

New opportunities for the gifted and talented

Directions Paper - April 2013

Minister's Message

The Victorian Government is committed to meeting the learning needs of all children and young people. We recognise that those who are gifted and talented have particular needs which have not always been acknowledged, understood and addressed in Victoria.

The Victorian Parliament Education and Training Committee's 2012 *Inquiry into the Education of Gifted and Talented Students* highlighted the need for action in this area. This inquiry found significant issues with current provision for Victoria's gifted and talented children and young people, and insufficient support for educators and families.

The Victorian Government recently outlined its vision for school education in the *Towards Victoria as a Learning Community* position paper and the *New Directions for School Leadership and the Teaching Profession* discussion paper. This vision includes a commitment to lift Victoria's education performance to the global top tier. Addressing the needs of gifted and talented children and young people in the years before, during and after schooling will be critical if we are to achieve this ambitious goal.

This paper signals an exciting new focus on the needs of gifted and talented children and young people, their educators and their families. It describes the steps already taken to implement many of the inquiry's 65 recommendations. It also outlines work to be pursued in the coming year, including the development of a state-wide gifted and talented strategy – the first in over a decade. The strategy will support better understanding in our community about the needs of gifted and talented children and young people and a coordinated, effective approach to addressing these needs.

I look forward to working with the Victorian learning community on these critical reforms.

The Hon Martin Dixon, MP
Minister for Education

What do we mean by gifted and talented?

Gifted individuals are those who possess outstanding natural intellectual, creative, physical or social abilities but may or may not demonstrate outstanding performance.¹ The level of an individual's ability may be considered on a scale of mildly to extremely gifted, with high to extreme levels of giftedness only prevalent in a very small proportion of the population.

Children and young people with high levels of giftedness often:

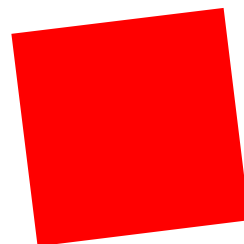
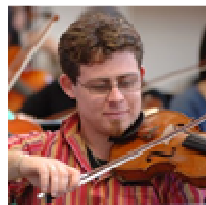
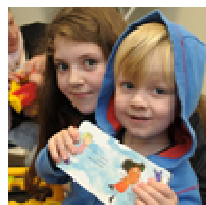
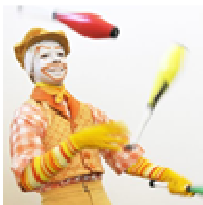
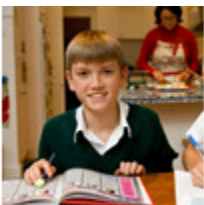
- show evidence of spontaneous deep thinking;
- pursue knowledge outside of formal education settings because of their intrinsic interest in a topic; and
- link ideas in unique and unexpected ways that diverge from conventional approaches.²

Talented individuals are those who demonstrate outstanding mastery of systematically developed skills and knowledge in one or more disciplines.³ They typically develop these competencies through repetition and are usually highly motivated and persistent in their endeavours. Talented children and young people understand how to demonstrate their knowledge and skills to achieve at a high level in

¹ Gagne, F., 2004, "Transforming gifts into talents: the DMGT as a developmental theory", *High Ability Studies*, Vol.15, Iss.2.

² Munro, J., 2008, "A learning-based approach to curriculum differentiation for gifted and talented learners", presented at the 10th Asia Pacific Conference on Giftedness, Singapore.

³ Gagne, F., 2004, "Transforming gifts into talents: the DMGT as a developmental theory", *High Ability Studies*, Vol.15, Iss.2.



assessment tasks, whereas gifted individuals may not.⁴

Research indicates that around 10 per cent of children and young people may fall within the full range of gifted and talented abilities.⁵

Talent and giftedness can be demonstrated in a wide range of areas including the major discipline areas of English and Languages, Science, Mathematics, Technologies, the Arts and Humanities, as well as through sports, leadership, creativity, innovative thinking and problem solving.

What do we know about the needs of gifted and talented children and young people?

While every child is unique, there is a strong body of evidence to show that gifted and talented students have particular learning needs that require specific strategies and efforts. These include:

- daily challenge in their specific areas of ability or interest;
- learning experiences that are differentiated in terms of pace, depth, complexity, repetition and teaching method;
- opportunities to socialise and learn with like-ability peers as well as work independently on areas of interest; and
- connections to people and opportunities beyond formal education settings that support an individual's particular passions and talents while also connecting to the broader curriculum.⁶

Negative consequences can arise when the needs of gifted and talented children and young people are not met. Some children and young people experience under-achievement, caused by a lack of stimulating learning experiences or deliberate under-achievement

to fit in with peers. Other potential issues include disengagement from learning, early exit from formal schooling, behavioural issues and social isolation.⁷

The consequences of not addressing the needs of these children and young people can be broad-ranging – both for the wellbeing and life prospects of the individual and for Victoria's prosperity more broadly.



What are the issues with Victoria's current approach?

In Victoria, some gifted and talented children and young people have very positive educational experiences. A small number of young people, for example, have the opportunity to participate in specialised government school programs (such as the Select Entry Accelerated Learning (SEAL) programs or the Maribyrnong College sports program), while others have the chance to attend selective entry high schools or specialist schools (such as the John Monash Science School and the Victorian College of the Arts Secondary School).

We also know that there are examples of excellent practice amongst early childhood education and care settings and in government and non-government schools. This practice includes, for example, seeking

⁴ Munro, J., 2008, "A learning-based approach to curriculum differentiation for gifted and talented learners", presented at the 10th Asia Pacific Conference on Giftedness, Singapore.

⁵ Gagne, F., 2004, "Transforming gifts into talents: the DMGT as a developmental theory", *High Ability Studies*, Vol.15, Iss.2.

⁶ Rogers, K., 2007, 'Lessons Learned About Educating the Gifted and Talented: A Synthesis of the Research on Educational Practice', *Gifted Child Quarterly*, Vol.51, Iss.4.

⁷ Education and Training Committee, 2012, *Inquiry into the Education of Gifted and Talented Students*, Parliament of Victoria.

out professional learning opportunities, establishing communities of practice, adopting evidence-based approaches to identification, and developing programs and approaches that meet the needs of gifted and talented children and young people.

Despite this, the needs of many gifted and talented children and young people are not being met. The *2012 Inquiry into the Education of Gifted and Talented Students*⁸ (the inquiry) confirmed a number of key issues with the current approach:

- there has been no gifted and talented policy in Victoria for a decade, resulting in a fragmented approach;
- 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 their needs;
- the specialised programs that exist are heavily concentrated in schooling at secondary level, and in metropolitan areas;
- gifted and talented children and young people from certain backgrounds (including those from regional areas and those with Koorie, English as an additional language or low SES backgrounds) are less likely to be identified as gifted and talented, and to have their learning and development needs met; and
- information and support for families, educators, and professionals is insufficient.

The inquiry report made 65 recommendations regarding improvements to the current approach to gifted and talented education.

Broadly, these recommendations relate to establishing a gifted and talented policy framework, supporting better identification of gifted children and young people, improving educational opportunities for these children and young people, supporting

families and educators, and shifting community perceptions of giftedness.⁹

Addressing the issues raised in the inquiry requires us to examine and enhance the experiences of children and young people across the learning cycle – in early childhood education and care settings, in government and non-government schools, and at the points of transition to vocational and higher education learning settings. This holistic approach to the implementation of the inquiry recommendations will benefit children and young people, families, educators and professionals throughout Victoria, regardless of their learning stage or setting.



What must we do to address these issues?

The Victorian Government has warmly welcomed the inquiry findings, acknowledging that much more can and should be done to support the needs of gifted and talented children and young people.

Minister Dixon tabled the Government's formal response to the inquiry recommendations in Parliament in December 2012, signalling strong support for the recommendations.

⁸ Education and Training Committee, 2012, *Inquiry into the Education of Gifted and Talented Students*, Parliament of Victoria.

⁹ Education and Training Committee, 2012, *Inquiry into the Education of Gifted and Talented Students*, Parliament of Victoria.

At a system level, work has commenced on the development of a gifted and talented education strategy.

A new strategy to support Victoria's brightest

In 2013, the Victorian Government will work intensively with stakeholders and experts on the development of a comprehensive gifted and talented education strategy. This strategy was the major recommendation of the inquiry and will support a more effective and coordinated approach to addressing the needs of this important cohort.

Specifically, the five-year strategy will:

- clearly articulate the importance of gifted and talented education
- outline a series of new, system-level actions that will support gifted and talented children and young people, their families and educators/professionals to achieve fair and equitable outcomes
- be comprehensive, state-wide, and evidence-based and will span early childhood education and care, school education and higher education and skills settings (where appropriate).

The system-level actions will be identified during the strategy development, using the inquiry recommendations as a starting point. Consistent with the inquiry's findings, however, the strategy will address the needs of children and young people, educators, families, and signal a strong focus on research and evaluation.

Meanwhile, implementation of many of the recommendations is already underway. Work has commenced on:

- establishing an expert group to guide current and future policy and resource development;
- commissioning a comprehensive evaluation to support strengthening of the SEAL program;
- building on current good practice by reviewing successful, evidence-based identification, curriculum and teaching approaches for gifted and talented children and young people and trialling these models in Victorian schools;

- reviewing and updating resources, guidance and checklists on the DEECD website (including material regarding identification, education strategies, and information for families);
- supporting the professional learning of educators through sponsorship of events such as the 2013 Victorian Association of Gifted and Talented Children conference; and
- developing and publishing an online resource booklet for early childhood professionals working with gifted and talented children up to 8 years old.

In addition, implementation is soon to commence on a number of other inquiry recommendations. These include the identification of new opportunities for gifted and talented children and young people (including improved networking and mentoring opportunities), guidelines for early entry to school and year level acceleration, toolkits for educators to help them to identify and support gifted and talented learners, professional learning for early childhood and school educators, and more comprehensive and accessible information for families.

What are the next steps?

Strategy development and implementation of inquiry recommendations has commenced and will continue in consultation with stakeholders throughout 2013.

These system-level reforms will only succeed, however, if Victoria's educators and education providers have input to their development and demonstrate commitment to improve the educational experiences of gifted and talented children and young people. Expectations regarding the respective roles of the system, educators, education providers, families and children and young people will be clarified in the forthcoming strategy.

If you would like further information on what is happening, please contact:

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