

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

I am writing to you as a parent of two profoundly gifted children.

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 because our children’s teachers did not have the skills to identify the giftedness of our children. After 3 years of school my 6 year old son became disengaged. His behavior then began to impact his learning as he was not challenged, and he no longer wanted to go to school. Teachers have only been given the skills to ensure students meet minimum education requirements and this is where the school’s resources are spent. There are no GATE programs at this early level and no specialist primary schools in Western Australia.

During this journey we have discovered that teachers and principals do not have the knowledge or skills to ensure that high achieving children’s needs are being met and they are kept engaged. We have had Principals with 50 years teaching experience and experienced teachers who readily admit they do not have the skills or knowledge to deal with this top 20% of the class who are gifted as it was never taught while at university nor is it a part of the ongoing teachers education training.

We have had to spend a lot of money to ensure our children have the stimulation and resources to keep them engaged. Many parents are not in this position and still we are not fully meeting the needs of our children. Only if our gifted children fell within the definition of ‘disabled’ then there would be an abundance of resources available. Instead, they have to sit in class being bored and in turn begin to disengage and act out. We have children who have the potential to change the world and contribute immensely to society. We owe it to them to have teachers who have the skills to keep them engaged and ensure they thrive.

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.