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

May 30, 2011

Re: Inquiry into the Education of Gifted and Talented Students

As a secondary teacher who has been investigating Gifted and Talented programs in Victorian public schools for the last twelve months, and as the parent of a student in a Victorian public school SEAL program, I wish to take the opportunity you have provided to share with you my observations of such programs, detailed below. I wish to also raise the following concerns regarding the education of gifted and talented students in Victorian public schools.

I find it of concern that there are no fixed guidelines for schools, nor consistency across Regions, in terms of the programs run, the testing used, or any other criteria that must be met in terms of program entry, or curricula (including acceleration or extension), for gifted and talented students. There is not even a clear definition of what a gifted and/or talented student is. Why can’t NAPLAN sittings incorporate a component to test for giftedness? Students are already organised state-wide to be tested, why can’t this setting be utilised? In regard to curriculum, the National Curriculum should incorporate a nation-wide curriculum for gifted and talented students, where no student is left behind, and every school in on the ‘same page’.

I also find it of concern that the culture remains in some schools, and with some teachers, that gifted and talented students do not need to be, or should not be catered for. Most disturbing is the culture in some schools, and with some teachers, that students in low socio-economic areas don’t need a program for gifted and talented students, as none would qualify.

There is no requirement in any teaching qualification (degree or diploma) to address the needs, or identification of, gifted and talented students. We are rightly provided with Professional Learning and strategies to support students at risk, however, when it comes to gifted students, there is little to no professional learning available – it’s clear the educators need to be educated.

If gifted students are identified, what happens to them then is dependent upon where they live, and/or their socio-economic backgrounds. There is no one body in this state, or country, that is easily identifiable, to assist these students so they all receive the same opportunities. If they are athletically gifted, there is the Institute of Sport. In Victoria, there are some schools that cater for these students, but these schools are neither evenly distributed across the State, nor financially accessible in terms of, for example, subsidised public transport, available for students from low socio-economic situations.
Giftedness, as is the term of this inquiry, like disease, does not discriminate. It can sometimes be hereditary, sometimes it is not, and it can occur in someone from any background, and any socio-economic circumstance, including those newly arrived in this country. These students are not adequately catered for, and most are never identified. There is no standard testing, it occurs randomly and often is parent-instigated. What if a parent doesn’t know what giftedness is? Why should there be highly intelligent students from ESL, regional and low socio-economic areas never identified as gifted, and their intelligence never given any opportunities? I welcome an inquiry such as this, in the hope that such issues may be addressed and some consistency in this matter established in terms of testing, program and opportunities.

We are a great sporting nation. Why can’t we be an intelligent nation too?