

18 July 2021

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

I am writing to you as a parent of a gifted child. I am also a primary school teacher who has worked in the Western Australian State Education System over the past 25 years. 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 matters to me because as a parent and a teacher, I feel let down by a system that does not appear to value the education of gifted children in our schools. Whilst completing my teaching degree at university, I was not given any significant training in general understandings of giftedness, nor the practical application of skills needed to cater for these students in my classroom. Further to this, throughout my 25 year career I have not received any formal professional learning provided by my school or the Education Department in this area. Conversely, it is obvious that intervention and support for children who struggle to meet expected levels of achievement is valued by the Education Department. Some level of funding, support and professional learning is prioritised and available for schools and teachers.

As a parent, when my daughter was identified as gifted in 2019, I was faced with the task of becoming an advocate for her to ensure that her unique needs are met in her classroom. It put me in a position where I was expecting something of her teachers that even I was unsure how to do. Over the past two years, I have had to seek out learning opportunities so that I could become knowledgeable and skilled enough to be able to provide support to her teachers then, now and into the future. I understand that the majority of her teachers will have a limited understanding of what it means to be gifted and will require a “crash course” to become familiar with strategies that will allow for her needs to be catered to in a mainstream classroom. It is no easy task to teach a child whose learning needs are vastly different of those of her peers and her teachers require evidence-based education and training. It should not be up to me to provide this training, but due to the lack of mandatory professional learning for teachers in gifted education, it has fallen to me, and to the individual teachers and parents of all gifted children across the country.

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

