

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

I am writing to you as both the parent of gifted children, an educator and educational consultant who supports teachers to meet the diversity of learners in our schools.

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.

The failure of these enquiries to require gifted education as part of pre-service teacher training and the omission of gifted learners from the AITSL standards send the message to teachers and parents that high potential and gifted students do not matter.

This issue is of personal interest to me because as an educator we are asked to improve the performance of all the learners in our classrooms, and yet there is no equity in the framing of what that support should look like for gifted learners. Teachers often wonder how they are supposed to provide appropriate learning for all students when the range of learner ability and skill is increasing year on year. Positioning high potential and gifted learners as important will make a significant difference in the lives of these children.

As parent, the school system pays lip service to providing appropriate learning experiences for high potential and gifted learners. As a parent you watch your child have positive experiences only if there are passionate, trained educators willing to consider their needs. I am fortunate to have this for our youngest child. However, for my eldest child this was not the case - and school was 13 years of drudgery and disappointment. For us it has worked out, because I am an educator and could keep him engaged outside of school. But for children in disadvantaged contexts the support of these students is purely based on chance.

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 they can provide a rigorous, engaging learning experience when they start classroom teaching.

If Australia is to continue to be the lucky country, if we are really serious about giving every child a fair go and if we want our children to compete on the world stage providing appropriate learning for ALL students including gifted learners is essential.

I urge you to require AISTL to include gifted learners in the teaching standards, to make a unit of study in gifted education compulsory in all pre-service teaching programs across Australia and give voice to a group who are often held up as exemplary, but who in reality have little support in the school system.

Yours faithfully,