



## Public submission made to the Review to Achieve Educational Excellence in Australian Schools

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Submitting as a: Academic person or institution  
State: NSW

### Summary

#### Summary response

1. Educational success for Australian students should be defined to be a situation where every Australian student is reaching his/her FULL potential.
2. School quality should be measured by the degree to which students at the school are supported with educational interventions that are implemented by appropriately trained teachers to reach their FULL potential.
3. School funding should be EQUITABLY directed to support the various student subgroups, including disadvantaged students, vulnerable students and academically advanced students (gifted students).
4. Pre-service teacher training programs need to have gifted education as a separate, compulsory unit
5. Australian teachers need professional development in gifted education, as gifted students (including underachieving gifted students) exist in all schools
6. The Australian Institute for Teaching and School Leadership (AITSL) need to give academically advanced/gifted students the explicit attention it gives other student subgroups (i.e., students of diverse linguistic, cultural, religious and socioeconomic backgrounds; Indigenous background students; students with a disability)
7. The major barrier to the provision of appropriate support for academically advanced/gifted students is the ill-informed attitude that educational provisions for these students are inequitable and elitist. As for all other students, academically advanced/gifted students need to be given access to those educational provisions that address their specific needs.
8. The lack of attention to gifted students in the Australian education system is reflected in the less than satisfactory performance of the "top end" of Australian students in comparative international assessments such as PISA and TIMMS.

## Main submission

Educational success for Australian students should be defined to be a situation where every Australian student is reaching his/her FULL potential.

School quality should be measured by the degree to which students at the school are supported with educational interventions that are implemented by appropriately trained teachers to reach their FULL potential.

School funding should be **EQUITABLY** directed to support the various student sub-groups, including disadvantaged students, vulnerable students and academically advanced students (gifted students).

At present, meaningful attention is not being directed toward academically advanced students (gifted students). Most teachers in Australian schools do not have training in gifted education, and therefore remain ignorant of who the academically advanced/gifted students are (including those who are underachieving), and what educational provisions should be provided for these students. Indeed, gifted education forms a compulsory unit in teacher training programs in only 3 Australian universities. Consequently, as a first step (and in consideration of the fact that academically advanced/gifted students exist in every Australian school), there is a need for funding to be directed for all teachers in all Australian schools to receive professional development in gifted education.

In parallel, it is imperative that the state/territory bodies that accredit university teacher training programs **REQUIRE** all university teacher training programs to have a compulsory unit in gifted education (so that future teachers will be in a position to adequately provide for academically advanced/gifted students). In the state of New South Wales, the state body requires (or is in the process of requiring) compulsory units in special education, Indigenous education and English as an additional language/dialect, but not in gifted education. This is despite the fact that the Australian Professional Standards for Teachers expect all graduate teachers to be able to “differentiate teaching to meet the specific learning needs of students across the full range of abilities” (Standard 1.5).

In a few states/territories, the relevant state/territory body appears to consider gifted education to be a part of special education, and therefore considers gifted education to form an element of teacher training programs if special education is included in the teacher training program. This administratively convenient “solution” to the issue, ignores the fact that any gifted education component of these special education units is given minimal attention (e.g., one lecture in a unit that runs over twelve weeks) and that the lecturers of these units do not have training in gifted education. In New South Wales, where special education has been required as a compulsory unit in teacher training programs since the 1990s (and where the relevant state body considers gifted education to be a part of special education), an entire generation of experienced teachers remain ignorant of who the academically advanced/gifted students are and what educational provisions should be provided to these students.

It is also important that education bodies give more meaningful attention to academically advanced/gifted students:

- The Australian Institute for Teaching and School Leadership (AITSL) needs to give academically advanced/gifted students the level of attention that it gives other student groups in the Australian Professional Standards for Teachers. For example, separate standards are devoted to “Students with diverse linguistic, cultural, religious and socioeconomic backgrounds”, “Strategies for teaching Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students”, and “Strategies to support full participation of students with disability”, but none are specifically devoted to academically advanced/gifted students. In fact, the expressions “academically advanced” or “gifted” do not appear at all in the Australian Professional Standards for Teachers.
- State/territory education departments need to have sections and personnel who have specific responsibility in supporting academically advanced/gifted students.

The Australian Curriculum Assessment and Reporting Authority (ACARA) is an example of a body that does give academically advanced/gifted students the explicit attention that they deserve.

The major barrier to the provision of appropriate support for academically advanced/gifted students is the ill-informed attitude that educational provisions for these students are inequitable and elitist. As for all other students, academically advanced/gifted students need to be given access to those educational provisions that address their specific needs.

The lack of attention to gifted students in the Australian education system is reflected in the less than satisfactory performance of the "top end" of Australian students in comparative international assessments such as PISA and TIMMS.