This submission responds to the recent invitation from the Education and Training Committee with regards to the Education of Gifted and Talented Students. As someone who has been a student in gifted programs, a generalist classroom teacher, a Gifted and Talented program coordinator, a facilitator of holiday programs for gifted students, an education officer supporting teachers with the implementation of gifted programs and the parent of a toddler showing clear signs of giftedness, I wish to make the following points:

**Maternal Child Health Nurses require urgent professional development in identifying children who are gifted, not just children with developmental delay**

With nine scheduled visits in every child’s first 3.5 years of life, the Maternal Child Health Nurse is in possibly the most privileged position to note advanced early development.

However, common protocol for appointments involves checking off a child’s skills (observed and reported) against the developmental milestones in the Child Health Record and eliminating any parent concerns raised on the PEDS Response Forms.

A child demonstrating all skills listed at a given age is viewed as a success, ‘free’ of the need for early intervention. It is rare for a Maternal Child Health Nurse to assess a child against the set of milestones for an older child and even rarer for one to mention giftedness, give parents a checklist of indicators of giftedness in preschoolers or suggest further testing.

Yet if a child shows developmental delay or traits consistent with a disorder of childhood such as autism, how very different the response is. The suspected condition is discussed with parents at length, referrals to specialists organised and follow-up planned.

Professional development for Maternal Child Health Nurses in the area of giftedness would greatly enhance their ability to identify - and support the parents of - gifted children.

**Early learning programs specifically designed for gifted students are required in order to nurture these children’s gifts and talents**

The plethora of enrichment activities for preschoolers (Gymbaroo, Mini Maestros, Letterland etc) belies the fact that there are no early learning programs specifically designed for gifted children. A handful of parent-organised playgroups for gifted children exist; however, these have no endorsement from government, schools or a gifted and talented association.

Just as there are early intervention services for children with autism, hearing impairment and social disadvantage, so too should there be legitimate opportunities for gifted children to access specialist (gifted) teachers and curriculum tailored to their unique needs. It is discriminatory to offer early intervention services to address the needs of children demonstrating developmental delay while expecting gifted preschoolers to wait a few years for their needs to be properly addressed (when they start school, assuming their school is ‘best practice’ in the area of gifted education).
The establishment of regional ‘Centres for Advanced Child Development’ and / or selective kindergartens would be two options to consider here.

**Early childhood educators require professional development on catering for the needs of gifted children, particularly in the context of play-based learning programs that don’t encourage academic progression**

The academic rigour of secondary schools and upper primary classrooms is quite foreign to most early learning centres and junior primary grades. Young gifted students who have mastered a skill are often encouraged (by teachers with little or no understanding of Gifted and Talented Education) to keep practising it, help other children learn it or try a different activity rather than master a more difficult skill associated with the first.

While play is an essential part of childhood, the current trend towards play-based learning in kindergartens and preschools is concerning : it does little to encourage gifted students to challenge themselves academically or master new material at the pace at which they are capable.

**All Australian universities offering teacher training should include a unit in gifted education as part of each course**

Special Education (remedial) seems to be regarded as a staple unit in tertiary teaching degrees but not Gifted and Talented Education. In some cases, the latter is touched upon in one lecture out of a semester-long unit. This is not sufficient coverage of a subject which affects approximately one student out of every class.

**Schools and teachers need to be expected (by Education Departments) to cater for the needs of gifted children without parents of gifted children needing to advocate**

It is usually the parent of a gifted child who ends up advocating for his or her child’s right to a challenging education. Neither the parent of a special needs child nor the parent of a child of average ability is required to argue his or her case for an appropriate education. It is expected.

**Schools or the Education Department should meet the costs involved in the identification of - and provision for – gifted learners.**

Again, common practice in this area is inconsistent with the support given to children with learning deficits. In those cases, the school funds the necessary tests and receives funding for the child’s educational support. With a gifted child, the parents are often expected to organise and fund IQ testing privately and in some cases (e.g. the Wise Ones gifted program) contribute towards the cost of meeting their gifted child’s academic needs. This is on top of regular school fees.
Selective schooling needs to be available for students earlier than Year Nine

The selective school model (e.g. MacRobertson Girls High and Melbourne High) has existed for many years, with great success. Why then is it only limited to students in Years Nine to Twelve? By about Grade Two, the precocity of a gifted child has become evident to teachers. These children must then bide their time in an often unchallenging mainstream setting for another seven years before they receive an appropriate education.

All school systems require funding earmarked to support schools with gifted and talented Education

For many years, the government has funded schools to offer a Language Other Than English. It is equally necessary to fund schools to support gifted students through the employment of a qualified Gifted and Talented Coordinator at each school who can develop a program or provisions appropriate to the needs of their student body.

Low SES schools (government, Catholic and independent) require extra funding to assist with gifted education

As there is so little funding available to support gifted education, schools are forced to fund specialist staff and programs themselves. Unfortunately, it becomes a self-fulfilling prophecy whereby private schools are able to find the money for a G and T program which makes them attractive to the parents of gifted students so the school develops a reputation for gifted education which draws further enrolments etc.

There needs to be an accreditation system to show parents objectively which schools are most likely to meet their gifted child’s needs

In Melbourne, for example, Camelot Rise Primary School in Glen Waverley is hailed as the government school of choice for gifted students. Parents have been known to move into the area to send their gifted child there. What we as the general public do not know, however, is if the school is indeed superior at catering for gifted students or simply brilliant at marketing itself as catering for gifted students. If it is indeed, best practice, this knowledge should be shared with other schools to benefit children who do not live in the Glen Waverley area.

Just as there are ‘Waterwise schools’ or ‘Safety House’ venues which have achieved accreditation against a specific set of criteria, so too should there be Gifted and Talented specialist schools which have demonstrated (and continue to demonstrate) best practice in the area of gifted and talented education.