

Dear Ms Lisa Paul and members of the Quality Initial Teacher Education Review,

I am writing to you as a former teacher, a parent of a gifted child, and finally with the perspective of having been a gifted child myself.

Many different government enquiries have considered gifted education and reported on the need for initial teacher education to include a compulsory unit on gifted education. Some of these include:

- Report by the Senate Select Committee on the Education of Gifted and Talented Children 1988,
- Senate Inquiry into the Education of the Gifted and Talented 2001, amongst its hearings found:

“The main theme that emerged in the inquiry is the need for better teacher training (both preservice and inservice) so that teachers are better able to identify the gifted and make provision for their special needs. Better curriculum support is also essential so that teachers can differentiate the curriculum for the gifted.”

- Productivity Commission Research Report, Schools Workforce, April 2012, which reported:

“...it is also important to recognise the learning needs of gifted and talented students who have the potential to excel beyond the achievements of an average student.” (p268)

Despite all these inquiries, reports, and findings there is still no inclusion of a compulsory unit on gifted education included in initial teacher training. The AITSL teaching standards do not include gifted students anywhere. They are a missing piece of the classroom puzzle.

This issue is of personal interest to me because I have seen first hand, from three different perspectives how gifted children can be let down by a failure of educators to have an understanding of the needs of gifted students. In my schooling, I was accelerated in early primary school, but did not have access to structured learning programs and teachers who had an understanding of the differences between myself (and my other gifted peers within the school) and other students.

Secondly, as a secondary teacher, I was not provided with the necessary instruction myself on how to identify and make provision for the students within my care that were gifted. I had a different perspective to a lot of my colleagues, but not knowing that many traits that were potentially signs of giftedness means that, looking back, I believe I missed several opportunities to help out gifted students.

Finally, as the parent of a gifted child, I have been heartbroken to see the lack of identification of their giftedness within a school environment, and even more troubling, the mis-identification of behavioural issues as a lack of maturity instead of a lack of enrichment. It was only because of the work of a single teacher who had been trained in how to identify giftedness, along with my own experiences as a child that pushed me to seek outside assistance to firstly identify, and then support my own child.

Quality teaching, and thus a quality education for gifted students is primarily met by teachers in mainstream classrooms. It is essential for teachers during initial teacher training to develop an understanding in the needs of gifted students and the appropriate pedagogies and identification processes so that can provide a rigorous, engaging learning experience when they start classroom teaching.

I urge you to make a unit of study in gifted education compulsory in all initial teaching programs across Australia.

Yours faithfully,
Matthew Schinckel