learning environment where I and my classmates are more inclined to learn and have been able to push ourselves further.

The program has been a great success since it was first implemented in our curriculum. Not only have older students been able to achieve more after being in the program but I have also been affected. In my primary years I often found that I was not being intellectually challenged or pushed to achieve my goals. First entering the program two years ago I am now studying Year 10 Curriculum and am being constantly challenged to go the extra mile and think that little bit harder. This has and will continue to give me great advantage over my peers, as I am already able to study and think at that higher level. I have met many students with similar interests to myself and I have been involved in activities such as: debating, public speaking, peer mentoring, writing competitions and leadership roles.

I sincerely hope that gifted students in the future are given the opportunity to achieve their goals through programs such as this one.

Emily Stambanis - 9BS

28 April 2011

To Whom It May Concern

My name is Alex Liao and I am a Year 9 Student who attends the SEAL class at Mill Park Secondary College. The SEAL class is a class for gifted students of the college who achieve higher standards than normal classes and learn subjects one year ahead of everyone else. However when I started school, I had no idea about the SEAL program and so was put into a mainstream class. In the mainstream class I didn’t find much of it a challenge and constantly achieved higher than my peers. I was restricted to the knowledge I had already learnt and my highest potential was never really tested. I was basically disadvantaged because I was given the normal curriculum when I knew that I could achieve higher, but since coming to the Seal program my potential to achieve is truly tested.

My limits were pushed to the limit and extended each year I spent in the SEAL Program. Every time I attend our classes I am learning new things bit by bit, I have been given an advantage from learning in the SEAL class and I intend to use every bit of that advantage to further my learning and education in the future.

I believe that this class is essential in the community for gifted children who achieve higher than their peers. If there wasn’t a class for accelerated students then I would have been kept back in my learning and I would still be learning subjects that didn’t challenge me at all and potentially waste my time at school. With the SEAL program, students can achieve higher than they had ever achieved before. If you were smart then you were just going to get smarter.

I believe that the SEAL program is essential for a student to achieve their absolute best if they want to get a head-start to their future.

Alex Liao - 9BS
17 May 2011

My name is Maighan Corps and I am currently in the Year 8 SEAL class at Mill Park Secondary College. 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 by both my teachers and my peers.

Mill Park Secondary College’s Select Entry Accelerated Learning (SEAL) program is an extremely beneficial opportunity to provide students with a challenging and fast paced learning environment. The teachers that have been allocated to teach my classes inspire me to always do my best. Their teaching methods continuously keep me interested whilst also providing challenging activities. During every class that I attend I find it easy to talk to my teachers about my work. If I need support or am simply inquiring about an extracurricular activity, I always find my teachers to be helpful and prepared to encourage me to achieve at a higher level.

My class mates in the SEAL program enjoy participating in a variety of extracurricular activities that stimulate our learning. Many of us make up a majority of the groups that represent our school including; Tournament of the Minds, debating, public speaking, sporting teams and the environmental committee. My teachers know my strengths and encourage me to participate in extra school activities that allow me to develop a variety of public speaking, sporting and thinking skills.

When I was first accepted to become a student in the SEAL program, I was extremely excited to have the opportunity to be challenged in the classroom, rather than doing the work I found too easy. I feel like the acceleration of curriculum isn’t acceleration at all, but simply the exact pace I should be learning at and at the correct level. So far all of my hopes for how the S.E.A.L program would benefit me have turned out well. I am thrilled to be in the SEAL program and love the challenges it offers me. I am convinced that it has helped me develop skills that I would not have learned in an ordinary class such as time management, confidence, and a strong work ethic to help support my challenging work load. The S.E.A.L program has been extremely beneficial to me in many ways and I am excited to see what more great opportunities the future will bring. I would recommend the S.E.A.L. program to any student who is interested in challenging themselves and striving to achieve their full potential.

Maighan Corps - 8CW
To Whom It May Concern

During my early experience in the SEAL program, I knew I could make assumptions relative to reliable teachers and friends, and the benefits that come with the work experience. The SEAL program is an opportunity for those who love school, are up for a challenge and want to keep pushing themselves that one step further. 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. When I first moved from the Extension class, I thought that I would not cope because I was leaving my friends. I was worried that I wouldn’t fit in but I was wrong. I bonded with my friends within the hour and within a week, my work ethic certainly improved. At first I thought that I would not keep up with the work, but I pushed myself and made my bare minimum of work much higher. Another major benefit within SEAL is the teachers. These aren’t just any teachers pulled out of a hat. They are the ones that stand out and really make a difference. They have the potential to help students at anytime, with anything, within reason of course. Like your friends, you will bond with your teachers and form a suitable and reliable relationship with them. With my teachers, I feel like I have known them for my whole life, because they know how first year SEAL students may feel and act. They can relate to how you might feel and make your experience much more comforting.

I hope this helps you all, I really do. I want you all to make the right decision on what you do with your lives and put a tick in every box. This is just my personal opinion, and yours may differ, depending on who you are. Good luck to you all.

Ryan Lawrence - 8CW
Present Position – Middle Years Curriculum Coordinator & Community Liaison (Transition and Marketing) Leading Teacher / Previous SEAL and Gifted and Talented Coordinator (2009 & 2010)

In 2005, I was part of the team that wrote Mill Park Secondary College’s application to become a SEAL provider school. I was involved in the initial training provided by the Department of Education, as well as an inaugural teacher in the program.

The introduction of the SEAL Program to Mill Park Secondary College in 2006 has provided a service that was identified as missing for the Mill Park school communities - in that it provided a genuine pathway for gifted and talented students within the local community. Within our own college, there was clearly a need to provide for gifted students, to whom extension and enrichment was not enough. Many students in our extension classes left at the end of Year 8 to join the select entry schools, or private institutions. We also had a large number of unidentified gifted students in mainstream classes, drifting under the radar and underachieving. Since the introduction of the SEAL program, our collective understanding of giftedness within the college community and our identification processes have increased; allowing these students to receive the challenge and acceleration they needed. Our total numbers of students leaving for select entry schools has decreased, influenced by the heightened levels of challenge and increased rigour that our program offers.

During the foundation year, the college received great support from the primary schools in the area and from the community in general. The college receives a great deal of support, and cooperation from Mill Park Heights Primary School, which run a very large and effective gifted identification and extension program. Approximately half of the students who have entered our SEAL program have come from Mill Park Heights Primary. Many students from our SEAL program have been involved in projects with the primary school, on top of annual visits, to discuss the benefits of the program to grade 5 and 6 students.

We have also received support from other Mill Park primary schools, which do not have the expertise or the size to run a gifted education program. When gifted students come from a small primary school, they may be the only gifted student in their class. When they arrive in our SEAL program, and discover a class full of like minds and the social and emotional benefits are enormous. There is obvious benefit from challenging the intellectual curiosity of young people, which can only be created by grouping similar students.

The College has been involved in a range of professional development programs for gifted students, and now has allocated time to plan and develop appropriate differentiated curriculum. In 2009 a group of teachers and curriculum leaders worked with the University of Melbourne’s Dr John Munro in a series of professional development seminars at the school. 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.

Our inaugural SEAL class is presently in their fifth year, completing a mix of Year 11 and 12 subjects. As such, we are not in the position to examine their ATAR scores, in order to evaluate their bottom line success of the program. It is fair to say however, that other indicators such as the positive social and emotional development of students within the program, increased teacher understanding of giftedness, positive community and primary school support, value adding between Year 7 and 9 NAPLAN and increased curriculum rigour all point to the success of the program.

Colin Burke
Middle Years Curriculum Coordinator
Mill Park Secondary College is proud to have been involved in the Select Entry Accelerated Learning Program for the last 5 years.

The College purpose statement is ‘Mill Park Secondary College is a school with high expectations, where each student grows and learns through individualised opportunities and embraces the challenge of creating their future by setting personal goals to achieve social and academic success. In the light of this, the SEAL Program is essential in achieving our purpose for the gifted and talented.

Mill Park Secondary College is a dual campus, coeducational state secondary school, with over 1700 students. Students come from more than forty different primary schools and the College is well served by public transport. While the majority of students are Australian born, the remainder were born in 57 countries. The number of languages spoken is 47 and the number of students who have a language background other than English is 338. Almost 400 students live with one parent and there are 407 students eligible to receive the Education Maintenance Allowance. While there are 85 family occupations at the Manager/Professional level, 475 family occupations are at the lowest level and 557 families are unemployed. It is vitally important that gifted students from low socio-economic backgrounds have access to an appropriate program to realise their potential.

Prior to the commencement of the SEAL Program, gifted students attended regular classes in local schools and then during Year 8 sat an entrance exam for either Melbourne High School or Mac Robertson Girls High School. Generally around 8–10 students were successful each year but many missed out and those who were successful were faced with travelling long distances each day to get to school. Those from lower socio-economic backgrounds tended not to apply for a range of reasons including the added cost of travel. The extra time travelling also takes students away for other activities such as sport or music in which many gifted students excel. With a strong program for gifted and talented students, the College has been able to provide a viable gifted and talented program for the Mill Park community.

The SEAL Program at Mill Park Secondary College is highly valued by the local community. This has been evidenced by the attendance of SEAL Information sessions, the volume of enquiries and the application process. Many parents commence investigation of the Program when their child is in Years 3 & 4. This highlights the high level of demand within the community, and the need for support for parents of gifted students. As the various sections of this submission have indicated the SEAL Program has grown and developed over the past 5 years in response to the diverse needs that gifted and talented students have. The significant training of staff has in fact enhanced teaching practice across all classes and allowed for increased identification of gifted students within non-SEAL classes.

SEAL students are case managed individually as their talent takes various forms. Creativity is encouraged at Mill Park Secondary College as we challenge our students with the motto 'Create your Future'.

**Trish Horner**
Principal
Dear Parents/Carers

Welcome to the Select Entry Accelerated Learning (SEAL) Program, for gifted and talented students of high intellectual ability and potential. Your child’s acceptance into this program is a great achievement, of which you should be very proud. Please take the time to read through this handbook with your child, created to outline to you the intention and nature of this unique program, the curriculum structure, guiding pedagogical principles and general expectations.

The philosophy of our SEAL Program is to provide students with an environment that allows them to fulfil their full academic and social potential. The SEAL Program offers a highly challenging, engaging and motivating learning environment, aiming to ensure that:

- gifted students work at a pace they naturally prefer
- gifted students are provided with a developmentally appropriate curriculum; and that acceleration does not push students to learn at a faster pace than they are capable of
- acceleration reduces the unnecessary amount of repetition that can cause boredom and disengagement for these learners
- gifted students are challenged appropriately for their ability level. (Research by Deslaurier (1999) revealed that 6 % of year 7 students know at least 80% of the curriculum not yet taught)

The basic structure of the program entails that like-minded, similar ability, gifted students are tested and selected in Grade 6 to be part of the SEAL home group. They complete a differentiated curriculum of Years 7–10 of secondary education in three years. This condensed curriculum allows students to complete a personalised and expanded three year VCE program. This program provides the right balance of acceleration, choice and depth of study – having obvious benefits for further education and career prospects.

Mill Park Secondary College’s SEAL program is designed to provide an appropriate level of challenge, curriculum engagement and acceleration, whilst also providing a personalised and fully supportive 6 year educational program for these learners who have so much potential. All students are supported by a home group teacher and the SEAL Program Coordinator, to ensure that their educational needs are met.

If you have any questions regarding the SEAL Program, or your child’s development, please feel free to contact the SEAL Program Coordinator for further information.

On behalf of Mill Park Secondary College - we look forward to supporting your child’s learning journey!

Leesa Mereos
SEAL (and Enrichment) Program Coordinator
What is SEAL?

SEAL is the Select Entry Accelerated Learning Program for identified ‘gifted and talented’ students. Mill Park Secondary College is one of only 25 Department of Education approved SEAL schools in Victoria. The program is designed to cater for gifted and talented learners who are characterised by an advanced speed of understanding processes and concepts, as well as the capacity for remarkably high standards of performance compared to other students of their own age. Gifted children often have the capacity to think clearly, analytically and can reflect on their experiences in an evaluative way - they also often have a personality disposed to inquisitiveness and curiosity.

Gifted students require differentiation in their curriculum in both speed and content, in order to appropriately cater for their needs. The SEAL Program at Mill Park Secondary College is designed to accelerate students through less challenging material, at the same time, engaging them with challenging, higher order thinking tasks and in depth curriculum.

Selection

Initially students are required to sit a rigorous aptitude test to gain entry into the program. This test examines students learning in relation to their innate ability and academic potential; unlike curriculum based tests, which typically identify what a student has already learned. This testing is undertaken during Grade 6, so that students may begin their studies in the appropriate setting from the beginning of Year 7.

Students may also be admitted to the program after they begin Year 7 at Mill Park SC; however this is only in exceptional circumstances. If a student is observed by their teachers as being exceptional, and in need of further challenge, they may be recommended to the Coordinator (Gifted and Talented), who may undertake separate testing at regular intervals. This may also be acceptable when a student moves into the Mill Park area and joins the school after Year 7. Aside from these exceptional circumstances, the SEAL class will remain the same from Year 7 through to Year 9, when variations in VCE subject choices will determine classes.

Review Process

In order to maintain a position in the SEAL Program, students must maintain a high standard of learning achievement and classroom behaviour. The College maintains the right to move students out of the program if they:

- Fall significantly behind in their studies eg. neglecting to hand in major assessment tasks, not completing class or homework on a continual basis
- Misbehave consistently, such as: show through their actions, a disregard for the College values or their classmates right to learn
Students will come under review should they be unable to maintain these standards. The process is as follows:

- The first review will consist of a verbal warning and parent interview where a written plan will be agreed to.
- Within three months an update letter will be sent home, advising parents of whether goals are being met.
- At this stage a student may be taken off review, or placed into the final review period of three months. Should the set goals not be reached by this stage, a student may be moved from the program, after consultation and agreement is reached with parents or carer(s). The student may be moved to a class that is more suitable for their individual needs.

The College reserves the right to override this process, and move a student from the program immediately, should extreme circumstances arise.

**Teaching and Learning**

In order to provide a fully differentiated program for students, the SEAL program has an alternative structure to the mainstream program. Students in SEAL will complete 6 years of secondary schooling, however they will complete the first four years of secondary schooling in three years. This will allow students to be challenged at a much higher level earlier, and complete a broader ranging three year VCE program (Some students of exceptional ability may opt to complete a two year VCE and hence a 5 year secondary schooling, however this will be considered on a case by case basis).

The basic structure of the SEAL program is displayed below:

<table>
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It is important to note that the SEAL Program is designed to be a six year program for the majority of students. By completing Year 10 a year early, students have the ability to complete a three year VCE.

This allows a greater subject choice, the ability to complete more Year 12 units, trial subjects at an earlier stage, and gain a higher ATAR [ENTER] score for further education or University. If students choose to complete five (5) years of secondary schooling in the SEAL Program, they will need to meet extra requirements in consultation with the SEAL Program Coordinator. Parents and students should be aware that completing a five (5) year secondary schooling often leaves students with lower ATAR [ENTER] scores, and creates possible social issues at university because of their younger age. Therefore, it is recommended that students complete the full six (6) years.

In the case of extra-curricular activities such as camps, excursions, work experience and sports teams, students will participate with their age peers. For example: SEAL students in their third year, will be studying Year 10 curriculum. However, they will participate in Year 9 electives, sports, camps and the ‘City School’ experience. This allows for interaction with their age peers on a social level.

Students in the SEAL Program will also stay on the Middle Years Campus for three years, and move to the Senior Campus in their fourth year, with their age cohort.
## SEAL curriculum outline

### 1st Year
- English x 10
- Maths x 10
- Humanities x 6
- Science x 6
- LOTE x 5
- P.E. x 6
- Pastoral x 4
- Materials Technology x 6
- Information Technology
- Visual Art x 6
- Dance/Drama

### 2nd Year
- English x 10
- Maths x 10
- Humanities x 7
- Science x 7
- LOTE x 6
- P.E. x 6
- Pastoral x 2
- Fabrics Technology x 6
- Food Technology
- Music

### 3rd Year
- English x 10
- Maths x 10
- Humanities x 8
- Science x 8
- P.E. x 6
- Pastoral x 2
- ICT SEAL x 8
- Elective

### 4th Year
- Units 1 and 2 English Language
- Units 1 and 2 General Maths or Maths Methods
- Elective
- Choice of Year 10 Elective or VCE/VEP Unit
- Elective
- Year 10 Elective
- Elective
- Year 10 Elective

### 5th Year
- Units 3 and 4 English Language
- Choice of VCE Units 1 and 2 or 3 and 4 subjects
- Choice of VCE Units 1 and 2 or 3 and 4 subjects
- Choice of VCE Units 1 and 2 subjects
- Choice of VCE Units 1 and 2 subjects
- Choice of VCE Units 1 and 2 subjects

### 6th Year
- Choice of VCE Units 3 and 4 subjects
- Choice of VCE Units 3 and 4 subjects
- Choice of VCE Units 3 and 4 subjects
- Choice of University or VCE Subjects

Accelerated or compulsory subjects | Non accelerated or student choice subjects
---|---
Exams

Due to the accelerated nature of the program, extra assessment is required to ensure that students are reaching the required levels at the appropriate time.

End of year exams will take place in the core subjects for the first three years of the program, during an exam week. In class revision and practice exams will be completed at school, however it is essential that parents support their children by encouraging revision and additional study at home, regularly and in the weeks leading up to the exams.

Students in first year will be examined on their knowledge of VELS level 5 (Year 8), students in the second year will be examined on VELS level 6 (Year 9) and third year students will be examined on VELS Level 6, (Year 10). Exam results are not placed on the student report, instead a separate exam results letter is sent home as soon as possible. (Please note – exams are only one aspect of student assessment and may not reveal full student achievement.)

Social and Emotional Wellbeing

All students in the SEAL program have an important first point of contact; their home group teacher. The home group teacher gets to know the class very well, meeting with the students every morning and usually teaching the group for one (1) or two (2) subjects. The home group teacher is also the first point of contact for parents if they have any concerns. Additional support staff includes: the SEAL Program Coordinator, the relevant Year Level Coordinators and Subject Coordinators.

All students at Mill Park Secondary College are supported by a highly supportive Student Welfare team. The Student Welfare Coordinator and Educational Psychologists are available for students to access, if needed for extra social or emotional support.

Collaborative Partnership

Underachievement in gifted students can be common during the adolescent middle years of schooling. Peer-group pressure, as well as the influences of physical and emotional change, all impact on gifted children and the way they perceive themselves - in the same other young people can be influenced. The success of the SEAL Program is dependent on the collaborative partnership between students, staff and supportive parents. To achieve its intention of maximising the opportunity for gifted students to reach their full potential, the program encourages parents to be part of the learning process, by establishing study routines and encouraging the appropriate habits that lead to success. At all times during the program, the emotional wellbeing and social development of the student should be supported by this collaborative partnership.

We congratulate you, welcome your feedback and look forward to sharing the future achievements of your gifted child – our student.
The philosophy of our SEAL Program is to provide selected students with an environment that allows them to fulfill their full academic and social potential. The SEAL Program offers a highly challenging, engaging and motivating learning environment for students who have been identified as ‘gifted and talented’.

The program takes into consideration that:

- gifted students are allowed to work at a rigorous pace they naturally prefer
- it is a developmentally appropriate curriculum; and that acceleration does not push students to learn at a faster pace than they are capable of
- accelerated students do not require an unnecessary amount of repetition, as this causes boredom and disengagement
- research (Deslaurier 1999) revealed that 6% of Year 7 students know at least 80% of the curriculum not yet taught, so students should be frequently pre-tested for knowledge or skills they already possess.

Gifted students are selected to be part of the program when they are identified through a ‘Higher Ability Selection Test’ (HAST) in Grade 6. The basic structure of the program involves students completing a differentiated and condensed program of Years 7 – 10 curriculum content in three years instead of the normal four years. This then allows students to complete a personalised and expanded three year VCE program. This program provides the right balance of acceleration, choice and depth of study for the individual student based on their area of strength.

Mill Park Secondary College’s SEAL program is designed to provide an appropriate level of challenge, curriculum engagement and acceleration, whilst also providing a personalised and fully supportive SIX (6) year educational program. The initial middle year’s part of the program (Years 7 – 10) involves students being supported by a home group teacher and a SEAL program coordinator, to ensure that their educational needs are being met.

**Definition - What is ‘Giftedness’?**

*Gifted children are those capable of high performance with demonstrated achievements and/or potential ability in one or more areas of learning.*

(www.vagtc.asn.au/assets/htm/gifted.htm)

*Giftedness is outstanding (demonstrated or potential) intellectual, expression, or practical ability in a domain compared to others of the same age and opportunity.*


**What is SEAL?**

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Gifted students require differentiation in their curriculum in both speed and content, in order to appropriately cater for their needs. The SEAL Program at Mill Park Secondary College is designed to accelerate students through less challenging material; engaging them with challenging, higher order thinking tasks and in depth curriculum.

**Selection**

Initially students are required to sit a rigorous aptitude test to gain entry into the program. This test examines students learning in relation to their innate ability and academic potential, unlike curriculum based tests, which typically identify what a student has already learned. This testing is undertaken during Grade 6, so that students may begin their studies in the appropriate setting from the beginning of Year 7.

Additional students may also be admitted to the program after they begin Year 7 at Mill Park SC; however this is only in specific circumstances. If a student is observed by their teachers as being exceptional, and in need of further challenge, they may be recommended to the Coordinator (Gifted and Talented), who may undertake separate testing at regular intervals. This can also occur if a vacancy develops in a SEAL class, presenting an opportunity for another gifted student. This may also be acceptable when a student moves into the Mill Park area and joins the school after Year 7. Aside from these circumstances, the SEAL class remains together from Year 7 through to Year 9, when variations in VCE subject choices will determine classes.

**Review Process**

In order to maintain a position in the SEAL Program, students must keep maintain a high standard of learning achievement and classroom behaviour. The College maintains the right to move students out of the program if they:

- Fall significantly behind in their studies e.g. neglecting to hand in major assessment tasks, not completing class or homework on a continual basis
- Misbehave consistently and show through their actions, a disregard for the College values or their classmates right to learn

Students will come under review should they fail to maintain these standards. The process is as follows:

- the first review will consist of a verbal warning and parent interview where a written plan will be agreed to
- within three months an update letter will be sent home, advising parents of whether goals are being met
- at this stage a student may be taken off review, or placed into the final review period of three months. Should the set goals not be reached by this stage, a student may be moved from the program and appropriate consultation with parents/guardians.

The College reserves the right to override this process and remove a student from the program and place them in another class, should extreme circumstances arise.

Please contact the SEAL Program coordinator as soon as you have concerns about a SEAL student’s behaviour or academic progress.
Teaching and Learning

In order to provide a fully differentiated program for students, the SEAL program has an alternative structure to the mainstream program. Students in SEAL will complete 6 years of secondary schooling, however they will complete the first four years of secondary schooling in three years. This will allow students to be challenged at a much higher level earlier, and complete a broader ranging three year VCE program (Some students of exceptional ability may opt to complete a two year VCE and hence a 5 year secondary schooling, however this will be considered on a case by case basis). The basic structure of the SEAL program is displayed below:

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Further sample courses are supplied at the back of this text.

It is important to note that the SEAL Program is designed to be a six year program for the majority of students. By completing Year 10 a year early, students have the ability to complete a three year VCE. This allows a greater subject choice, the ability to complete more Year 12 units, trial subjects at an earlier stage and gain a higher ATAR [ENTER] score for further education or University. If students choose to complete five (5) years of secondary schooling in the SEAL Program, they will need to meet extra requirements in consultation with the SEAL Program Coordinator. Parents and students should be aware that completing a five (5) year secondary schooling often leaves students with lower ENTER scores and possible social concerns at university based on their younger age, therefore it is recommended that students complete the full six (6) years.

In the case of extra-curricular activities such as camps, excursions, work experience and sports teams, students will participate with their age peers. For example: SEAL students in their third year will be studying Year 10 curriculum. However, they will participate in Year 9 electives, sports, camps and the ‘City School’ experience. This allows for interaction with their age peers on a social level.
Students in the SEAL Program will also stay on the Middle Years Campus for three years and move to the Senior Campus in their fourth year with their age cohort.
Curriculum

A major hurdle for the SEAL program teachers is how to condense and deliver four years of curriculum in three. The VELS curriculum has now been restructured in order to group some topics together, eliminate repetition, provide higher order understanding of the VELS and still hit the appropriate developmental standards. There is however, still some pressure to cover the material but teachers must begin with the assumption that these students are already well above expected levels when they start Year 7, so acceleration through to the end of Year 8 by the end of the first year is quite reasonable. In Grade 6, many of these students have completed advanced Secondary curriculum and demonstrated higher abilities. They have also been recommended by teachers who had already been extending and challenging them beyond the expected levels. The answer to the anticipated pressure on teachers to cover all subject content for SEAL classes, is pretesting and differentiation.

Pre Testing for effective acceleration through the curriculum

Year 7 NAPLAN data reveals that there are many students who are performing well above their level in literacy and numeracy when they start their first year of Secondary education. If under exam conditions they can reach two full VELS levels higher than they need to, why then should we be teaching them that material at all? Without over simplifying, results often raise more important questions. How do we get students in the SEAL program to develop a deeper understanding of the content if they have already mastered the skills?

Part of the answer lies in pre testing. Here is an example: a pre-test on Year 7 algebra has most students in the class gaining over 75% without being taught the topic. If most of our students scored over 75% on the end of unit test, most teachers would be happy; but this is the start. What can be done? It is clear that starting at Chapter 1 of the algebraic textbook is not the answer, but here is a perfect teaching opportunity for the teacher to skip a large part of the topic. A SEAL teacher could move straight into the higher order thinking on the topic allowing students develop greater problem solving abilities using their existing skills.

Similarly in Humanities if most of the class gets 80% or higher on the pre test for ancient civilisations, the unit should not be spent re-teaching the details of the civilisations which the students already know. Rather it should be spent applying that topic specific knowledge to broad questions, comparisons, evaluation, analysis and synthesis; including student choice or preference of what and how they would like to demonstrate their learning.

Exams

Due to the accelerated nature of the program, extra assessment is required to ensure that students are reaching the required levels at the appropriate time.

End of year exams will take place in the core subjects for the first three years of the program, during an exam week. In class revision and practice exams will be completed at school, however it is essential that parents support their children by encouraging revision and additional study at home, regularly and in the weeks leading up to the exams.

Students in first year will be examined on their knowledge of VELS level 5 (Year 8), students in the second year will be examined on VELS level 6 (Year 9) and third year students will be examined on
VELS Level 6, (Year 10). Exam results are not placed on the student report, instead a separate exam results letter is sent home as soon as possible.

(Please note – exams are only one aspect of student assessment and may not reveal full student achievement)

It is the SEAL subject teachers’ responsibility – in consultation with their faculty leader and SEAL coordinator – to write and correct exams.

Correct exam structure and templates are provided by the SEAL program coordinator, and a structured exam timeline will be given to staff at the start of Term 4.

Engagement

Generally speaking, classes in the SEAL program don’t have the same behavioural or classroom management issues that some mainstream classes may experience. However, gifted students can be notoriously hard to please or engage in class, particularly if they are not provided with the correct level required for engagement. In fact, many students identified as ‘gifted’ in Primary school were often seen as the worst student in the class as a result of being under challenged or unmotivated through boredom.

It is vital that gifted students maintain engagement in their learning. This can be achieved at a classroom level through a number of methods. Firstly, the acceleration aspect of the SEAL program which includes the faster paced introduction of new ideas and material is an important factor. However, there are secondary strategies, such as: thinking tasks, open-ended activities, regular problem solving challenges or assessment projects (providing scope for individual choice to suit preferred learning styles) that promote the engagement of all students in the class.

One example of this is providing brain teasers at regular intervals (such as once a week) or as a tuning in activity before teaching. There is an array of resources (books and websites) containing Brain Teasers. Examples such as: The ‘Mind Bending Lateral Thinking Puzzles’, a series by Des McHale or ‘Quizzles’. These can be whole class activities, or placed on the board at the beginning of a lesson and left to figure out. Even something as simple as a regular word of the day exercise delivered in an interesting manner, can be a great tuning in activity for gifted groups. These may be seen as more English or language based activities, but they can be altered or changed to suit specific subject key vocabulary.

Another engagement or differentiation tool is what John Munro calls ‘Provocative Questioning’. These can be applied in any subject and are bold and designed to be multifaceted. No one answer is correct but the questions are designed to provoke discussion, interest, passion and debate. The example John uses regularly is for study of ancient civilisations. How did the Egyptians master farming, irrigation and the use of water 4000 years ago, yet over 200 years of farming the Murray Darling system has failed? It is a provocative and interesting discussion for students to have. It could even be set as an open ended assignment where students have to frame their own questions, research and draw conclusions. The possibilities of such questioning are endless, especially in subjects like Science, Humanities and English.

SEAL documents are available under Faculties (T) in the SEAL Journals folder.
Differentiation

Inquiry learning is a key aspect of differentiation. Due to the nature of the gifted student as generally being able to master new skills or ideas very quickly; **open ended problem solving tasks** are a great way to differentiate their curriculum. Students should not be forced to repeat the same task over and over but provided with inquiry based problem solving tasks where they are able to apply their learnt knowledge in a practical manner - by using higher order thinking skills. It is suggested that teachers habitually negotiate with students about doing these tasks and how they wish to present their findings. Gifted education teachers are often surprised at how effective alternative presentation methods can be and what their students provide as evidence of learning.

‘**Thinking routines’** are an effective way of engaging your class by providing them with the forum for the exploration of individual ideas, as well as differentiating the curriculum to suit individual needs. A good teacher resource for creating differentiated curriculum and easily applicable to all faculty areas, is available in the library. ‘**Infusing Thinking**’ by Michael Pohl has ready-made samples of differentiated tasks for gifted students which explicitly incorporate high levels of thinking and facilitate learning depth of content or topics.

Advocacy

The role of the SEAL teacher should primarily be that of an **advocate to positively promote the rights and needs of gifted students** and to develop knowledge and skills about the policies and practises of gifted education. It is easier to drive the process of advocacy with the support of a group of committed, knowledgeable teachers; as opposed to running a gifted program with one person as expert in this area. Therefore, teachers are encouraged to develop experience with gifted and talented students and to complete some form of professional development in this area.

Despite the amount of positive evidence in favour of groups and accelerating gifted students, concerns about some individuals’ socio-emotional adjustment persist as a common area of concern for teachers. However, intellectually gifted children have been found to develop social maturity, high levels of self-esteem, healthy adjustment and seek the company of older friends (Sayler, 1996) or teachers, as they crave higher intellectual stimulation. Despite often contradictory research evidence, the SEAL program aims to meet the needs of gifted students by providing them with an environment and learning experience that will encourage the consolidation of essential social skills, as well as enable each individual to reach their full potential.

Your role as an advocate for these students is essential, as some can be the target of bullies who oppose their reserved natures or unique characteristics. There are also some gifted individuals who may demonstrate learning difficulties (labelled double ‘gifted’); yet posses a high IQ and may have difficulty showing their abilities. A teacher of a SEAL class must be aware of the individual needs or limitations of each member of the group, similarly to those displayed in a mainstream class and not have unrealistic or idealistic expectations of these students.

Teaching a SEAL class can be an extraordinary learning journey for the teacher, as knowledge about teaching methodology for engagement and how gifted students learn best, are invaluable for educators and can be applied to all types of classes.