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*Tasmanian Association for the Gifted Inc.*

## **Submission**

### **Review to Inform a Better and Fairer Education System**

2 August 2023

Tasmanian Association for the Gifted Inc.

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We thank the Expert Panel for this opportunity to provide a submission on the Review to Inform a Better and Fairer Education System on behalf of the members of the Tasmanian Association for the Gifted Inc (TAG). Unfortunately, as TAG is a volunteer run organisation we have not had the resources to answer all 38 specific questions of the Consultation Paper within the allocated timeframe. We welcome any enquiries from you regarding information relating to unanswered questions and sincerely apologise for not being able to provide you with the information at this time.

### **1. What are the most important student outcomes for Australian school students that should be measured in the next NSRA? Should these go beyond academic performance (for example, attendance and engagement)?**

[Brief summary of this question: Academic performance tests would likely be appropriate in the case that gifted students were understood and their learning needs met. Unfortunately, in the current status quo other measurements such as (dis)engagement may be indicative of gifted students at risk, with research recommending that any assessment of gifted student (dis)engagement should include data from the students themselves.]

The Alice Springs (Mparntwe) Education Declaration states that

*“Australian Governments must provide all young Australians with equality of opportunity that enables them to reach their potential and achieve their highest educational outcomes.”*

This is not happening for gifted students. They are not reaching their potential or achieving their highest educational outcomes. In Australia it is estimated up to 75% of (identified) gifted students underachieve and up to 40% of (identified) gifted students drop out before the end of Year 12<sup>1</sup>. The outcomes for unidentified gifted students are likely dire due to their special learning needs not being either identified or supported

By way of background, most Australian educational policies<sup>2</sup> use Gagné’s Differentiated Model of Giftedness and Talent<sup>3</sup>, which theorises that gifted students have ability or aptitude that places them in the top 10% of their age peers (for which an IQ score derived from an appropriate psychometric assessment is a relevant assessment)<sup>4</sup>. However, gifted children are not necessarily ‘top of the class’: accurate identification and educational interventions that meet learning needs are necessary to support their talent development trajectory, and underachievement remains until talent evolves<sup>5</sup>.

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<sup>1</sup> Parliament of the Commonwealth of Australia. (2001). The education of gifted children. Retrieved from [https://www.aph.gov.au/Parliamentary\\_Business/Committees/Senate/Education\\_Employment\\_and\\_Workplace\\_Relations/Completed\\_inquiries/1999-02/gifted/report/contents](https://www.aph.gov.au/Parliamentary_Business/Committees/Senate/Education_Employment_and_Workplace_Relations/Completed_inquiries/1999-02/gifted/report/contents)

<sup>2</sup> Smith, S. (2017). Responding to the Unique Social and Emotional Learning Needs of Gifted Australian Students. In: Frydenberg, E., Martin, A., Collie, R. (eds) Social and Emotional Learning in Australia and the Asia-Pacific. Springer, Singapore.

<sup>3</sup> Gagné, F. (2010). Motivation within the DMGT 2.0 framework. High Ability Studies, 1(2), 81–99.

<sup>4</sup> Ronksley-Pavia, M. (2023). The Fallacy of Using the National Assessment Program—Literacy and Numeracy (NAPLAN) Data to Identify Australian High-Potential Gifted Students. Education Sciences, 13(4), 421.

<sup>5</sup> Smith, S. (2017). Responding to the Unique Social and Emotional Learning Needs of Gifted Australian Students. In: Frydenberg, E., Martin, A., Collie, R. (eds) Social and Emotional Learning in Australia and the Asia-Pacific. Springer, Singapore.

The difference between giftedness and talent was recently emphasised in the article ‘The Fallacy of Using the National Assessment Program–Literacy and Numeracy (NAPLAN) Data to Identify Australian High-Potential Gifted Students’<sup>6</sup>, noting the problematic use of NAPLAN results by some Australian schools for identifying giftedness when “*NAPLAN is an achievement test—at best identifying some narrow aspects of academic talent—rather than an assessment of potential (i.e., giftedness)*”. As mentioned above, talent actualisation is not guaranteed just because a student is gifted – their special learning needs must be addressed.

The learning needs of gifted students are as different from the norm as children with learning disabilities at the other end of the spectrum<sup>7</sup> and without that support gifted students suffer. Two previous Senate inquiries into the education of gifted children in Australia<sup>8 9</sup> revealed that our education systems regularly fail gifted students, and that gifted students regularly suffer psychological distress, boredom, frustration, and underachievement. In addition, without appropriate provision, disengagement for gifted students becomes exponential<sup>10</sup>, with early school leaving described as being the ‘endpoint’ of disengagement<sup>11</sup>. Gifted students may score highly on achievement tests but also be disengaged (because the content is so far below their ZPD); or they may score poorly due to disengagement, e.g.:

*“I’ve probably learnt about 2 or 3 things this year. I don’t learn, I just repeat the same thing over and over and over.. Maths - I just couldn’t concentrate. I was that bored I got a few [questions] wrong and the teacher didn’t know I was actually good at it. I was just so bored.”*

<sup>12</sup>

They may also interpret assessments differently from the ‘norm’ due to divergent thinking<sup>13</sup>.

Enabling gifted students to “*to reach their potential and achieve their highest educational outcomes*” is an important student outcome. Ideally, the needs of gifted students would be understood and met, but obviously we have a problem achieving this at the moment in Australian education, despite appropriate practices supported by a wealth of empirical studies (e.g. <sup>33 34 35</sup>) being widely known. Were gifted students understood and learning needs met, academic performance tests would likely

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<sup>6</sup> Ronksley-Pavia, M. (2023). The Fallacy of Using the National Assessment Program–Literacy and Numeracy (NAPLAN) Data to Identify Australian High-Potential Gifted Students. *Education Sciences*, 13(4), 421.

<sup>7</sup> Rotigel, J.V. Understanding the Young Gifted Child: Guidelines for Parents, Families, and Educators. *Early Childhood Education Journal* 30, 209–214 (2003).

<sup>8</sup> Parliament of the Commonwealth of Australia. (1988). Report of the Select Committee on the Education of the Gifted and Talented Children. Canberra, ACT: Australian Government Publishing Services.

<sup>9</sup> Parliament of the Commonwealth of Australia. (2001). The education of gifted children.

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[https://www.apf.gov.au/Parliamentary\\_Business/Committees/Senate/Education\\_Employment\\_and\\_Workplace\\_Relations/Completed\\_inquiries/1999-02/gifted/report/contents](https://www.apf.gov.au/Parliamentary_Business/Committees/Senate/Education_Employment_and_Workplace_Relations/Completed_inquiries/1999-02/gifted/report/contents)

<sup>10</sup> Smith, S. (2017). Responding to the Unique Social and Emotional Learning Needs of Gifted Australian Students. In: Frydenberg, E., Martin, A., Collie, R. (eds) *Social and Emotional Learning in Australia and the Asia-Pacific*. Springer, Singapore.

<sup>11</sup> Hancock, K. J., & Zubrick, S. (2015). *Children and young people at risk of disengagement from school*. Perth: Commissioner for Children and Young People, Western Australia.

<sup>12</sup> Northern Tasmanian schoolgirl in ‘Gifted Kids Interviews’, recorded by TAG Committee member, 2012.

<sup>13</sup> Ronksley-Pavia, M. (2023). The Fallacy of Using the National Assessment Program–Literacy and Numeracy (NAPLAN) Data to Identify Australian High-Potential Gifted Students. *Education Sciences*, 13(4), 421.

be appropriate. In the current status quo, other measurements, such as (dis)engagement may be indicative of gifted students at risk.

Although behavioural problems may be an obvious symptom of disengagement for some gifted students, identifying many gifted students who are at-risk or who have disengaged can be problematic<sup>14</sup>, as they can frequently appear behaviourally engaged (e.g., on task), affectively engaged (e.g., positive reactions to teachers), and socially engaged (e.g., involved in their learning) and there may even be some signs of cognitive engagement (e.g., goal setting), as well as satisfactory achievement (though not what would be expected given their potential and not what their parents and some teachers know they can achieve). Research suggests that incongruities between gifted students and their teachers' thinking is a foundational issue underlying increasing underachievement – with teachers erroneously believing their students' needs are adequately met<sup>15</sup>. They recommend that student voice on this issue be considered more carefully.

Thus, any assessment of gifted student (dis)engagement should include data from the students themselves.

## **2. What are the evidence-based practices that teachers, schools, systems and sectors can put in place to improve student outcomes, particularly for those most at risk of falling behind? Are different approaches required for different at-risk cohorts?**

- Identification of gifted students so that they have access to appropriate interventions.
- Acceleration (including grade and subject acceleration) and flexible pathways for gifted students. Myths surrounding acceleration are rife in Australian education, and this practice is rarely utilised (to the extreme detriment of gifted students) despite being very strongly supported by empirical research and in some cases recommended by State education departments.
- Above level testing so gifted students can be learning at their ZPD.
- Differentiation, enrichment, etc.

## **3. How can all students at risk of falling behind be identified early on to enable swift learning interventions?**

- Prompt access to gifted assessment through suitably trained psychologists.
- Education for teachers, schools, and parents of signs of giftedness so that students can be promptly referred for testing.
- Additional resources for suitably trained psychologists in schools – at the moment the wait for gifted assessments through schools in Tasmania is up to 2-3 years according to our Members.
- Once identified, ensure that gifted students are appropriately supported through interventions necessary to engage them to avoid leaving the school system or not reaching their potential.

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<sup>14</sup>Ronksley-Pavia, M., & Neumann, M. M. (2020). Conceptualising gifted student (dis) engagement through the lens of learner (re) engagement. *Education Sciences*, 10(10), 274.

<sup>15</sup> Ireland, C., Bowles, T. V., Nikakis, S., & Russo, D. (2021). Increasing underachievement of Australian highly able secondary science students. *SN Social Sciences*, 1(11), 264.

#### 4. Should the next NSRA add additional priority equity cohorts? For example, should it add children and young people living in out-of-home care and students who speak English as an additional language or dialect? What are the risks and benefits of identifying additional cohorts?

Gifted students should be added as additional priority equity cohorts. The 2001 Senate Inquiry said the disadvantage suffered by gifted children whose needs are not met is within the meaning of 'educational disadvantage'. In Australia, it has been reported up to up to 75% of gifted students underachieve<sup>16</sup>, up to 40% of gifted kids leave school without completing Year 12, and it is estimated that 20%-25% of gifted kids have social and emotional difficulties, about twice as many as in the general student population<sup>17</sup>.

##### Benefits:

- **FUNDING.** The interventions needed for gifted students can be as much as disabled students at the other end of the spectrum BUT there is no funding available to support teachers or schools in providing the interventions necessary for successful outcomes for gifted students
- The special needs of gifted students might be taken seriously. Despite two Senate inquiries (the first 30 years ago)<sup>18 19</sup>, a Victorian Parliamentary inquiry<sup>20</sup>, and numerous policies and empirical studies, attitudes persist against gifted education<sup>21</sup>. Nationally, gifted education of educators and school councillors/psychologists is largely lacking. The pervading belief of many Australian educators is that gifted and talented students are already academically advantaged and will achieve even without any teacher intervention. Research shows this to be a myth (albeit a widely accepted one)<sup>22</sup>, and it is extremely damaging. But it is not the only one e.g. a school psychologist told one of our members they didn't believe gifted students existed.

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<sup>16</sup> Parliament of the Commonwealth of Australia. (2001). The education of gifted children.

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<sup>17</sup> ACT Government, Myths and Facts

<sup>18</sup> Parliament of the Commonwealth of Australia. (1988). Report of the Select Committee on the Education of the Gifted and Talented Children. Canberra, ACT: Australian Government Publishing Services.

<sup>19</sup> Parliament of the Commonwealth of Australia. (2001). The education of gifted children.

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<sup>20</sup> Victoria. Parliament. Education and Training Committee. & Southwick, David. (2012). Inquiry into the education of gifted and talented students. Melbourne : Victorian Government Printer,

[http://www.parliament.vic.gov.au/images/stories/committees/etc/Past\\_Inquiries/EGTS\\_Inquiry/Final\\_Report/Gifted\\_and\\_Talented\\_Final\\_Report.pdf](http://www.parliament.vic.gov.au/images/stories/committees/etc/Past_Inquiries/EGTS_Inquiry/Final_Report/Gifted_and_Talented_Final_Report.pdf)

<sup>21</sup> Smith, S. (2017). Responding to the Unique Social and Emotional Learning Needs of Gifted Australian Students. In: Frydenberg, E., Martin, A., Collie, R. (eds) Social and Emotional Learning in Australia and the Asia-Pacific. Springer, Singapore.

<sup>22</sup> Fraser-Seeto, K. T., Howard, S. J., & Woodcock, S. (2015). An Investigation of Teachers' Awareness and Willingness to Engage with a Self-Directed Professional Development Package on Gifted and Talented Education. Australian Journal of Teacher Education, 40(1).

- Access to gifted assessment by psychologists in schools might improve. Currently our Members in Tasmania report waits of up to 2 to 3 years for assessment (see our submission number 42 [https://www.aph.gov.au/Parliamentary\\_Business/Committees/Senate/Education\\_and\\_Employment/SchoolRefusal/Submissions](https://www.aph.gov.au/Parliamentary_Business/Committees/Senate/Education_and_Employment/SchoolRefusal/Submissions)), and are told that support is prioritised for catching up students that are behind – which doesn't recognise the extreme risks associated with disengagement for gifted students or outcomes of reaching their potential.

Risks:

- Adding gifted students as additional priority equity cohorts would need to be supported by education of educators, psychologists, principals, decision-makers, etc. due to pervasive myths that undermine and prevent the interventions desperately needed by gifted children.

**5. What should the specific targets in the next NSRA be? Should the targets be different for primary and secondary schools? If so, how? What changes are required to current measurement frameworks, and what new measures might be required?**

Since disengagement and underachievement for gifted students often begins in primary school it is important to be able to recognise and intervene early with appropriate pedagogical practices and support strategies. A target for gifted students should be that they are actually learning everyday – and not disengaging. This means identification, understanding where their ZPD is using above level testing and the use of evidence-based interventions. This should of course be continued throughout their schooling.

**6. How can the targets in the next NSRA be structured to ensure that evidence-based approaches underpin a nationally coherent reform agenda while allowing jurisdictions and schools the flexibility to respond to individual student circumstances and needs?**

- There are international frameworks for decision-making in relation to acceleration that can be used to inform this practice so that the decisions are evidence-based rather than being left to school decision makers who largely have no training in gifted student needs (see <https://accelerationsystem.org/>).
- Schools should be given funding so that they can actually undertake meaningful interventions for gifted students, and so that students can be promptly tested by psychologists.
- Test for engagement, including student voice.
- Educating those involved in decision-making on interventions for gifted students. At the moment there are myths prevalent that prevent appropriate interventions being made, despite some policy being available. Educators, principals, school psychologists should all have suitable training in gifted education.

**7. How should progress towards any new targets in the next NSRA be reported on?**

- Levels of engagement for gifted students.
- How many more principals, educators, schools, etc. now have training in gifted education.
- How many more psychologists are available in schools for prompt gifted assessments.

- Funding for gifted educational needs to be reported

**8. What does it look like when a school is supporting student mental health and wellbeing effectively? What is needed from schools, systems, government and the community to deliver this?**

For gifted students: no school refusal, no disruptive behaviour, engagement, learning, outcomes reflective of potential, students not being forced to leave schools to go to other schools or homeschooling due to needs not being met. Proper gifted student identification and evidence-based interventions to ensure engagement and learning is occurring.