Rosebud Secondary College

Submission to the ‘Parliamentary Inquiry into the Education of Gifted and Talented Students.’

May 31st, 2011.

Written by:
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Rosebud Secondary College
Parliamentary Inquiry into the Education of Gifted and Talented Students.

1. The program currently being provided by Rosebud Secondary College

As it stands, the SEAL program at Rosebud Secondary College expects students to complete Years 7 to 10 in three years. In effect they will complete four terms’ work in three terms, for each of three years.

A range of people including parents, teachers or peers can nominate students wishing to join this program. A selection committee is drawn from the staff of Rosebud Secondary College who oversee the actual identification process. Year 6 students from our main feeder schools are often identified by their teachers and encouraged to contact the SEAL Coordinator in order to apply for consideration for entry into the SEAL program. Students from outside the traditional feeder sources may also contact the school for consideration, for example new families moving to the area. Word of mouth plays a role here, with the SEAL program seemingly being held in high regard in the broader community.

The initial selection process starts with the premise that we are looking to cater for new Year 7 students entering the college, identified as being suitable to work at a significantly higher level and faster pace than others of the same chronological age. This links to the stated vision of the Rosebud Secondary College to provide a curriculum that, “... will enable all students to achieve their best in learning, personal and social development by providing a learning development that is safe, engaging and stimulating.”

The expectation is that the students entering the SEAL program are expected to demonstrate the following qualities:

- be academically gifted - in approximately the top 20% of students of their age.
- be motivated and interested
- demonstrate a commitment to completing set tasks
- be creative, quick and flexible thinkers able to find new meanings and deal with new relationships
- have a strong self-concept
- have supportive parents/guardians

The students in this program will be encouraged to be involved in a range of school activities. This is seen as especially important for their social development and students would have the same rights of access as other students. Activities might include music, interschool sport, student leadership and dramatic productions.

As well, these students are expected to be involved in the Australian Mathematics and English Competitions, the Science Competition and other avenues which are judged as providing suitable support for the work they are undertaking.
The formal selection process is as follows:

1. **Intelligence/Achievement Test(s):**
   The current testing procedures involve initially assessing student suitability for consideration for the program via the use of University of New South Wales, Year 6 General Achievement Test. This test focuses on the key errors of language convention, written language skills, reading comprehension, basic scientific concepts, numeracy skills and logical reasoning.

2. **Teacher evaluation form:**
   After the initial testing (usually around 55 students sit the initial test), the top thirty students are selected for the next phase of the selection process. This involves contacting the Year 6 teachers of these students and providing them with a pro-forma, asking for their perceptions of these students in a range of areas. This form seeks to garner knowledge regarding ideas relating to how students learn, their motivation and their involvement in the school community beyond the realm of academic success.

3. **Parent evaluation form**
   This is a chance for parents to present their perceptions as to how their child may benefit from involvement in a SEAL program. This again seeks to look at the student’s broader involvement in their community (interests and achievements) and to build a broader image of the student.

4. **Interviews of parents or guardians and students**
   There are two key components to this interview. Firstly, it is an opportunity for the college to elaborate upon the advantages and expectations of the SEAL program and secondly, it allows the prospective parent and/or student to air any concerns or further their understanding as to how the program operates. This process also allows the college to view evidence of achievement, though work samples or projects the student may bring, have conversations about their interests in sport, performing arts, literature etc., and gain an impression of the students social confidence and skills.

5. **Self-evaluation form**
   This allows the prospective student to provide some information as to how they believe they can benefit from inclusion in an accelerated program.

The College makes the final decision about which students are to be offered entry to the program. Students entering the program late will have similar procedures to go through and all students have ongoing evaluation of their progress and welfare.

Rarely, circumstances may arise where a student may be removed from the SEAL program. This can occur for a range of reasons, mostly relating to personal, academic or behavioural factors. The college does not take decisions to remove students from the program lightly. Where possible, the program coordinator and the broader college community will look at whatever strategies are suitable to keep students in the SEAL program. There will always be
cases, however, where this is not possible and the student may need to be removed either for their benefit or the benefit of the other students.

The aims of the program are:

- to create a more challenging learning environment
- to provide proficiency in the basic curriculum
- to expand the horizons of the most able students in the future

The students will undertake a compacted curriculum in five of the Key Learning Areas.

These areas are:

- English
- Mathematics
- Science
- Studies of Society and Environment
- Languages other than English (LOTE)*

* Students are accelerated in Indonesian or Japanese, alternating with each starting year, but will have ongoing access to courses in both Indonesian and Japanese at higher levels.

Students will complete the standard Years 7 to Year 9/10 courses in the other learning areas of Arts, Technology, Physical Education and Health where they are mixed with other students as far as possible.

At the end of Year 9, those students who have successfully completed the expectations of the SEAL program have a range of options open to them. These options reflect the notion that these students effectively have a year ‘up their sleeve.’

On completion of the program students will have a choice of the following:

- Complete VCE in two years and progress directly to tertiary studies
- Complete a three year VCE with extra units such as a second LOTE
- Complete a three year VCE combined with university enhancement courses
- Complete a three year VCE combined with a Dual Recognition course
- Complete a two year VCE and have a year as an exchange student
- Complete a two year VCE, defer tertiary studies, and work for a year
- Complete a three year VCE with part year 10 and part VCE
- Complete a standard year 10 then a two year VCE
2. The experiences and issues surrounding these programs

The initial selection procedures for the SEAL program examine the students across a range of core skills such as logical reasoning, literacy and numeracy. Other filters such as interviews, school reports and viewing student work samples are also applied. It does not always follow that the SEAL program attracts the best and brightest across all curriculum areas. The development of any student’s intellect is never a stable linear progression. To expect a Year 6 student who may be performing well above the levels of their peers to be excelling to the same degree in Year 9 may not always follow.

We are dealing with youngsters who are often going through the turmoils of puberty and this can greatly impact their physical and intellectual development. Competencies can plateau, meaning that while students may be ahead at Year 6, this may not last. There are also examples where parents have chosen not to apply for their child to be part of the SEAL program, even though it is anecdotally evident that they could be a successful candidate. Some parents have expressed the view that they see such programs as ‘hothouses,’ adding undue pressure onto children. Others I have spoken to have said they believe SEAL students to be socially isolated from their peers and don’t want this for their child. It is vital that we provide for these students in the mainstream.

In relation to the testing content, there have been some issues raised regarding how best to select the students for the SEAL classes. In using the University of NSW Year 6 GAT, we are looking at a broad skills base in the students who apply. I have received some specific feedback from the science KLA who have expressed the view that our current procedures do not attract the ‘best or brightest’ science students. This is obviously something we will need to look at.

Taking a brief overview of VCE results across all students, our programs of enrichment are successful in ‘value adding’ to the academic achievements of these students. Students in the SEAL program achieved median ATAR scores on average around 20 points higher than the whole school cohort. (See SEAL Program Review 2010- attached as an appendix) This document outlines the performance of the SEAL class in relation to the rest of the Year 12 students across a range of different variables. A similar trend is apparent in those students who are placed into the Year 10 Advanced classes.

3. The experiences of students participating in these programs

In seeking to understand the experiences of students who are currently participating in, or who have participated in, the SEAL program at Rosebud; I asked students at different levels to provide feedback. This came to me from students expressing their ideas in writing or through casual conversations.
On the whole, the feedback I received from students was positive. They appreciated the opportunities that the SEAL structure provided for their academic development and felt that it had improved their opportunities for success in VCE and beyond. They felt that their teachers had worked very hard in providing these opportunities. This was particularly true in relation to students who struggled with some areas of the curriculum. Obviously, the SEAL students are not a homogenous group. Their academic and social development is as variable as any comparable group of students in their year level. Many of the students spoke of this and felt very supported in their endeavours by both their peers and teachers. On the whole, they reported teachers had a good knowledge of who they were and recognised their individual strengths and weaknesses. They acknowledged they sometimes needed to be pushed to achieve, again appreciating the efforts of the teacher to help them to improve their skills in a particular subject.

Further to this, most students I spoke to recognised the advantage for them in being grouped with students who shared similar aspirational attitudes for academic success. They felt protected without being isolated from their year level. No one that I received feedback from reported negative treatment or bullying from other students. Many had taken on leadership roles within the college and these were often peer selected. They felt very much a part of the school community and revelled in the opportunities provide through, in particular, sport and performing arts.

Some spoke of the sense of pride they felt in being considered intelligent or ‘smart’ by their peers. They often felt lucky that they had not had been exposed to the some of the negative behaviours their peers were exposed to in mainstream classes. Everyone that I spoke to felt that the SEAL program had helped them to be more successful than what they would otherwise have been in a mainstream setting.

Older students, currently in years 11 and 12, were very happy with the opportunity of having the extra year to pursue other interests. This aspect of the program was seen by many as the greatest advantage for SEAL students. This allowed them to pursue subjects that they may not have any vocational aspirations towards, however allowed them to pursue an interest or passion. They also felt privileged that they were under less pressure to make choices too early.

The negative aspects reported by SEAL students centred around the issues of workload and opportunity. Some students felt overwhelmed at various times by the workload expected in some subject areas. These feelings often related to the subject areas students felt least capable in and were not focussed on one particular subject or teacher. The students were very self critical and looked at any medium rated performance on their part as tantamount to failure.

In relation to opportunity, several students felt that they should be allowed to drop their LOTE subject at the end of Year 9 and pursue other electives. They expressed frustration at
being forced to continue with a subject they felt did not feature in their future plans. No one expressed this sentiment in relation to any other subject.

4. **How the college views the concepts ‘giftedness’ and ‘talent’**

As mentioned earlier, it is a stated objective of the college’s curriculum that it “... will enable all students to achieve their best in learning, personal and social development by providing a learning development that is safe, engaging and stimulating.” All KLAs and the teachers working within them are expected to provide assessment tasks that allow each student to reach their potential in each class. In terms of the specifics relating to these concepts, it would be fair to say that the SEAL program is perceived as the key factor in meeting the needs of these students. While other students outside the program may be recognised as ‘gifted’ or ‘talented’ within these classes, there is no formal process in collating information on this group. At the Year 10 level, ‘advanced’ courses are offered to students who have demonstrated a consistently superior skills base in. They are subject to the same assessment and reporting procedures as all other students. Students may be identified as being suitable for particular courses by teachers and, in consultation with the course counselling process, may be offered other opportunities.

Other specific courses and programs are offered for ‘talented’ and ‘gifted’ students in a variety of areas. Enrichment programs are offered to high achievers and talented students such as: National Youth Science Forum, United Nations Challenge, Debating, Lion’s Youth of the Year, University of NSW Maths and English competitions, performing arts competitions (eg State Schools Spectacular, Rock Eisteddfod and music camps. Student mentoring at senior levels allows students to form meaningful relationships with subject teachers. Statistically, mentored students achieve higher ATAR scores than those who are not.

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

While there are no specific mechanisms to identify or label a student as ‘gifted’ or ‘talented’ in a particular area, assessment procedures will expose these students as they progress through the school. As discussed previously, there are a range of opportunities provided by the college to meet their potential.

SEAL students require and expect their teachers to be passionate and expert in their subject areas. These classes are staffed by teachers who choose to work within the SEAL program. It logically follows that these teachers are interested in the teaching of gifted and talented students.

The SEALP coordinator attends four SEAL Professional Learning days per year provided by DEECD. The information is reported to staff at team meetings and through other forums.
There is certainly room to extend the range and scope of such professional learning opportunities to all teachers.

6. The broader implications for school communities arising from the education of gifted and talented students.

Gifted students are a group of students with special needs and should not be expected to fend for themselves. Like low achieving or physically disabled students they should be resourced appropriately so that they can achieve their potential. Mainstream programs may not meet the needs of these students.

On a positive note, providing a meaningful program for gifted and talented students across all areas of the school community, as well as those in the SEAL program, enriches the college. Without such enrichment, the aspirations of students may stagnate. The school benefits by having a stronger presence in the community and a reputation for excellence in many areas. This benefits us all.
Appendix:
REAL RETENTION:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>7B 2005-2010</th>
<th>RSC 2010</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>YEAR 7-12</td>
<td>73%</td>
<td>45.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>YEAR 7-10</td>
<td>73%</td>
<td>75.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>YEAR 10-12 (VCE)</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>67.3%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The group lost seven students prior to the end of Year 10, which is historically quite high for the program. All students who began their VCE at RSC did successfully complete it. Geran _____ completed his Year 12 in 2008 in order to pursue his motor-cross career. While he is included in the retention data, his academic results were included in the 2009 report.

ACADEMIC RESULTS – ATAR SCORES:

(NB: SEAL data is included in the whole cohort data)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>7B 2005-2010</th>
<th>RSC 2010</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>&gt;90</td>
<td>16.60%</td>
<td>5.06%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>80-89</td>
<td>27.70%</td>
<td>10.76%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>70-79</td>
<td>22%</td>
<td>15.19%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>60-69</td>
<td>16.60%</td>
<td>18.35%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>50-59</td>
<td>5.50%</td>
<td>21.51%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>40-49</td>
<td>11%</td>
<td>13.92%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>30-39</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>10.12%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20-29</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>2.53%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10-19</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>2.53%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>&lt;10</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The number of students with ATAR (ENTER) scores over 90 was significantly lower than 2009. Of the 11 students who achieved 90+ scores, 3 of these came from the SEAL group. This equates to 37.5% of the highest scores coming from this group. In 2009, this figure was 50%. The 80-89 score grouping follows a similar pattern. The percentages for both groups were lower than last year. Of the 22 students who performed in this rage, 5 came from the SEAL group. It is also important to note that 3 students achieved ATAR scores under 59. In 2009 there were no students in this category, while in 2008 6% of SEAL students achieved scores of 50-59, with none under 50. It would be necessary to examine each student’s course and expectations in relation to ATAR scores to draw any further conclusions in relation to this information.
**MEDIAN ATAR SCORES:**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>7B 2007</th>
<th>7B 2008</th>
<th>7B 2009</th>
<th>7B 2010</th>
<th>RSC 2010</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Median score</td>
<td>79.65</td>
<td>82.70</td>
<td>83.35</td>
<td>77.55</td>
<td>59.95</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

These figures again reflect the higher achievement level of the SEAL students in 2010. Although the SEAL student median score is significantly lower than the previous two years, the roughly 20 point difference between SEAL students and the whole RSC cohort is consistent with those years shown.

It is interesting to note the effects of mentoring when considering the median scores for the SEAL students. Those SEAL students who were mentored achieved a median ATAR score of 84.60. This is significantly higher than the 77.55 result for the whole class. These figures are probably a reflection of the eagerness of the students to do well by availing themselves of the guidance of teachers who they feel will assist them. It is also likely that the mentors have been able to ‘value add’ to the students own efforts by providing strategies and support throughout the year. It may be worth examining this in relation to the whole Year 12 cohort.

**STUDY SCORES (Raw, not scaled)**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>7B 2007</th>
<th>7B 2008</th>
<th>7B 2009</th>
<th>7B 2010</th>
<th>RSC 2010</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>&gt;40</td>
<td>5.5%</td>
<td>1.1%</td>
<td>8.6%</td>
<td>5.70%</td>
<td>2.10%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>&gt;35</td>
<td>33%</td>
<td>7.2%</td>
<td>15.7%</td>
<td>26.01%</td>
<td>18.05%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

English scores are well represented in both the >40 and >35 categories, with 31.5% of >35 scores coming from this subject. Other scores are spread across all subject areas with no discernable pattern evident. The only exception to this is Maths (Further/ Specialist/ Methods) where there is only one score above 35 in the whole SEAL cohort.

It is important to remember that these scores are raw and many may be scaled up into these categories after final calculations are made. As in previous years, the study scores for subjects completed in Year 11 have been included in the final year scores.

**GAT SUMMARY:**

(These results based on raw/ mean scores)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>SEAL</th>
<th>School</th>
<th>State</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Written Communication</td>
<td>26.38</td>
<td>21.53</td>
<td>21.64</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Maths/Science/Tech.</td>
<td>24.67</td>
<td>19.79</td>
<td>20.03</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Humanities/Arts/Soc. Sci.</td>
<td>23.61</td>
<td>19.05</td>
<td>18.84</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
This is the first time these results have been included in the SEAL report so it is not possible to comment on previous year’s results.

While it is not necessarily possible to determine the expected performance in specific subjects to GAT scores, it is clear that the SEAL group’s skills in the broad categories tested in the GAT are significantly stronger than both the school mean and state mean.

This data seemingly follows the same pattern as the median ATAR scores, however it is not possible to correlate these results absolutely without looking at individual student performance in both these areas.

**VCAL / VET:**

There were no SEAL students completing either VCAL or VET courses in 2010.

**DESTINATION DATA:**

Alex ____ - Left at end of 2005 / mainstream

Blake ____ - Left at end of 2005 / mainstream

Jessica ____ - Left at end of 2006 / Flinders Christian College

Justin ____ - Left during 2007 / Westernport Secondary College

Gabrielle ____ - Left at end of 2007 / Frankston High School

Jessica ____ - Left at end of 2007 / Frankston High School


**NAPLAN DATA:**

**7B 2008 / 9B 2010**-

The data for this class demonstrates a strong performance across all areas of assessment against Victorian state-wide standards. One interesting issue, however, is the performance of the 9B boys in writing where 4% achieved scores ‘AT’ the National Minimum Standard. Writing appears to have been the biggest challenge for this group overall as well. This observation was made by HRI in last year’s report and perhaps represents a challenge for teachers across all KLAs to look at how to improve in this area.

In relation to the Student Comparison Report (Year 7 2008 to Year 9 2010), there was a generally strong correlation of results between the Year 7 and Year 9 results for each student. Some anomalies are evident, with writing again being the area where most students received negative comparison results.
The NAPLAN results for this group demonstrate scores across all areas of assessment that are generally above expected performance levels. This is to be expected of a group selected on their academic abilities around this level. There are some areas that stand out as needing attention. Grammar and punctuation seems to be an issue for several students and writing again seems to be a problem also.
I feel that the ‘B’ program has been beneficial to my learning. It has helped me to widen my learning areas and helped me to find new skills that I wouldn’t have had the chance to discover in mainstream. At some stages it has been hard but I think the hard work will all pay off in the end.

Being in the ‘B’ class has helped me to develop a lot of great friendships within the class with other class mate because we have been together for 3 years now. We all get along so well and we have learned to put aside one another’s differences.

I think the subject variety in the accelerated program are quite well picked, although; I think that it would be great to have more electives so we can still have the chance to experience different subjects and have the chance to drop our language (Indonesian).

I have enjoyed the ‘B’ class immensely. It has been one of the best choices I have ever made. It has helped me to find traits in myself that I didn’t know I had and it has stretched me to achieve higher results.

I think there is still ways to improve the S.E.A.L program such as giving us a few study periods a cycle to complete work that we need to catch up on. This would also help us to get the individual help needed from teachers. I also think that the ‘B’ class should be more involved with the other year 9’s. We sort of got isolated from the rest of the year level and labelled as the ‘B’s’.

Thank you for taking the time to read my feedback, and please consider the last paragraph because i know a lot of us have the same view (: