INTRODUCTION

I am the mother of two gifted children. According to Porter (2005) there is a proponderance of those achieving just below the 5% level (ie. IQ) and so they are more likely to have their needs met within education and social settings naturally, than those in the upper 5%.

DEFINITION OF “GIFTEDNESS”

Giftedness for the purposes of this submission would include only the top 3-5% by their IQ scores (that is IQ scores above 130) in the gifted range because they are the group that will encounter difficulties with educational provisions which have not been modified to meet their needs. But it can be assumed to be that students in this range of exceptionally or profoundly gifted are extremely rare (at the most 3 in 100,000 Porter 2005) which makes them difficult to recognize as most teachers will go through their whole teaching career without ever encountering one. Exceptionally gifted children are extremely advanced across most developmental domains, extremely early (Gross 2004). According to Porter (2005), they may acquire talking, walking and reading skills early but compounding this, they then advance so quickly that some developmental stages are almost imperceptible. At two years old my son was visiting the library and borrowing books from the Adult Section. “These young students are more isolated from their peers and receive an educational program that does not routinely meet their learning needs (Porter 2005).” According to Porter (2005) although not a perfect measure of intellectual giftedness and although individuals are often gifted in domains other than intellectual, levels of giftedness are often denoted by their IQ scores.

Socially these children have interests, hobbies, and friendships and that are more typical of children 5 years older than them. According to Porter the wider the discrepancy between their skill levels and those of their age peers means their social isolation is more pronounced than for children with lesser levels of giftedness.

Recommendation 1. The group of gifted children most in need of services are the exceptionally and profoundly gifted students.

According to Porter (2005) there is a proponderance of those achieving just below the 5% level (ie. IQ) and so they are more likely to have their needs met within education and social settings naturally, than those in the upper 5%.
extreme form-teachers may not know to offer very advanced learning experiences, particularly if they hang back from experiences or are non-conformists. This makes it extremely important that parents document their children’s skills and for assessment to include IQ because teachers may overlook them.”

**Recommendation 2. In my view these exceptionally gifted children learn best if they are able to follow their own interests and teachers facilitate this.** Facilitation is an idea that doesn’t fit easily with current educational practices which are curriculum and results driven. The level of creativity and the drive to express this is one of the qualities that is a unique characteristic in degree to this group. It needs a different approach and if it is suppressed the child becomes depressed or is more likely to misbehave. According to Porter (2005), the ‘learning style the exceptionally gifted have been described as possessing is a strong-even stubborn- goal orientation, being intensely driven to utilise their skills, with a ‘rage’ or vital urge to master (Gross 2004).’ My son creates his own learning goals and strategies for learning them with great stamina, energy and commitment to the process.

This capacity and internal need to seek out his own learning, which is a characteristic of profoundly gifted children, goes against the way most teachers define their roles, which is to impart knowledge to their students rather than to enable learning by providing resources, support, and encouragement which is what these children need.

- needs to be child centred rather than teacher-centred
- encourage independence rather than dependence.
- be open rather than closed,
- be accepting instead of judgemental,
- be complex and abstract instead of simple and concrete,
- permit and encourage high mobility instead of low mobility.

**Recommendation 3. For many exceptionally gifted children a different approach is needed to engage the child other than a disciplinary approach this could take the form of negotiation and requires flexibility.** Freeman, (2000) observed that children who achieve at high levels are typically curious, with a hunger to learn and a strong need to control. Porter (2005) says that ‘although these traits foster high achievement, they can simultaneously create conflict with authoritarian disciplinarians at home or school.’ I think the disciplinarian approach adopted towards my child at the kinder and later at primary school was an important factor in the difficulties he encountered. These factors contributed to his anxiety and unhappiness and lowered his self-esteem. Porter’s research (1999) is supported by the research of Crockenberg and Litman, (1990), she concludes, ‘that when mothers (or teachers) exercise restrictive control over their gifted children the children become defiant, uncooperative, withdrawn, anxious, unhappy, hostile when frustrated and unwilling to persist at tasks’. Our child learnt in this year to hide his abilities and keep a low profile.

**Recommendation 4. To be able to identify exceptionally gifted children it is important for teachers to spend time getting to know each student.** When our son had a teacher who took the time to get to know each of her students he felt more
confident about showing some of his abilities along with being a more active member of the group. This teacher then suggested he needed to have testing to see what level he was functioning at. This suggestion was based on her observations of his ability.

It was this observation and testing that enabled our son to be identified as gifted.

Recommendation 4. The psychological issues that the exceptionally gifted child presents need to be understood in terms of the their unusual circumstances and not be viewed as entirely an internal emotional problem. Porter (2005) has observed that “young gifted children develop deep attachments to their primary care givers but not a breadth of attachment to peers. This comes about not because they shun other people, but because the difference in development between themselves and their peers means that they do not learn that their peers could be a relevant source of intimacy for them. Whilst their thirst for stimulation means that they come to rely on their parent to translate the world to them and explain them to the world. The result is that they are more vulnerable if separated from the parent and less consoled by the presence of age mates. This is exacerbated if the intellectual demands of the setting are low. This reliance on the parent (in the absence of other deep relationships) means feeling the responsibility of being all things at all times for your child can be exhausting and worrying.” Also as a consequence of this huge emotional investment the separation at adolescence is intensely painful for both the caretaker and the child as they move on towards independence.

Recommendation 5. Support groups need to be set up for parents of exceptionally gifted children. Their problems are sufficiently different to warrant a separate group to other gifted parents groups. According to Porter (2005), Hall (1994) maintains ‘some of your (ie. parent’s of gifted children) most difficult moments can occur when talking to other parents whose children are not gifted learners’, Porter (2005) suggested that it is in the parent’s and the child’s interest to find people encountering similar situations for support and to keep a varied network of social contacts for yourself and your child. Some emotional support would be most welcome at this time but the inherent isolation of these families mean that the experience is quite the opposite no support is forthcoming. Our experience and that of other parents of highly gifted parents is that their experiences are seen to be sufficiently different to other parents of gifted children to warrant exclusion in that group.

Recommendation 6. There needs to be a body of workers with expertise in the area of educating exceptionally gifted children that parents of gifted children can go to for assistance when things aren't working within a school. At present if we needed a worker to come to the school to advocate for our children's needs we would have to pay $150 per hour. This, along with the fees for extra testing, the extra interests that these children need, etc is very expensive.
are high maintenance children. Parents often describe to me the extra effort required to keep their gifted child stimulated and the extra emotional guidance their child needs and constant advocacy.' Yet if we as parents tried to advocate for our child we were sometimes treated as if we didn't understand the child or received in a defensive manner because of the teacher's lack of understanding of the gifted child's special needs. According to Porter,'imagine a parent approached an early childhood educator to enrol a new child and advised that the child had cerebral palsy, I guarantee that the parent's report would not be met with: “There, there, dear. Everyone thinks their child has cerebral palsy.” But when parents report their child is gifted, this patronising message is a common response.'

**Recommendation 7.** Bullying is a key issue for profoundly gifted children in a society such as ours that does not accommodate excellence or difference readily. Our son experienced bullying in Primary school when he was accelerated. The school addressed this problem when it came to their attention.

These experiences we feel arise out of general feelings in our society which does not tolerate children who are more able than the general population (tall poppy syndrome). More training in gifted education for teaching staff and experience at managing acceleration could help in decreasing these negative attitudes towards gifted children. He has also been bullied when he was in settings with his peers and with family and friends. These experiences was not acceptable.

**Recommendation 8.** Teachers need to be trained to understand acceleration as a viable educational option for gifted students and understand how to incorporate this in their teaching practices.

According to Colangelo (2004)’ a common myth is that teachers and parents see acceleration as hurrying children through their childhood and the reality as determined by research is that acceleration is moving the child at an appropriate pace. By worrying about hurrying, a chance is missed to match the enthusiastic, passionate, bright child who has the ability to move ahead with the right curriculum. They ignore the bright student’s rage to learn.’ Colangelo et al (2004) has identified that ‘teachers are often concerned that acceleration will upset other children’ and says that ‘accelerating one or two children is unlikely to negatively affect the class.’ According to Colangelo et al (2004), most parents worry less about academic effects than about friends for their children. Studies show that accelerated students participate in school activities and view themselves positively. According to Gross (1999) research suggests that highly gifted children who are not accelerated are at a much greater risk of social isolation and emotional maladjustment through inappropriate placement with age peers. She says that opposition to special provisions for gifted students can arise from resentment towards high potential which is part of the tall poppy syndrome which Australia is renowned for. She says some teachers are against acceleration out of fear that it will place these able students at social and emotional damage if they are allowed to progress faster than their peers.

Our son was accelerated. Students with this age difference weren’t threatened by his abilities and were friendlier. He really enjoyed this experience and had a teacher who had had experience teaching another child who had been radically accelerated like our son. The teacher was completely relaxed about the subject acceleration and had no doubts about it.
working or about our son’s capacity to do the work. He also enjoyed our son's achievements in a quiet way. We were most fortunate to have our son at a school which provided flexibility and interest in helping him at each stage of his development and a willingness to accept that his educational needs change over time and that the school needed to be prepared to accommodate these changes to meet his individual needs. He went on to gradually increase the number of VCE subjects he did each year completing his VCE at years. You will note that for this child and children like him there was no need to sequentially learn these higher level school subjects or prepare skills, they learn quickly and not in the manner of most other children.

Gross (1999) reports that studies of the academic effects of radical acceleration provide strong evidence of positive outcomes for accelerated students. According to Colangelo et al (2004) Rogers (2002) undertook a research on a synthesis of studies on the academic effects of acceleration and found that accelerated students out performed non-accelerated ability-peers, regardless of which form of acceleration is employed. Gross (1999) reported on Holahan and Sears (1995) study which found that gifted children’s interests, attitudes and knowledge developed in correspondence with their mental age rather than their chronological age.

Recommendation 9. Universities need to be educated about the needs of gifted children and possibilities of fast tracking &/or acceleration need to be offered so these students stay engaged with the learning process. At university there is no room for my son to be treated as an individual in his degree and no provisions for his special abilities or needs nor opportunities for acceleration. I would hope that universities could learn about the special needs of highly gifted students especially those who are accelerated and make some attempt to meet those needs.