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

Dear Ms Risely

In response to Mr David Southwick’s invitation to make a submission to the Victorian Parliament’s Education and Training Committee’s *Inquiry into the Education of Gifted and Talented Students*, a submission has been prepared by the South Australian Department of Education and Children’s Services.

Please find our submission attached.

Thank you for the opportunity to contribute to the Inquiry.

Yours sincerely

[Signature]

Hon Jay Weatherill MP  
MINISTER FOR EDUCATION

14/6/2011

Encl.
South Australian Department of Education and Children’s Services submission to the Victorian Parliament’s Education and Training Committee’s *Inquiry into the Education of Gifted and Talented Students.*

1. Programs currently provided for gifted and talented students in South Australia

All South Australian Government schools strive to provide teaching and learning programs that offer choice and challenge for all students.

Most gifted and talented learners in South Australia are taught in mainstream classes using a differentiated curriculum.

**Differentiated curriculum**

A differentiated curriculum caters for a wide range of learning styles, readiness and ability levels within a mainstream class.

Key elements in differentiating the curriculum include:

- **Pace:** Gifted and talented learners will generally understand new concepts easily with fewer repetitions. This means that they will need to progress through the curriculum at an accelerated pace of instruction to ensure their learning is continuous and that they are not bored or frustrated.

- **Level:** Gifted and talented learners generally understand concepts, abstractions and ideas beyond what would normally be expected at their age level. Therefore the curriculum needs to be concept based and include complex, abstract ideas so that interests and abilities are challenged and extended.

- **Grouping:** Gifted and talented learners benefit from flexible grouping strategies where they can work individually or with other gifted peers.

- **Assessment:** Assessment is an important, on-going diagnostic tool for matching instruction to learner needs. Pre-assessment enables educators to determine what children/students already know, so that a more challenging learning program can be provided.

For gifted and talented learners with learning difficulties, the differentiated curriculum needs to be set at an appropriately challenging level and provide access to the curriculum by understanding learning characteristics, teaching to those characteristics and building on learner strengths.
For gifted and talented learners with specific disabilities that may prevent them from performing to their potential for example, autism, dyslexia, ADD/ADHD, physical, emotional or behavioural disability, a differentiated curriculum is essential for their well-being. This is critical for gifted and learning disabled students that display strong abilities in some areas and strong weaknesses in others.

**Enrichment, extension and acceleration**
South Australian schools also provide for gifted and talented learners’ needs through opportunities for enrichment, extension and acceleration within and beyond the classroom.

Examples of enrichment programs in South Australia include:
- cluster groupings of like-minded peers
- co-curricular programs including:
  - clubs such as chess and debating
  - participation in competitions such as the University of New South Wales - Maths, Science and English Competitions, Tournament of the Minds, Oliphant Science Awards, Future Problem Solving
  - leadership opportunities such as Student Representative Council (SRC), Forums, Peer Mediation, Student Voice(s) or Student Action Teams
  - participation in choir, instrumental music (soloist and ensembles), South Australian Primary School Amateur Sport Association (SAPSASA) sport
- community programs.

Examples of extension include:
- differentiated curriculum
- compacted curriculum to allow more time to pursue studies at a greater breadth and depth
- teaching tools which encourage the development of critical, creative and caring higher order thinking skills such as Bloom’s Taxonomy, Creative Problem Solving and Moral Dilemmas

Examples of acceleration include:
- early and flexible entry into all levels of education (including preschool)
- placement in vertically grouped or composite classes
- flexible timetabling to facilitate subject acceleration
- year-level acceleration
- tertiary extension and enrichment pathways.

**Special programs**
**The Ignite program**
DECS directly supports three secondary schools through its Ignite program which provides accelerated learning for gifted secondary students. The three schools are The Heights School, Glenunga International High School and Aberfoyle Park High School. Students
who live outside the zone of these schools are eligible to apply to be part of the program.

The features of the Ignite program are:
- students working with their intellectual peers
- focus on critical, creative and caring thinking
- comprehensive and ongoing training and development for staff
- selective entry for students into year 8 based on a four-part test
- technology and resources
- flexible timetabling.

The Ignite program offers less review and repetition than in the regular curriculum so students can vertically accelerate through middle school, completing years 8, 9 and 10 in two years.

Alternatively, students can opt for a companion program that emphasises subject acceleration and extension, rather than grade skipping.

Students are selected for entry into this program on the basis of their performance in an Australian Council of Educational Research (ACER) assessment. The cost to families for testing is approximately $60.00 with the exception of School Card recipients who may sit the test free of charge.

The assessment, developed specifically by ACER for the three Ignite schools, is in four parts. There is an assessment of mathematical ability, writing, comprehension and an abstract reasoning test. When the results are returned from ACER, students are invited to an interview on the basis of their ranking in the test.

DECS Special Interest Secondary Schools.
A number of government secondary schools provide high quality specialist programs in areas such as music, sport, science, maths and languages.

Students can apply through a selection process to attend the following special interest program schools.
- Brighton Secondary School (music and volleyball)
- Fremont Elizabeth City High School (music)
- Marryatville High School (music and tennis)
- Woodville High School (music)
- Adelaide High School (languages, cricket and rowing)
- Urrbrae Agriculture High School (agriculture)
- Charles Campbell Secondary School (performing arts)
- Golden Grove High School (performing arts)
- Heathfield High School (volleyball)
- Blackwood High School (netball)
- Seaton High School (baseball)
- Seaview High School (tennis)
- Mount Gambier High School (cricket, netball, football)
- Grant High School (baseball)
- Henley High School (Special Physical Education and Sports school)
- Pasadena High School
- Underdale High School (soccer)
- Roma Mitchell Secondary College (cycling, hockey and soccer)
- Wirreanda (Special Physical Education and Sports school)
- The Australian Science and Mathematics School (a specialist public school with a special focus on science and mathematics for students in Years 10, 11 and 12).

**Individual Education Plans (IEP)**
Gifted and talented learners whose abilities are not able to be catered for within the regular classroom curriculum require an Individual Education Plan (IEP). An IEP is developed collaboratively with educators, the learner (where appropriate) parents/caregivers and other relevant professionals at least once a year.

An Individual Education Plan is valuable for gifted and talented learners who are:
- assessed by psychologists as being in the intellectually gifted range at the 98th percentile or above and are capable of working at a significantly higher level than their age peers
- require provisions beyond those offered within their class
- display uneven development with a significant gap between areas such as verbal and non-verbal performance or have learning difficulties/disabilities that require targeted support
- enrol early in preschool/school or are to be accelerated through a year level
- require significant social/emotional support.

2. **Any relevant projects or policies currently underway specific to the education of gifted and talented students**

Information on the projects and programs being undertaken by DECS has been provided in response to point one above.

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

The key benefit of programs for gifted and talented students include:
- enabling students to work with their intellectual peers and/or those who have mastered their abilities, skills and knowledge in at least one similar field or domain of achievement
- working within an environment which fosters the wellbeing and success of gifted and talented students
- targeted teaching informed by research-based practice and ongoing evaluation and improvement.

Issues surrounding programs for gifted and talented students include:
• ensuring students receive a broad based education within a subject specific specialisation program
• fair, equitable and transparent selection processes
• finite places in programs
• programs are often seen as being elitist in places where the majority of students are from a privileged background
• isolation within a school community as one group is set apart from others
• a tension around school inclusiveness and an “elite” focus
• the transition from school to post-school pathways where gifts and talents are maximised without the scaffolding provided by individual programs.

4. How the concept of 'giftedness’ and ‘talent’ should be defined

The DECS statement: *Gifted and Talented Children and Students Policy* is based on Gagne’s (2003) *Differentiated Model of Giftedness and Talent.*

**Giftedness**
Gagne’s model identifies gifted individuals as those who possess a natural (innate) ability or aptitude in at least one field or domain of ability, such as intellectual, creative, socio affective or sensorimotor, which is manifested to an outstanding degree, positioning them amongst the top 10% of their age peers. Without significant support in the form of an appropriate curriculum and trained educators, such potential may never come to fruition.

Gifted learners, at or above the 98th percentile, are regarded as requiring intensive and specialised programs to achieve their full potential.

**Talented**
Talented individuals have mastered their abilities, skills and knowledge in at least one field or domain of achievement, placing them within the top 10% of their age peers who also pursue or have pursued that same field of achievement.

5. Equity of access to programs for all gifted and talented students

All students can apply to access special programs operating in South Australian secondary schools. Selection into these programs is based on specific criteria developed for that particular program.

6. Addressing the issues of underperformance among gifted and talented students and supporting positive social and emotional development

DECS acknowledges that like all learners, gifted learners will not necessarily follow an even rate of learning development; there may be
periods when progress is spasmodic and irregular. On the other hand, a
gifted learner whose abilities have yet to be developed into demonstrated
talent may be an under-achieving learner with high potential.

*The Differentiated Model of Giftedness and Talent* explains the
distinctions of giftedness and talent. It demonstrates that many factors
can support or hinder the development of giftedness into talent, such as
self esteem, learner motivation, cultural and socioeconomic factors and
the capacity of schools and centres to both identify and cater for a
learner’s giftedness.

For some gifted and talented learners, being different from their peers in
ability and achievement and/or trying to live up to very high expectations
may result in painful sensitivity, depression, loneliness, perfectionism,
social isolation or stress.

Educators and parents/carers are encouraged to work together to ensure
that gifted and talented learners are accepted and valued and have
opportunities to interact with peers who have similar interests and
abilities.

Students can be referred to a Psychologist - Educational Services or
other registered educational psychologist, school counsellor or expert in
gifted development when necessary, especially before placing learners
on an accelerated pathway such as early entry (preschool) and whole
year acceleration.

Consultation may also be necessary for subject and career choice,
especially where students are accelerated into South Australian
Certificate of Education (SACE) subjects and/or tertiary level study.

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

In South Australia, individual schools work to educate their community
about giftedness and talent to ensure that:
- programs are not perceived as a ‘pull out’ or ‘withdrawal’ model
- the purpose and aims of programs are understood
- gifted and talented student needs are understood.

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

DECS works continuously to build the capacity of every teacher to
unleash the learning potential of all students including those who are
gifted and talented. The South Australian Teaching for Effective
Learning (TfEL) Framework and professional development program
currently being implemented across South Australia is aimed at engaging
all learners, through a focus on personalisation and connecting
curriculum to the learner’s world.
Personalising learning requires teachers to understand each individual and respond to their learning needs, including gifted and talented students. TfEL supports a differentiated curriculum with high expectations for all students with appropriate support.

The Gifted Education Research, Resource and Information Centre (GERRIC) Australia wide teacher education program provided many schools and teachers in South Australia with an improved capacity to respond to gifted and talented students. This initiative launched many gifted and talented programs throughout South Australia and encouraged many DECS staff members to undertake post-graduate courses in Gifted Education at the Flinders University.

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

The broader implications of programs for gifted and talented students in DECS' schools are the benefits that arise for the whole student cohort within a school.

In schools with programs where additional specialist resources have been acquired the whole school community has access to the facilities. For example the Special Interest Music Centre program established in the mid 1970s while targeting specialist music students, enables all students undertaking music at the site to access specialist buildings, technology and highly trained staff. There are also benefits for non-specialist music students to participate in numerous ensembles and perform in out-of-hours performances.

In specialist sport, language and music programs, peer mentoring, tutoring and role modelling have great benefits to non-specialist students.

In Ignite schools, all students benefit from whole staff comprehensive training and development programs that are designed for the teaching of gifted students. However, the knowledge put into practice benefits all. The training and development includes developing a deeper understanding about how all students learn, including brain theory, higher order thinking and models of differentiations.

The schools also provide sharing and planning time for teachers in learning areas to improve their curriculum and integrate thinking skills more broadly. The sharing of teaching and learning and joint planning benefits all students.

Thank you for the opportunity to contribute to the Inquiry.