

Aiming High

A strategy for gifted and talented children and young people

2014 – 2019



VICTORIA
AS A LEARNING
COMMUNITY

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Ministers' Message

All children and young people are entitled to an education that is engaging, challenging and helps them reach their full potential. Yet, in Victoria, we have not always provided adequate learning opportunities for our most able and high-performing children and young people.

With the release of *Aiming High: A strategy for gifted and talented children and young people, 2014–19*, the Victorian Government is committing to a renewed focus on gifted and talented education. We will provide better opportunities for our gifted and talented children and young people, and greater support for their families, early childhood professionals, teachers and educational leaders. *Aiming High* is an important next step in creating a learning community that makes Victorian education even better.

Gifted and talented children and young people have outstanding potential or ability in one or more of a wide range of areas, such as literacy, numeracy, sport, music, visual and performing arts, a vocational area or leadership. While their ability is exceptional, gifted and talented children and young people, like all young people, need to be encouraged, challenged and inspired if they are to reach their potential.

Drawing on the findings of the Parliament of Victoria's *Inquiry into the Education of Gifted and Talented Students* (2012), we know what we must do to support gifted and talented learners. Our vision is that all gifted and talented children and young people are identified, no matter what their cultural, language or socioeconomic background, or where they live. We must provide them with differentiated learning experiences and acceleration and extension opportunities, so that gifted and talented learners are challenged and have the chance to

connect with 'like minds' and experts. We have to support the social and emotional development of our highest achievers, too.

In addition, we must work in partnership with families and tap into their rich knowledge and insights about their gifted and talented children. We have to provide early childhood professionals, teachers and educational leaders with the information, resources and professional learning they require to support gifted and talented learners. And we must build community understanding, so that children and young people with exceptional ability across all domains feel valued and supported as they pursue excellence.

Much is at stake in the education of our gifted and talented children and young people. In the absence of challenging and appropriate learning experiences, the gifted and talented can become bored or frustrated, disengage from learning, and experience anxiety, depression or psychological distress. The sense that they could have achieved more in their area of ability is a burden they may carry for many years.

On the other hand, if the abilities of gifted and talented children and young people are recognised and fostered, the benefits for the individual are significant. The chance to realise their potential, pursue a passion and develop a love of learning all stem from quality learning opportunities for the gifted and talented. More broadly, gifted and talented education promises benefits for our society and economy. From business to politics, the arts and sport, gifted and talented children and young people are the potential leaders of tomorrow.

Aiming High outlines why we must act to strengthen gifted and talented education and what we must do – we look forward to working with you to put the strategy into action.



The Hon Martin Dixon MP
Minister for Education



The Hon Wendy Lovell MP
Minister for Children and
Early Childhood Development



The Hon. Nick Wakeling MP
Minister for Higher Education
and Skills

1. Introduction

Aiming High: A strategy for gifted and talented children and young people, 2014 – 2019 outlines a number of actions that will be implemented over the next five years to support Victoria's gifted and talented children and young people to reach their potential.

The audience for the strategy is broad. It includes early childhood professionals, teachers and educational leaders, as well as gifted and talented children and young people, their parents, carers and families, and the wider community.

While the strategy relates primarily to early childhood settings and schools, it also addresses the critical points of transition into and between schools and on to vocational and higher education settings.

The strategy:

- defines what is meant by gifted and talented and affirms the importance of catering for this cohort in Victorian early childhood settings and schools
- describes existing opportunities for gifted and talented children and young people in Victoria
- outlines a range of new actions that will be undertaken to strengthen gifted and talented education in Victoria
- articulates expectations of educators, and the support and resources that families, educators, and children and young people can expect from the Department of Education and Early Childhood Development ('the Department').

Release of the strategy marks the culmination of a broad-ranging examination of how best to support Victorian gifted and talented children and young people to reach their potential.

In June 2012, the Education and Training Committee of the Parliament of Victoria released the report, *Inquiry into the Education of Gifted and Talented Students* (the Inquiry). The Inquiry examined gifted and talented education in early childhood settings, primary and secondary schools, drawing on evidence relating to the government, Catholic and independent sectors. It involved extensive engagement with educators, the families of gifted and talented children and young people, experts and other stakeholders and made 65 recommendations on how the education of gifted and talented learners could be improved.

In December 2012, the Victorian Government released its response to the Inquiry, supporting 63 of its 65 recommendations. The Government's commitment to a comprehensive policy response was confirmed with the release of the directions paper, *New Opportunities for the Gifted and Talented* in April 2013.

This strategy is the first policy statement on gifted and talented education to be released in Victoria in over a decade. It is long overdue. Victoria faces a number of challenges in the education of gifted and talented learners – while many children and young people have the opportunity to excel in their area of ability, some are missing out.

Aiming High places the education of gifted and talented children and young people back on the agenda for the Department, early childhood settings and schools. A coordinated approach, coupled with targeted support and resources, is necessary if we are to support and strengthen the abilities of gifted and talented children and young people.

The right learning opportunities can open up a world of possibilities for gifted and talented children and young people. Working together, early childhood professionals, teachers and educational leaders across the government, Catholic and independent sectors, families and communities can all help to ensure that gifted and talented children and young people have the chance they deserve to realise their potential.

A plan for action – At a glance

Engaging families and the community	Extending and supporting gifted and talented children and young people	Resources and capacity-building for early childhood professionals, teachers and leaders	Building the evidence base and evaluating our programs
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Actions

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Develop an identification toolkit for parents • Provide information to support parents and carers of gifted and talented children and young people, including Koorie parents, those from English as an Additional Language (EAL) backgrounds and parents of twice exceptional children and young people • Raise community awareness about the learning requirements of the gifted and talented and how these can be addressed • Support organisations that work with parents, families and carers of gifted and talented learners 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • \$1.2 million for educational and community organisations to develop and deliver high-quality extension programs for gifted and talented students • \$200,000 for selective entry high schools to provide outreach activities for Victorian students • Strengthen senior secondary pathways, with the introduction of the VCE (Baccalaureate) and Industry Pathways programs 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provide professional learning for early childhood professionals • Provide professional learning for teachers • Develop an identification toolkit for early childhood professionals and teachers • Publish a model school policy and provide best practice case studies and curriculum examples • Review and publish new guidelines for early entry to school and acceleration • Provide information and support to leaders in early childhood settings and schools • Build the capacity of careers practitioners and teachers to engage gifted and talented young people 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Review tools and strategies that support effective identification of gifted and talented children and young people • Review the SEAL program • Examine selection processes in selective entry high schools • Evaluate implementation of this strategy
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Directions for the longer term

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increase collaboration between gifted and talented learners and members of the community, business and industry 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provide more extended learning opportunities online • Develop opportunities for students who are gifted and talented in areas of applied learning • Work with universities to support early entrants to university 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Support gifted and talented education networks within and between early childhood settings and schools • Encourage postgraduate study in gifted education • Work with universities to encourage opportunities for pre-service learning in gifted and talented education 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Support early childhood settings and schools to evaluate their programs • Trial successful models for identification, curriculum and teaching for gifted and talented students
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2. Who are gifted and talented children and young people?

Gifted individuals possess outstanding natural intellectual, physical, creative or social abilities. Importantly, they may or may not be high achievers – gifted children or young people may have outstanding potential but be disengaged and under-achieving. While all gifted individuals have the potential to perform at a significantly higher level than their age-peers, their level of ability may be considered on a scale of mildly to extremely gifted. About 10–15 per cent of people may fall within the full range of gifted abilities, however high to extreme levels of giftedness are only prevalent in a very small proportion of the population (1-2 per cent) (Gagné, 2004).

Talented individuals are those who demonstrate outstanding mastery of systematically developed knowledge and skills in one or more areas. They typically develop these competencies through practice and are usually highly motivated and persistent in their endeavours (Gagné, 2004).

Aiming High adopts the widely accepted definition of giftedness and talent proposed by education researcher Professor François Gagné (2004¹), in which ‘giftedness’ is understood as outstanding potential and ‘talent’ as outstanding performance.

Importantly, Gagné suggests that a person’s environment, including their educational setting, as well as their personality and ‘chance occurrences’ play an important role in the transformation of gifts into talents. Motivation and persistence are also crucial: like all children and young people, those with outstanding ability require perseverance and benefit from learning the rewards of hard work. All children and young people are entitled to the opportunity to realise their potential; Gagné’s emphasis on the realisation of potential as an outcome of gifted and talented education resonates with the core work of early childhood settings and schools.

In Victoria, we recognise that there is considerable diversity among gifted and talented children and young people. Gifted and talented children and young people live in all parts of Victoria and are from all backgrounds. They include

Koorie and English as an Additional Language (EAL) learners, children and young people who experience educational disadvantage and those who have a physical or learning disability (‘twice exceptional learners’).²

Giftedness occurs across a wide range of areas

Gifted and talented children and young people may have one or more gifts or talents across a wide range of domains, including:

- discrete academic disciplines, such as mathematics, science, languages or the humanities
- an area of physical, artistic or technical ability, such as a gift in a sport, the visual and performing arts, agricultural science or software development
- creativity, innovative thinking and problem-solving ability
- social, communicative and leadership ability.

¹Prof. François Gagné’s model has been adopted as the basis for program and policy development in NSW, SA, the ACT and Tasmania. It was also adopted by the *Inquiry into the Education of Gifted and Talented Students* (June 2012).

²See page 10 for a definition of twice exceptional learners.

Identification of giftedness and talent is complex

Gifted and talented children and young people may excel in one or more domains but be age-typical, or even struggle, in other areas of their cognitive, social or emotional development. Demonstration of their area of giftedness may also be uneven or spasmodic.

Assumptions relating to age, gender, disability, and socioeconomic, language or cultural background can also impede our capacity to identify giftedness. Gifted and talented children and young people from specific groups, such as those from disadvantaged backgrounds, often require specific attention to ensure their potential is identified and they receive appropriate learning experiences.

Definitions and expressions of giftedness and talent also vary across cultures. Children and young people from some cultural backgrounds, for example, may not feel comfortable openly questioning educators or 'finding' rather than solving problems. The value families place on exceptional ability in a particular domain, such as sport or mathematics, is also influenced by cultural factors.

Early identification of the exceptional abilities of gifted and talented children, including in the years before school, means they have the best chance to thrive. However, the identification process and the approach taken to support and strengthen the abilities of gifted and talented learners must also be tailored to the individual.

A number of characteristics are associated with intellectual giftedness

While outstanding ability in an area such as sport or music can be evident from observation, identifying intellectual giftedness requires some familiarity with the typical characteristics of intellectually gifted and talented children and young people. While every child is unique, research points to a number of qualities that are typically demonstrated by this group. In comparison to their age-peers, they are likely to:

- learn at a faster pace
- demonstrate advanced speech and language skills and the capacity to reason in a more complex and abstract way
- spend more time addressing the 'front end' of a task (defining the problem, predicting how it could be solved and planning)
- undertake an exhaustive search of all possible solutions to a problem, rather than stopping their search when they reach the first plausible answer
- make significantly more connections between previous learning and new learning, and make connections across disciplines without being prompted
- exhibit exceptional memory and absorb and recall concepts 'as a whole', or within their broad context
- prefer independent learning
- seek out and enjoy new knowledge, and develop deep knowledge of a subject of interest (Rogers, 2002; Gross et al., 2005).

Case study: Identifying giftedness and talent*

Ali has just started school at a primary school in suburban Melbourne. His teacher Jo has read his Transition Learning and Development Statement and is aware that Ali has advanced literacy abilities. She notices that Ali is reading independently and has an extensive vocabulary. Ali also has a highly detailed, 'expert' knowledge in his area of interest, trains.

Jo wants to learn more about Ali's abilities and learning style. She contacts his parents and they agree that, over one week, they will both make a record of behaviours they view as advanced for Ali's age. Jo also asks Ali to complete a reading comprehension test usually given to Year 2 students. Jo meets with Ali's parents to discuss the observational records, test result and some samples of Ali's work.

They decide that, while Ali's classmates are learning to read, Ali can spend time with a Year 1 class where the activities are more appropriate for his literacy level. At other times however, he will remain in Jo's class, where he can develop his numeracy and social skills. They also decide to take steps to help Ali make friends, including introducing him to children from Years 1 and 2 who have an interest in reading and could join a lunchtime book group. Jo documents the plan and she and Ali's parents agree to revisit it later in the year.

*This case study is hypothetical.

Gifted and talented children and young people have particular learning requirements

Gifted and talented children and young people often differ from their age-peers not only in terms of their abilities, but in their preferred learning style as well. They have particular learning needs that require specific strategies and efforts, such as:

- daily challenge in their specific areas of ability or interest
- learning experiences that are differentiated in terms of pace, depth, complexity and teaching method
- opportunities to socialise and learn with peers of like-ability as well as work independently on areas of interest
- connections to people and opportunities beyond the early childhood setting or school that support their particular passions and talents while connecting to the curriculum (Rogers, 2007).

While education for the gifted and talented requires specific strategies in terms of curriculum, assessment and teaching method, it also involves consideration of social-emotional development.

Some researchers suggest that gifted children and young people are more likely to be perfectionists and to be sensitive and preoccupied with moral issues, and so they may require particular support in terms of social-emotional development (Sisk, 2009).

When high-ability children and young people are in educational settings where their abilities are not recognised and supported, they typically experience boredom, frustration and decreased motivation (Neihart et al., 2002). In some cases, more severe forms of psychological distress can result.

The Inquiry (2012) identified that some learners suffer from a sense of isolation, low self-esteem, anxiety and depression when their ability is not identified, they are insufficiently challenged or they feel 'out of sync' with their peers. They may disengage from learning or deliberately under-achieve in order to fit in with their peers. Some gifted learners may become disruptive in the classroom or exit early from schooling.

Gifted and talented children and young people have particular learning requirements. Responding to these requirements is not an optional extra – it is a key responsibility of early childhood settings, schools and the Department.

Twice exceptional learners

Twice exceptional learners are gifted children and young people who also experience a physical or learning disability. They may be hearing or vision impaired, have an autism spectrum disorder or another condition, such as dyslexia, attention deficit disorder (ADD) or attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD).

The giftedness of twice exceptional learners may be overlooked because these children and young people may not be able to express or demonstrate their gifts in the way others do.

They may require particular kinds of opportunities for demonstrating their understanding, such as multimodal or dynamic assessment tasks (Munro, 2010). Twice exceptional learners may also require additional support to meet their particular learning, social or emotional needs as well as develop their particular areas of ability.



3. Why this strategy now?

The strategy addresses the entitlement of all children and young people to a high-quality education that supports and strengthens their learning abilities

All children and young people, including those who are gifted and talented, are entitled to have their abilities recognised and to have the opportunity to realise their potential. Gifted and talented education is a priority because it contributes to the equitable provision of learning opportunities across the Victorian education system.

Victoria has not had a gifted and talented education strategy for over a decade and, without a clear policy direction, focus has shifted away from gifted and talented education.

The needs of some gifted and talented children and young people have been overlooked. As a first step, this strategy will help to dispel confusion about what being gifted and talented means, raise the profile of gifted and talented education, outline important new actions, and articulate expectations of early childhood settings, schools and the Department.

The strategy will help make Victoria a world leader in education

The Victorian Government has outlined a commitment to make Victoria a world leader in learning and development over the next 10 years. A range of benefits will flow from this: our young people will have greater opportunities in work and life, and Victoria will be more prosperous and economically competitive.

To become a world leader in education, we must increase the proportion of children and young people performing at the highest levels.

According to international assessments, a number of jurisdictions have a greater proportion of students achieving at the highest levels than we have in Victoria. For instance, the OECD’s Programme for International Assessment (PISA) (2012) shows that Victoria has fewer students in the top two levels (5 and 6) in maths proficiency than comparable jurisdictions (Thompson et al., 2013). In addition, achievement in reading declines over the years of schooling (VELS Teacher Judgements, 2011). We also know that learners from particular cohorts are not achieving at the level at which they may be capable. Children and young people from rural and disadvantaged communities, for example, do less well than their city peers.

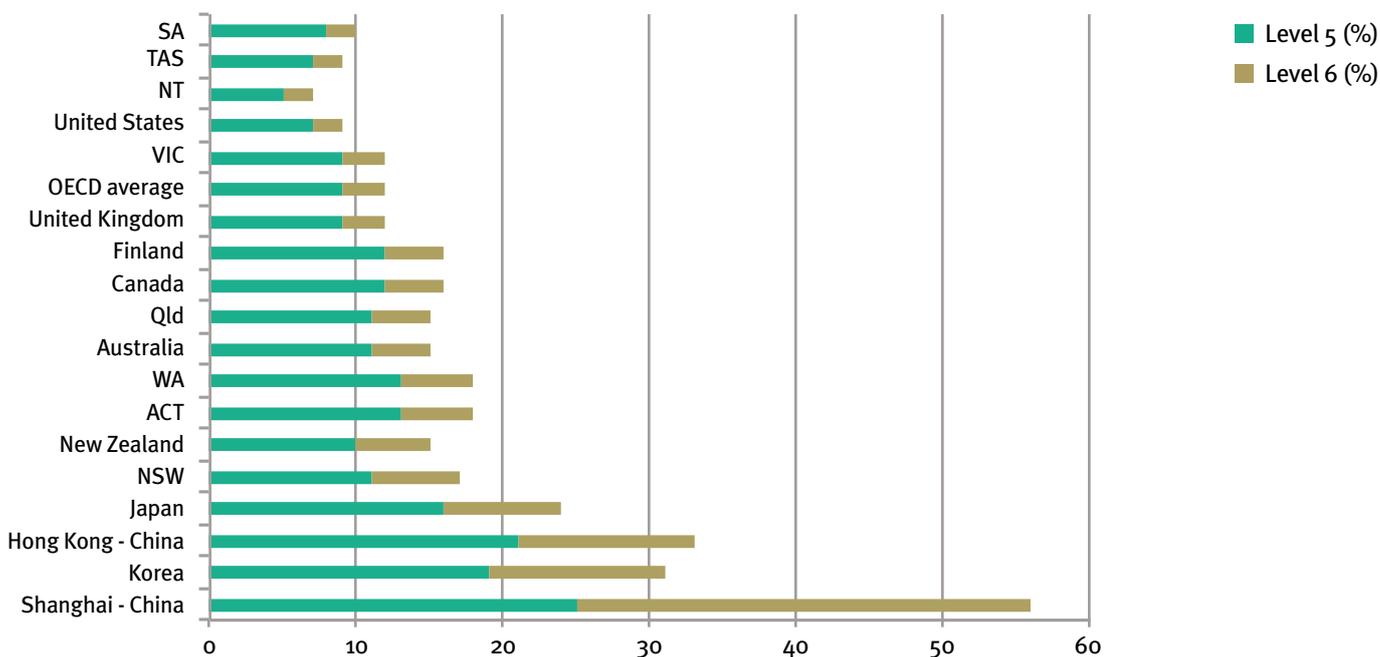


Figure 1: PISA results show that Victoria has a lower percentage of students in the top two levels (5 and 6) in maths proficiency than comparable jurisdictions (Source: OECD, 2013).

The strategy is aligned with the Government's reform agenda

The Victorian Government has a strong vision for early childhood and school education, including that:

- children should have the best start in life so they can achieve optimal health, development and wellbeing outcomes, and acquire the basic skills for life and learning
- children and young people should have access to a high-quality education so they can realise their potential.

The Victorian Government recently released the *Early Years Strategic Plan: Improving outcomes for all Victorian children 2014-2020*. This plan seeks to improve outcomes and better support children from birth to eight years. It builds awareness about the importance of early childhood and outlines the Victorian Government's directions and actions for early childhood in coming years. The plan includes an Outcomes Framework that identifies ambitions for all young children in Victoria.

In addition, the Victorian Early Years Learning and Development Framework (VEYLDF) promotes high expectations for every child. Learning programs should be responsive to each child and build on their culture, strengths, interests and knowledge to take their learning forward.

In *Towards Victoria as a Learning Community 2012*, the Victorian Government articulated a new approach to school education reform characterised by a focus on professional trust, school autonomy, accountability and support.

Reform across these three areas will support improved provision for gifted and talented students. In the context of a greater focus on professional trust and professional practice, teachers and educational leaders will be provided with clear expectations about professional responsibilities and advice about best practice. An increased focus on school autonomy means that schools will have the flexibility to make locally-informed decisions and tailor their provision to support the needs and interests of their students and school community. Strong accountability and support will ensure that teachers and educational leaders, including principals, will have access to resources and support, and that they will be accountable to their school community for their provision for all, including gifted and talented learners.

Research snap shot: Educators can help deter children from masking their ability to 'fit in'

'Fitting in' with their peers is extremely important to children and young people. At around the age of seven, most children begin to norm-reference, measuring their abilities against those of their peers, rather than against their own previous performance. Gifted children may start to norm-reference at an even younger age, including the preschool years.

Research shows that when children detect that exceptional ability makes them seem different from their peers, many mask that ability in order to gain peer acceptance.

An Australian study of 60 children who could read when they started school found that more than 40 of them 'significantly moderated their reading performance, or deliberately stopped reading in class, within two weeks of starting school. Those children who continued to read were those whose teachers accepted and facilitated it' (Gross, 2004; Gross et al, 2005).

The strategy addresses key challenges, including those identified by the *Inquiry into the Education of Gifted and Talented Students*

A number of early childhood settings and schools across the government, Catholic and independent sectors provide outstanding programs and support for gifted and talented children and young people. Nevertheless, some gifted and talented children and young people are not experiencing an education that is responsive to their abilities.

As the Inquiry (2012) found, the learning and development experiences of gifted and talented children and young people are highly dependent on family background, where they live and their ability to advocate for appropriate learning programs. In particular, gifted and talented children and young people in rural and regional Victoria, those from Koorie, English as an Additional Language (EAL) and disadvantaged backgrounds, and those with a disability, are less likely to be identified as gifted and talented, and to have their learning and development needs met.

The limited number of specialised programs in primary schools and rural and regional areas is also a barrier to the provision of challenging and engaging learning opportunities for gifted and talented children and young people across Victoria.

If gifted and talented education is to occur in every early childhood setting and classroom, early childhood professionals and teachers also require greater support. We know there are gaps in educator knowledge about how to understand and work effectively with gifted and talented children and young people and that support for these learners could be strengthened.

Another key challenge is to build understanding in the community about the particular requirements and learning styles of gifted and talented children and young people, and how early childhood settings and schools can respond appropriately. There are many myths and misconceptions about gifted and talented education, including that it is elitist, that all children are gifted in some way, and that gifted children and young people can 'look after themselves'.

Case study: Differentiated learning in a secondary context*

Yang is in Year 9 and has outstanding ability in science. He has been reading his older brother's Year 12 physics and chemistry textbooks in his own time, and quickly becomes bored and restless during his Year 9 science classes.

Yang's teacher Ben assesses Yang to determine what he currently knows. He also identifies that Yang responds well to hands-on learning – this is his preferred learning style.

While other students in Yang's class are learning about energy transfer across different mediums, Ben provides Yang with a more cognitively complex and applied problem-solving task regarding the operation of the school's solar panels. He carries out self-directed research on how the panels work and reports to Ben on how the design could be improved or adapted for other purposes.

Ben also includes questions of different levels of complexity as part of his regular classroom teaching, and asks his students, including Yang, to suggest questions and problems for the class to address.

*This case study is hypothetical.



4. Existing opportunities for gifted and talented children and young people

A range of existing opportunities and programs offer Victorian gifted and talented children and young people the chance to develop their abilities, connect with 'like minds' and have their achievements recognised and celebrated.

Victoria's learning frameworks support personalised learning

All children and young people are entitled to an education that supports and strengthens their learning. The Victorian Early Years Learning and Development Framework (VEYLDF) and AusVELS, the Foundation to Year 10 curriculum framework, give educators considerable flexibility in providing rich and meaningful learning opportunities that strengthen the individual abilities of learners. They are designed to advance the learning and development of all Victorian children and young people, including providing challenging and engaging learning for those with particular gifts and talents. While it is the responsibility of every teacher to differentiate learning programs to support all learners, including the gifted and talented, research shows that many educators need additional support to differentiate the curriculum in a way that extends high-performing learners (Griffin et al., 2013).

Curriculum differentiation and personalised learning also depend on effective and ongoing assessment. Victorian teachers have a range of tools available to help them assess the learning of all students, including gifted and talented children and young people.

Schools offer their own programs for gifted and talented students

Schools can also develop additional programs and strategies for gifted and talented students that suit their particular context, student cohort and broader teaching and learning program. A number of primary and secondary schools in Victoria have sourced external programs or developed their own approaches to extend students' learning within the classroom, school and community environments. Programs and activities may include:

- curriculum differentiation through changes in pace, depth, complexity and teaching method
- ability grouping, including year level acceleration and subject acceleration
- specialised programs that offer students access to specialist expertise and facilities, including facilities available in the wider community, as part of deep engagement with a particular curriculum area
- mentoring programs run within or between schools to connect students with 'like minds'
- supplementation of the curriculum with additional activities, excursions or opportunities to provide greater breadth and depth of learning, such as participation in the programs offered by Victoria's six Science and Mathematics Specialist Centres, the Victorian State Schools Spectacular, the Science Olympiad or the Model United Nations Assembly

- the Higher Education Studies Program, which offers high achieving VCE students the opportunity to study at a university as part of their VCE studies. Eligible students can complete one or more first year university subjects in a wide range of areas, including information technology, philosophy, mathematics and languages. Students who successfully complete the program have an increment added to their Australian Tertiary Admission Rank (ATAR) and may receive credit towards an undergraduate qualification
- the opportunity to develop high level technical or vocational abilities through access to workplace learning or learning in a community setting.

Schools offer specialised programs, including the SEAL program

The Victorian Government continues to support government schools to specialise in a field of their choice, such as languages, mathematics, science, design or a vocational area.

Specialisation promotes diversity and choice across the school system, and empowers schools to respond to the needs and expertise that exist in their local school community. The families of gifted and talented children and young people can select from a wide range of schools with a specialist focus in a particular curriculum area. Schools with specialised programs can also connect with selective entry high schools and specialist secondary schools as part of their outreach programs.

The Select Entry Accelerated Learning (SEAL) program aims to address the learning needs of gifted and talented students who are capable of working at a significantly faster pace and in greater depth than their age-peers. SEAL program students usually complete Years 7 to 10 in three years, giving them an extended range of options for their senior years of schooling. This may include choosing to complete additional VCE units, undertake the Higher Education Studies Program or enter tertiary education after only five years of secondary schooling. In 2013, over thirty-five secondary schools across Victoria offered a SEAL program.

Victoria has a range of selective entry high schools and specialist schools

Selective entry high schools

Selective entry high schools provide an educationally enriched environment for high-achieving and academically-talented students. There are four selective entry high schools in Victoria for students in Years 9 to 12:

- The Mac.Robertson Girls' High School
- Melbourne High School
- Nossal High School
- Suzanne Cory High School.

Students are educated alongside peers who perform at a similar level to themselves, and by teaching staff experienced in providing a challenging curriculum for high-achieving students.

Specialist secondary schools

Specialised secondary schools that cater for gifted and talented students include:

- **John Monash Science School**
Victoria's first specialist secondary school for students in Years 10 to 12 devoted to the sciences, mathematics, associated technologies and fields of endeavour.
- **Victorian College of the Arts Secondary School**
The school provides a nationally and internationally recognised specialist

program for the training of talented young dancers, musicians and visual artists.

- **Elizabeth Blackburn School of Sciences**
A branch of The University High School, this school provides a rigorous academic program focussed on the sciences and mathematics for Year 11 and 12 students.
- **Maribyrnong Sports Academy**
A sub-school at Maribyrnong College, the Academy offers specialist programs for students in up to 20 sports.

These schools provide an outstanding environment for gifted and talented learners and support other students across Victoria through their outreach activities.

Awards programs celebrate student achievement

A number of awards programs recognise and celebrate outstanding achievement:

- **Annual Premier's VCE Awards**
Recognise outstanding achievement in senior secondary studies.
- **Annual VCE Seasons of Excellence**
A series of concerts, exhibitions and screenings present and celebrate outstanding student work in design, technology, multimedia and the cinematic, visual and performing arts.
- **VCE Leadership Awards**
Recognise the efforts of VCE students in promoting leadership and participation in their school and local community.
- **VCAL Achievement Awards**
Recognise the outstanding achievements of young people who participate in VCAL.
- **Victorian Training Awards**
Promote and reward outstanding achievement and innovation in vocational education and training.
- **Victorian Learn Local Awards**
Recognise the achievements of learners, practitioners and programs in the Learn Local sector.

Case study:

Connecting Ballarat High School musicians with Opera Australia

Talented music students at Ballarat High School have used videoconference technology to participate in a clarinet masterclass, drumming lessons, an audience with songstress Katie Noonan and an international concert.

The school has also used videoconference technology to connect students with professional musicians from Opera Australia. Musicians based in the opera company's Sydney rehearsal studios have provided 25 tutorials and workshops for the school's senior performing ensembles, all via videoconference.

The project culminated with a music tour of Sydney, where students were able to observe an Opera Australia performance while sitting in the orchestra pit at the Sydney Opera House. The students also had the opportunity to perform at Deutsche Bank Place and in front of 900 students at a Sydney school.

Kwong Lee Dow Young Scholars Program

The University of Melbourne's Kwong Lee Dow Young Scholars Program offers up to 700 Year 11 and 12 students the opportunity to engage with the university, staff and each other through an extensive program of events and activities. Participating students, who have demonstrated outstanding academic ability and leadership potential, have the chance to participate in problem-solving competitions and VCE revision lectures, access the university's libraries and facilities and get a taste of university life.

At the end of Year 12, the university invites Young Scholars and their parents to an evening event which recognises the students' membership in the program and celebrates their completion of Year 12.

We have a strong foundation to build on

In summary, Victoria has a strong foundation for gifted and talented education. In particular:

- Victoria's early years and curriculum frameworks are flexible and designed to be tailored to individual learning and developmental abilities
- Victorian schools and early childhood services have the autonomy to develop programs that meet the needs of their learners
- Victoria has a number of established programs for gifted and talented students, including SEAL programs
- Victoria has considerable diversity across our system, including selective entry high schools and a number of schools with specialised programs
- Senior secondary certificates offered in Victoria, the VCE, VCAL and International Baccalaureate (IB) Diploma, are flexible and offer depth and breadth to extend gifted and talented young people.

While we have strengths to build on, there is more we can do to improve the education of the gifted and talented. There is more we can do to create opportunities for children in the early years and at primary school, those living in rural and regional Victoria, those of Koorie, EAL and disadvantaged backgrounds, and twice exceptional learners. A range of actions are required to provide all gifted and talented children and young people with high-quality learning experiences.

Case study: Boroondara Secondary Schools' Gifted Cluster

The Boroondara Secondary Schools' Gifted Cluster provides enrichment activities for gifted and talented students in Years 7–10, and is open to all secondary schools in the Boroondara area (and immediately beyond).

The Cluster offers students from local government, Catholic and independent schools the opportunity to participate in learning units, which in the past have included workshops on photography, puppetry or the mathematics of infinity, a constitutional convention and a French walking tour of the city.

Each school selects students to participate and the cluster enables students to meet 'like minds' who share common interests. It also provides a professional development opportunity for teachers and facilitates the sharing of best practice between schools.

The Cluster meets each term to plan and discuss Cluster enrichment units, and each school is expected to provide at least one unit per year.



5. A plan for action, 2014–19

Much can be done to ensure improved support and learning opportunities for gifted and talented children and young people. To make a real difference, action is needed at the early childhood setting, school and system level, and across a wide range of areas.

Collaboration across the government, Catholic and independent school sectors will enable us to share resources and best practice and to support cross-sectoral partnerships between schools. We also want to support learning opportunities beyond formal education settings – genuine engagement and partnership with families and communities is vital.

Work is underway to provide greater opportunities and support for gifted and talented learners and their families, early childhood professionals, teachers and education leaders. The Victorian Government has established a Gifted and Talented Education Expert Reference Group to provide advice and guide the development of resources to be released as part of the implementation of this strategy.

Engaging families and the community

Parents and families know their child best, and engaging with families is critical if early childhood settings and schools are to effectively tailor their provision for gifted and talented children and young people. Parents and families are entitled to know about the learning and development opportunities offered to their child, how they are progressing

and where they may benefit from additional assistance and support. The best outcomes stem from genuine collaboration and partnership between families, early childhood settings, all school sectors and the wider community. To promote this kind of collaboration, we will:

- **Develop an identification toolkit for parents** to capture the critical information that families can provide in identifying gifted and talented children and young people, and support family engagement in the identification process.
- **Provide easily accessible information to support parents and carers** of a child with a gift or talent, including advice about where to go for support and additional information. Specific advice will be provided for Koorie parents, parents from EAL backgrounds and parents of twice exceptional children and young people. Access to information in a range of languages will also be provided.
- **Raise community awareness** of the particular learning requirements of gifted and talented learners and how these can be addressed.
- **Continue to support organisations that work with parents, families and carers** of gifted and talented children and young people in Victoria.

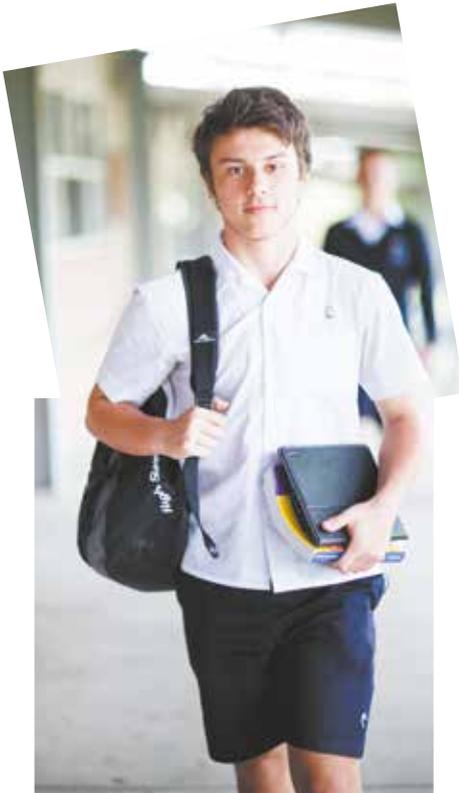
Directions for the longer term:

- **Support increased collaboration between gifted and talented learners and members of the community, business, and industry.**

Extending and supporting gifted and talented children and young people

While some gifted and talented children and young people have access to a range of learning opportunities that engage, challenge and connect them with 'like minds', we know that others are missing out. The following actions will directly support gifted and talented children and young people to access appropriate learning opportunities, in and beyond formal educational settings. We will:

- **Provide \$1.2 million in seed funding over three years for educational and community organisations to establish high-quality extension programs** for gifted and talented students. These programs will offer gifted and talented children and young people the opportunity to connect with 'like minds' and experts, access specialised facilities and be challenged and extended in an area in which they have demonstrated outstanding potential or ability. The programs will target students, such as primary students and those living in rural areas, who are less likely to have access to extension opportunities, and will be connected to the AusVELS and to school-level provision. Further information about this action and detailed guidelines which outline the funding application process will be available on the Department's website in coming months.



- **Provide \$200,000 for selective entry high schools to provide outreach activities** for Victorian students. These activities may include virtual and face-to-face peer mentoring and vacation short courses.
- **Strengthen senior secondary pathways.** Introduce a VCE (Baccalaureate) to encourage students to undertake more demanding courses of study at senior secondary level by including a VCE Language and a high level Mathematics study. Introduce Industry Pathways programs to encourage talented students to undertake vocational education in their chosen industry area. A new study, the VCE Extended Investigation, is designed for highly able and independent learners and will be delivered by a range of schools in 2014.

Directions for the longer term:

- **Provide more online, extended learning opportunities for gifted and talented students.** This may include opportunities to engage with the curriculum in greater depth or breadth, or to connect with like-minded learners and experts wherever they may be, including in rural and regional areas.
- **Develop opportunities for students who are gifted and talented in areas of applied learning** so they will be acknowledged as high-performing students in their studies of vocational education.
- **Work with universities to support gifted and talented early entrants to Victorian universities.**

Resources and capacity-building for early childhood professionals, teachers and leaders

Few things have a greater impact on the learning and development of our children and young people than the professional practice of early childhood professionals and teachers. Early identification and support of young gifted and talented children is crucial for their future success and wellbeing (Robinson, 2008). Our educational leaders, in early childhood settings and schools, can also make a big difference by building an organisational culture that values gifted and talented education.

We want all Victorian early childhood professionals, teachers and educational leaders to have the skills and knowledge required to effectively identify gifted and talented children and young people and to advance their learning and development. To this end, we have recently released a comprehensive online information resource for those working with gifted and talented children aged 0–8, *Making a Difference for Young Gifted and Talented Children*.

In addition, we will:

- **Provide professional learning for early childhood professionals** to support the use of the resource, *Making a Difference for Young Gifted and Talented Children*.
- **Provide additional professional learning opportunities for school teachers in gifted and talented education.** This may include professional learning activities that address effective strategies for identifying and catering for gifted children and young people in schools.

- **Develop an identification toolkit for early childhood professionals and teachers.** The toolkit will support early childhood professionals and teachers to work with families so that gifted and talented children and young people are identified as early as possible. It will explicitly address identification of children and young people from Koorie and EAL backgrounds and twice exceptional gifted and talented children and young people.
 - **Publish a model school policy and provide a range of resources, including best practice case studies and examples** to support early childhood professionals and teachers to respond to the needs of the gifted and talented in the classroom. The model policy will support schools to establish their own school-level policy for gifted and talented education and may address identification, extension and enrichment (including curriculum differentiation and personalised learning), acceleration and ability-grouping, connecting students with ‘like minds’ and program evaluation. The model school policy and other resources will address culturally inclusive approaches, including ways in which Koorie cultural elements can be incorporated into programs.
 - **Review and publish new guidelines for early entry to school and for acceleration,** ensuring that families and educators can make informed decisions about acceleration.
 - **Provide information and support to leaders in early childhood settings and schools regarding gifted and talented education,** ensuring they can make informed decisions about their provision for gifted and talented learners.
 - **Build the capacity of careers practitioners and teachers** to engage gifted and talented young people and their families in career planning and development. This will help ensure that gifted and talented young people can make effective transitions from school or non-school settings, such as TAFE, Registered Training Organisations or Learn Local settings, on to further education, training or employment.
- Directions for the longer term:**
- **Support gifted and talented education professional networks** within and between early childhood settings and schools.
 - **Encourage postgraduate study in gifted and talented education,** so that educators can continue to build their knowledge and skills throughout their careers.
 - **Work with universities to encourage opportunities for pre-service early childhood professionals and teachers to learn about giftedness** and integrate theory and practice.
- Review tools and strategies that support the effective identification of gifted and talented children and young people, including those from diverse cultural and language backgrounds.**
- **Undertake a comprehensive review of the SEAL program,** with a particular focus on the quality and consistency of the program.
 - **Examine selection processes in selective entry high schools** to support equitable access to these schools and programs.
 - **Evaluate implementation of this strategy.**
- Directions for the longer term:**
- **Support early childhood settings and schools to evaluate their provision and programs** for gifted and talented children and young people.
 - **Trial successful, evidence-based models for identification, curriculum and teaching** that are being used in other systems and share learning across the system.
- Building the evidence-base and evaluating our programs**
- In Victoria, early childhood settings and schools have considerable autonomy in their provision of learning opportunities for gifted and talented children and young people. Early childhood professionals, teachers and leaders are encouraged to tailor their provision to meet local needs, but they require a comprehensive evidence base about what works if they are to make informed decisions. To support the development of an evidence base and evaluation of our programs, we will:

6. How we can all play a part

Gifted and talented children and young people are encouraged to:

- share their interests and reflections on their own learning and development with early childhood professionals and teachers
- participate in making a personalised learning and development plan, when deemed necessary, that addresses their gifts or talents
- provide feedback to their families, early childhood professionals and teachers about whether they are enjoying their learning and being adequately challenged.

Parents, carers and families are encouraged to:

- communicate regularly with their child's early childhood setting or school regarding their child's learning and development
- provide guidance about culturally appropriate provision for their child
- help ensure documentation about their child's learning and development is carried forward from early childhood settings to school as part of an effective transition
- engage an educational psychologist to provide an assessment, where necessary (for example, to determine an Intelligence Quotient (IQ), establish giftedness or better understand areas of ability)
- provide learning opportunities outside of formal learning settings.

Early childhood professionals and teachers can support gifted and talented children and young people by:

- becoming familiar with definitions of giftedness and talent and supporting effective identification of the gifted and talented
- working closely with the parents and carers of gifted and talented children and young people
- planning and documenting a personalised learning plan for gifted and talented children and young people when necessary and ensuring this is linked to transition documents
- using assessment regularly to establish what children and young people know and how their learning has progressed over time
- differentiating their teaching practice in terms of pace, depth, complexity and teaching method to address the particular needs of gifted and talented children and young people
- ensuring learning opportunities for the gifted and talented are inclusive and culturally responsive
- building their own capacity to offer extension and enrichment opportunities, undertaking professional learning opportunities when available
- reflecting on and evaluating their own teaching practice for gifted and talented children and young people.

Educational leaders, including school principals, can support gifted and talented children and young people by:

- conveying the importance of gifted and talented education to their staff and school community and celebrating high achievement across all domains

- supporting staff to undertake relevant professional learning
- working with their staff to develop a school-level Gifted and Talented Education Policy, which may address identification, extension and enrichment, acceleration and ability-grouping, connecting students with 'like minds' and evaluation
- building networks with other leaders within their school and with other schools regarding gifted and talented education
- establishing collaborative partnerships with parents, business and universities, and others in the community, to support mentoring and other opportunities for gifted and talented learners
- maintaining regular contact with other professionals working with gifted and talented students
- regularly evaluating the support they offer gifted and talented children and young people.

The Department will:

- provide high-quality resources and support for early childhood settings and schools
- continue to share information and work collaboratively across the sectors
- implement the actions outlined in this strategy
- ensure implementation of actions is informed by current research and best practice
- evaluate its policies and programs regarding gifted and talented education.

7. Conclusion

Addressing the particular needs of gifted and talented children and young people is part of the core work of all Victorian early childhood settings and schools. Many of these settings and schools are already providing outstanding opportunities for gifted and talented children and young people. Yet further improvements can be made. Now is the time for action.

This document has outlined the Victorian Government's commitment to taking action to support gifted and talented education. We are committed to engaging families and the community, providing new opportunities for gifted and talented children and young people, providing resources and capacity-building for early childhood professionals, teachers and educational leaders, and building the evidence base and evaluating our programs.

Putting these commitments into action will require collaborative effort between the Department, early childhood settings, schools, families and other stakeholders over a sustained period.

Implementation of *Aiming High: A strategy for gifted and talented children and young people, 2014–19* will support early childhood settings and schools to partner with families and provide quality opportunities for the gifted and talented. With the right support and opportunities, these children and young people will be challenged and extended. Their gifts and talents will be recognised and celebrated. They will feel connected with others who share their passions, and become confident learners and participants in the wider world. They will have the chance to realise their full potential, whatever that may be.



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