

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, an early childhood teacher and an academic who teaches the early childhood degree.

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 am a parent of a 14 year old boy who is twice exceptional (gifted with ADHD). His education and mental health has been greatly affected by his teachers level of understanding of Gifted and twice exceptional learners, both positively and negatively. Our local school did not understand his needs, the principal’s advice to us was “he needs to sit in a classroom and learn that life is boring and when he goes home you teach him”. So we had to travel to a school outside our area to have his needs met, he currently attends a private high school with teachers who have specific post graduate gifted training and are passionate about meeting his needs. Not all parents can travel great distances and pay large amounts of money to have their needs met, and they shouldn’t have to.

I volunteer for the state gifted association Gifted NSW and hear many stories where teachers do not understand the needs of gifted children, parents try to advocate for their child/ren but this is often stressful and not well received by schools. Children’s engagement and mental health are affected but teachers are not trained to identify and support these children. The children who don’t have vocal parents struggle on their own, they disengage and misbehave. Gifted children have the right to an education that is meaningful for them, this is true for all children, but made more challenging for gifted learners because of the lack of teacher training.

When I trained as an Early Childhood teacher, more than 25 years ago, we had one lecture on giftedness, that was conducted by a very well respected academic, who didn’t understand giftedness. She was largely negative, criticised IQ testing, stated we need to focus on the things they are not good at and said “all parents think their child is gifted”. None of this is true or based in evidence or research, but a whole lecture theatre of students heard this as fact. Whilst this was

quite a long time ago, for some teachers this is their only training of gifted and I know of teachers who trained more recently who have had similar training. Australia has excellent academics who are well respected in the field of gifted education, we need to utilise these academics to provide specific and appropriate training on gifted education to all teachers.

I am also an academic, I teach in the Bachelor of Education (Early Childhood) at TAFE NSW, Higher Education. I teach a core, stand alone gifted subject. Every student who completes our degree receives 48 hrs (4 hours x 12 weeks) of specific training in gifted education. My students finish with a much greater understanding of how to identify and support gifted learners. I do not know of any other early childhood degree that have a subject like this (and only a small number of other education degrees). This amount of training would be appropriate for all teachers. If we can fit it into our degree why can't others?

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,

A solid black rectangular box used to redact the signature of the sender.