Submission to the Victorian Parliament Education Committee Inquiry into the Education of Gifted and Talented Students.

That we are not adequately catering for our gifted or brighter students is evident in the analysis of the TIMSS\(^1\) data. In his address at the Mathematics Association of Victoria’s Annual Conference 2008, Professor Barry McGaw (Chair of the Interim National Curriculum Board) traced Australia’s results over the three studies and pointed to the reason for our fall in rank: the performance of our highest achieving students has fallen in comparison to those students in many other countries.

The MAV believes that all students should have access to the best possible mathematics teaching and that all students should be in an environment where they can achieve to their highest potential. This includes students who have been identified as gifted.

Recommendations:

1. There is a body of research that provides a background for the pedagogy of teaching mathematics to highly able students. MAV recommends that this research be studied as a component of pre-service education and that all teachers have access to and Professional Development in this area.

2. There are many models in place which provide for the needs of these students. Broadly speaking, they are extension, and enrichment, mentoring, acceleration and individual programs, with none of these being mutually exclusive. MAV recommends that all schools have the facility to implement whichever is appropriate for particular students. Recent research by John Hattie (University of Melbourne) strongly supports acceleration as an option, something which has not been looked on favorably over recent years.

3. Any special program for a group of students needs resourcing. Funding needs to be at an appropriate level so that schools can provide staff and materials for these students.

4. MAV commends the list of resources detailed on the Department of School Education website and encourages all teachers to access these.

5. MAV commends the recent Government initiatives of establishing specialist high schools which by definition cater for the needs of some of our most able students. However, these do not necessarily cater for all as many are not identified by the selection processes employed by these schools.

\(^1\) TIMSS – Trends in International Mathematics and Science Study
6. While acknowledging the research which commends acceleration and like-grouping of highly able students, MAV points to other research which supports the opposite view. It is important that any decisions made on what is effectively streaming are cognizant of the needs of all students of mathematics.

Ms Elizabeth Burns and Dr Max Stephens for MAV Council