

# CORRECTED VERSION

## EDUCATION AND TRAINING COMMITTEE

### Inquiry into the education of gifted and talented students

Melbourne — 12 September 2011

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Mr N. Elasmarr  
Ms E. Miller

Mr D. Southwick  
Ms G. Tierney

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#### Witnesses

Ms L. Broadbent, President,

Ms C. Priest, Secretary, and

Ms C. Carapetis, past committee member, Gifted Support Network.

**The CHAIR** — I welcome the Gifted Support Network, represented by Colleen, Louise and Carolyn. I know that you have been watching this inquiry very closely, and that is great, so you are probably aware of the process and what has been happening with our committee, the Education and Training Committee. We are conducting this inquiry in regard to investigating opportunities around gifted and talented students. We have a series of questions that we wish to ask you; if something has been missed, we will give you the opportunity to make a contribution at the end.

As you can see, everything is being recorded by Hansard. You will have the opportunity to review the transcript for any typographical errors. Everything that you say is covered by parliamentary privilege, which is the same privilege that members of Parliament are covered by, but that privilege is not afforded to you outside the room. If you go out and give a press conference after the hearing or what have you, the same sort of privilege does not apply. Did you want to say anything by way of introduction?

**Ms BROADBENT** — I thought we could briefly introduce the Gifted Support Network, then each of us could talk very briefly about our personal stories for 1 or 2 minutes and then we could respond to questions.

You would have seen in our submission that the Gifted Support Network is a support network for families with gifted children. We have been going for more than 10 years. We have more than 110 member families, and we offer various activities and events for both parents and their children every term. We also have a library; we received a grant and so we have quite a considerable library. For parents who are new to this area, reading is a great way to start. We offer seminars every term, normally with an educational developmental psychologist specialising in this area or an academic in the field. Those seminars are well attended by teachers as well as parents. Depending on who we have speak, they are sometimes very well attended by teachers because they have had PD by that person. We charge \$10 for those seminars. That is very cheap PD for the school to send their teachers along.

We provide telephone and email support. If you type 'gifted' and 'Melbourne' into a search engine, I think the Gifted Support Network is one that comes up high on the list. We get a lot of emails and telephone calls from people and we take those calls. Carolyn and I do a lot of that work. We would get probably more than 30 cases a year that we deal with one on one, and often there is probably more than one conversation or email with each of those people. A lot of support goes on there. That is really the Gifted Support Network.

I came to the Gifted Support Network because I have a daughter who is gifted. By the time she was about three and a half she was clearly different. I considered early entry into school, but I was nervous about that, so we did not do that. We ended up doing a grade skip at the end of grade 1. She started in a Catholic school, so we have been in the Catholic education system. She went to an independent school, and she is still there and is now in year 12. That is my situation. I might hand over to Colleen to speak about her situation.

**Ms CARAPETIS** — I have two children; they are 19½ and 17. My 17-year-old daughter is about to finish school. My journey, if you like, with my children is almost over. Thank goodness, I have to say. It has been torrid. My son was double accelerated at much expense to us, because we had to get a private consultant. The schools did not understand and did not know what they were dealing with. We were lucky enough to have the IQ test carried out within the school with him. We did not actually have to pay for that, but that was at our insistence and after talking about discrimination and equity, because it took three terms of them knowing that he was different but not actually doing anything about it. They then wanted to put him into grade 4 for math when he was in prep. I said, 'Hang on a minute, don't you think we should actually know what we are dealing with before we just go carte blanche and put him into grade 4, just because that is what you think?'. That was when they actually tested him. That was in the public system.

Both my children have gone through the whole of their schooling in the public system with varying degrees of success. Both have been accelerated. My son was double accelerated. He skipped grade 1, he skipped grade 6 and went from grade 5 straight into a SEAL program. The acceleration itself was okay, but the SEAL program did not really do it for him. He then had to be accelerated on top of that in maths, which was a bit of a drama too, even for those who supposedly understood the whole thing. He then went to Melbourne High School, which was a huge success. He finished VCE with a score of 98.6. He did very, very well. He finished that and started university at nearly 17. He is now in his third year of university doing advanced science. The only mark he has had has been a high distinction. He is doing really well, in spite of the difficulties. I think without what we put in, that probably would not have been the outcome.

Our daughter is a different kettle of fish. We accelerated her once, but she aspires to be everything her brother is not. A bit of that sibling psychology comes in, I guess, where she just wants to be different from him, but she is doing very well. She got a 50 last year for PE, without really doing much work. I would say she studied right at the end, when she needed to. She did the work as she needed to do it, but I would say she really did not put in a huge effort. Our son was the same. When he went through his VCE studies I think he just did the work that he needed to hand in, and at the end he made sure he had covered what he thought he needed to cover and that got him through.

That has been our journey. It has been torrid. I think that is all I want to say.

**Ms PRIEST** — I am Carolyn. I have two children. My son is 13 and my daughter is 9. We have not really done a lot. Both of them have been assessed as gifted. I have not really done a lot with my daughter because she is much more confident. However, my son started prep in the right age group although he was not reading. I had a relationship with Lynne Mackenzie-Sykes — I do not know if she is part of this — and she assisted him. At the end of term 2 she recommended that he be accelerated. He was not really reading, so he went into grade 1. By the end of the year he could read the newspaper, and not because anybody was putting any effort into it; he just decided to do that and he went up. It was one of those things.

He studied in the Catholic system. In year 3 they called us in and said, ‘We would like to start him in year 6 math’, which was a really courageous thing for them to do. It was worked through and I think they did a really good job, but by the end of year 4 they called us in again to say, ‘He has had 18 months of year 6 math and we would really need to establish a relationship with a high school. I continued to drive him to see Lynne fortnightly for extension and things like that, but they wanted us to establish a relationship with a high school and to take him. I could not envisage my year 4 child and me fronting up. He was then moved to a private boys school. With all of those extra activities, that went really well for a while and he took on everything — sport, music and everything. That was fantastic.

Last year the strain of year 7 started to show with the inappropriate extension and with him not being understood. In extension math he was being told to redo his work in a different way because that would be fun and he should not annoy the next child, and this was because he would finish so quickly. He developed anxiety issues last year to the point where he was at home a lot. He asked to move, so he is now at the government high school. They have only just recently tested him. For some reason, I had to get back because I had used the services involved. I could not get them to test him or anything. So he is in year 8; they tested him as year 10 maths. The school is still not doing anything. I figure with all my understanding and the reading that I have done, I have the evidence, I have the IQ reports. He has tested high, and they still do not do anything. When he is learning something he is a different child. Now I am at the point where he may not be able to finish school, so that is a really hard journey. It is really brilliant for Colleen that they have had successes, but I have a child so young who we are having counselled and all these sorts of things.

**The CHAIR** — How old is he now?

**Ms PRIEST** — He is 13. So this is why we have not really attended to our daughter, because she is quite brilliant, too, but because she copes and she is not as sensitive, we have not really done anything. There is only a certain amount of energy one puts into these things all the time. That is sort of my brief story.

**The CHAIR** — Thank you very much for sharing that story with us. It certainly brings it home.

**Ms TIERNEY** — Just in terms of your experience, Colleen, you say it was traumatic on a number of levels. In terms of the key things that you were really frustrated about, what were they, and what were the costs? You said it was quite expensive, the additional impact on the family budget.

**Ms CARAPETIS** — The costs — I will address that first. We were lucky enough to have both of them assessed through the system, so we did not pay for the psychologists for that, but we did at different times when we felt we were not being heard by the school system, even though we had read a lot of research and we had consulted with consultants, which cost us money. At times that might have been \$60 an hour, where we consulted with someone who would talk with us and with our son or with our daughter, to work out how to do the testing and to work out where we should head, what sort of strategy we use to try to have their needs met. It was really blow by blow. Sometimes it would be not doing anything for a year, because it would be under control because of the work we had done the year before.

It was traumatic in that we knew and the experts knew, but the school system did not get it. We are sort of asking them to understand something that they are not educated about. So do not think I am slamming them for it, because they do not know — and I did not know, either. I had no idea I had a gifted child. I knew he was different. I thought gifted was, you know, writing some great musical piece when they were four. He read the newspaper when he was four. We thought all kids did that; we thought he was just a little bit ahead. We did not know.

**Ms BROADBENT** — Could I answer that about costs as well? My daughter was assessed privately, so that was \$600. She was also quite advanced in maths and the school system really did nothing in the way of addressing that, so we paid for her to go to CHIP. I know you have had Gail Byrne and Glenison speak. CHIP run a weekly, 2-hour maths session. My daughter also did swimming and ballet, but her most favourite thing to go to was CHIP, to go to maths on a Friday night. Really it kept her sane during the week, knowing that she was going to go to that. But that is a couple of hundred dollars a term. She did that from prep to grade 4. We had a couple of breaks and then she went back in years 7 and 8. That is thousands of dollars, of me paying for maths tuition for my daughter because the school — and even the private school, that was, as well — could not address her needs in the classroom. As for Carolyn, her psych expenses are outrageous.

**Ms PRIEST** — Yes, we have lots of psych expenses, and music — we have talked about our music expenses, too. You have said \$30 000, or that you do not want to think about [REDACTED]'s music. I have spent a lot on clarinet and piano. I have done that to try to get my children to have to work and learn something. Even though they are really brilliant and they might go to the movies and they will hear the song and they will come back and they will just play it, sometimes they have to learn and work through it. I have persisted with that, not because they really loved it or wanted to go anywhere with it.

**The CHAIR** — We might move through some of these questions and flesh out some of the ways forward. Firstly, I wanted to look specifically at your submission. It says that the term 'gifted' is associated with privilege, achievement and success. What terminology do you think should be used for gifted and talented students in Victoria?

**Ms BROADBENT** — I think 'gifted'. I think if we try to find another term, we will just have to go back and say, 'We're saying high potential, but actually we mean gifted'. The world consensus uses gifted. We just need to change the attitudes around the term rather than maybe the term.

**The CHAIR** — Your submission says that teachers and early childhood professionals should be educated to increase their ability to identify gifted students. What kind of education, support or resources do teachers and early childhood professionals need to help them identify gifted students?

**Ms PRIEST** — As part of their checks, if there were some indicators included, because we can look at a child and say, 'That child will be gifted' — you can see it in the playground or by the sophistication of their language. So you might need only a dozen checks there which would flag that further investigation.

**Ms BROADBENT** — I am not sure what is going on in the education of early childhood — for instance, the maternal and child health nurses — but I live in Ormond and the McKinnon health centre often refers parents through to me. I get phone calls; of those 30, probably 4 or 5 of them will be through there — and that is the maternal and child health nurse who has said, 'I think you'd better contact this group'. Now, that is lovely, that they do that, but really maybe there should be something more than just a parent volunteer support group that these parents can go to. That aside, they are picking it up.

There is a number of really easy ways to flag giftedness. Renzulli's checklist — which is just sense of humour, advanced language, doesn't need as much sleep — with just a simple 15 or 20 things on a checklist to start with would be great at that level, the maternal and child health nurse level. There is no harm in just investigating that further, if you can pick it up early, because I think probably you have heard that early intervention is going to work the best.

**The CHAIR** — Sure. Just on that, do you think that all students should be tested for giftedness, and if so, at what age? You mentioned early childhood.

**Ms BROADBENT** — I think that it is not so much that all students need to be tested with a formal IQ test, because that is not really possible and it is too expensive. But something like if teachers and early childhood

people have that checklist, even if it is in the back of their mind and they have a child in front of them and they think, 'Actually, I'll pull that checklist out, because I'm already noticing a couple of things that are different', and go through that. Then there are a variety of other sorts of cheap testing options. All children I think are tested. They come in and they do that pre-testing now of children.

The problem that I have experienced with that is my daughter had that pre-testing. They had to count by 2s to 20. My daughter came home and said, 'Mrs So-and-so made me stop counting at 88'. I can just image the scene, where she would have just kept counting forever, but nothing happened from that. Why did the teacher not say, 'Can you count by 3s?' — because she could, even though she was five — 'Can you count by 5s; can you divide 100 by 4?'. Just a couple of extra questions would have actually pointed that teacher in the right direction, but she only needed to count to 20, so that was it.

I think it is that openness, perhaps, to not being fixed in the testing they currently do, to allow that to go a bit further. Is that a wishy-washy answer? No, not all children need an IQ test, but yes, with all children you need to find out where they are at. For gifted children, they perhaps never go high enough to find out where they are at. That is the problem.

**Ms PRIEST** — That testing in prep, they do not seem to know, or they just stop it. I mean, my son was told when he was in term 2 of prep or something, but then when we had this psychologist help us out later on, to recommend he get accelerated, he was at grade 3 level or something. They set him the grade 3 NAPLAN, and she said to me, 'He's got most of them right; it must have been because it was multiple choice'. I said, 'No. If you give him a chocolate, he knows what a quarter of a chocolate is'. 'Oh, right, he can put it into practice'. I could not understand why the teachers could not test to find to that level.

**Ms TIERNEY** — We have just dealt with identification. Could we now move on to the skills and support that you believe teachers need to have to actually teach gifted children. What would they be?

**Ms CARAPETIS** — Coordination.

**Ms PRIEST** — This is where we need that group. You want to talk about the way they hear the group.

**Ms BROADBENT** — I think it is unrealistic to think that every teacher is going to be an expert in gifted education. In our submission we recommended that the department of education have a working group or a group responsible for gifted education. I think there used to actually be someone whose job it was to be responsible for gifted education. It became a part-time job a couple of hours a week, and I do not know if it even exists at all now. If there were something from the top down, it would give teachers the opportunity to take the risks that at the moment they are unwilling or perhaps afraid to take.

Our children need teaching. That is really in some respects quite the opposite of how they are taught to teach children. Children need multiple repetition of a task. Children should not be pushed far out of their comfort zone because we do not want them to be emotionally damaged. That is the opposite of what our children need. Our children do not want multiple repetition. If they know it, they know it; there is no point doing it 10 times. They do need to be pushed out of their comfort zone because our children never get that excitement of learning. If there is something other children cannot do, they struggle and learn it, they achieve it and feel that sense of achievement. Our children can get to VCE almost without ever having experienced that. Sometimes it is actually too late, because they do not know how to apply themselves to a task.

A teacher needs to feel that they are able to push these children to something that is above and beyond what the rest of the class is doing. I think they feel very nervous about doing that. We need a system in place where we have, from the top down, some leadership in gifted education so that a teacher could say, 'I've got this child, give me the permission to work differently with them'. That means that a teacher needs to have identified the child and then is able to go somewhere for that help, that expert advice. Whether there is a cluster system and an expert in gifted education for a number of schools, or whether there is a working party in the department that comes straight to the teacher — I am not sure how that would be set up — the teacher needs to be able to go somewhere and get that help when they have that child in their classroom, as opposed to every single teacher somehow magically becoming gifted experts.

**Ms TIERNEY** — You mentioned it in your introduction, but for the record can you tell us a little bit more about the professional development or resources your organisation provides to teachers?

**Ms BROADBENT** — I believe teachers have to do an amount of professional development for a number of hours during the year. I do not know how you get accredited to provide that, but we do not provide that. If they come to us and one of our seminars, no doubt they will learn, but it is not officially professional development for them. The sorts of things that we provide are educational psychologists, academics with expertise in gifted education and other people who are experts in the field but perhaps not qualified, such as heads of parent groups and that sort of thing, who come and speak for us.

**The CHAIR** — Your submission says that the Department of Education and Early Childhood Development should mandate some minimum provisions for gifted education. Why do you think such a mandate is needed, and what should these minimum provisions be?

**Ms BROADBENT** — The first half of the question is easy. We have to have them because we do not have them and nothing has happened. We are all in this situation. We have been in every school system. It does not exist, so we have to have something in place. Whether we have the right people who are qualified to tell you what the provisions should be is perhaps harder to know.

**Ms PRIEST** — Sometimes when you bring an IQ report they do not seem to acknowledge that. I had a situation recently where they did their own in-house testing, and all of a sudden they said, ‘Oh, he’s bright’. The tests need to be recognised, and they need to understand them. If a kid tests at a certain level, then telling us that he needs to keep going on year 8 maths does not seem to make sense. There have to be some flags. When the NAPLAN results comes back, if the maths result is right at the top, then that child should not be made to continue at the current year 3 or year 5 level; when the teacher sees the dot is at the top they should be able to automatically say, ‘This child should not be sitting here’.

**The CHAIR** — So do you think the key thing that is needed is more around teacher education and training in this area to identify and to work with children?

**Ms PRIEST** — Certain indicators mean that the regular situation does not apply, and then there needs to be the formula of, what do we do now? That is the problem. They are reinventing it each time. When that dot is at the top they do not seem to see it, because the fuss that is made when they see those high IQs or high reports, it is as if they fluked it. They need to know what to do next. That is where the group needs to plan out how it will be handled.

**Ms BROADBENT** — Yes, there does need to be more training, but I think it needs to be targeted, rather than given to every single teacher. In particular, if you have a gifted child in the classroom, that teacher needs help. We could say all teachers need training in their undergraduate degrees, but that is not going to help for five or six years. Something needs to happen now for the teachers who are in schools now. We could target the teachers who actually have the gifted children in their classrooms, which will depend on where you put that number for giftedness — whether it is the 130-plus or whatever the number is; the top 2 per cent or top 5 per cent — because not every teacher in the state has a gifted child in their classroom. I think it is doable. If you have a gifted child in your classroom, there should be a group you can go to for help on how to do that within the structure of our education department.

**Ms MILLER** — Many submissions argue that gifted education should start as early as possible. What early childhood programs currently exist for gifted children, and how can we increase the provision of appropriate education opportunities for children prior to primary school?

**Ms BROADBENT** — That is our no. 1 thing. People phone us and say, ‘My child is 3 or 4, what can we do?’.

**Ms CARAPETIS** — I chose to actually pay for an extra day of kindergarten for my daughter because I could not deal with it. My daughter went to an integrated kindergarten where they had children at the other end, and that teacher picked it up and said, ‘She’ll be gifted too’; she knew. Because we had that experience with the other end, it became for me about justice. My children come from a very working-class background. We did not have the money to pay for these experts, but we had to adjust the other things that we did to find the funds to find the answers. That was one of the many ways that we dealt with it. We used to take them to museums. We used to do a lot of things just on a personal level that were not too expensive, and the extra day of kinder was one of the measures we took.

**Ms PRIEST** — As far as support goes, when people ring me I advise them — unless the child is specifically interested in numeracy and literacy — not to actively search for something to teach them but to go along the language route or the music route. A lot of people come to us with children in the four-year-old, kinder age group and the prep age group, and I have advised people, ‘Even though the situation is stressful at kinder, you cannot change it. You are only there for a short time; you cannot change the way that particular group is running, and sometimes it is better not to have the child attend kinder and to wait until they go to school’. There is nothing at the moment, and there is a lot of stress for parents and children, and that is when the behaviours start because the children know they are different. There are places to put them, but you cannot move them in the middle of the year, whereas once they are in school you can move them. But you cannot move during kinder, so it is really tricky.

**The CHAIR** — Can I just ask a follow-up there? In terms of guiding them in the language and music programs, is that to provide them with another outlet so you are not accelerating to a point where, in your case, the maths —

**Ms PRIEST** — If you can.

**The CHAIR** — is at year 6 level when your kid is in year 4 or year 3.

**Ms BROADBENT** — Many gifted children are not numerate and literate by the time they go to school, but I would say the majority would be. My daughter was two or three years advanced in maths and reading by the time she got to school. Rather than you fostering and developing that as a parent, your child tends to drag you kicking and screaming because they want to develop that. At some stage she would have got her hands on a book and would be reading it. I do nothing. I only have books in the house. I once bought one of those books that you can buy in the newsagent for maths — colour in the number 1 and things like that. That was it: that was what my daughter did all the time. She would sit and do these maths books, and that was her idea of a good time. I was not trying to push maths; she would drag that out — ‘Please can I have another one of these?’. Trying to find something away from the school curriculum is what leans you towards music or languages because it is something you can do that is not going to make them even more advanced by the time they get there. It is tricky because they pull. It is hard to not have them be terribly advanced.

**Ms MILLER** — Your submission says the introduction of a SEAL program for primary schools should be investigated. What are the potential advantages and disadvantages of a SEAL-type program for primary school children, and what other kinds of programs should be available in primary schools?

**Ms CARAPETIS** — If you have a SEAL program at primary school level, it would be coordinated like it is at high school. Doesn’t coordination make more sense than just this one-off bandaid solution? That is my thought.

**Ms PRIEST** — It shows you the years — I am not in it, but we are looking at being in it — where the acceleration can happen and where the compaction can happen, so it gives people choices. Do you finish early? Do you do more year 12? Do you start university? It gives you choices, and it is a known thing. I guess there would also be a cohort of people together and other parents, so it is less weird.

**Ms MILLER** — Following on from that, many submissions have reported that it can be difficult for a child to enter primary school early. What are the Gifted Support Network members’ experiences of this, and do you think early entry to primary school should be more accessible to gifted children? If so, what criteria should we use to determine if early entry to primary school is suitable for a gifted child?

**Ms PRIEST** — The thing that gets me is that if you ring up in November and say, ‘I am not bringing my child next year; they are not socially ready’, that is fine — ‘We will see you in 12 months’. But if you ring up in November and say, ‘My child is not five by the end of April, but I want to bring my child next year’, the hoops you have to jump through are really hard. There are things that the child needs to be able to do to be able to cope. I think a professional needs to make that decision. The parent cannot necessarily make that decision. My daughter started young — not even as an early entry; she was right at the end — and I had comments that it was not appropriate because she was tired and she was little. She might not have started till grade 2 if they had waited till she was a certain height. The sorts of things that they were looking at were not actually relevant.

If the child is accepted to have the right IQ, it is their robustness and it is their personality. Some sensitive children might not be able to start early because they might not be able to handle that. But my son was sensitive, and he was able to handle acceleration. It is all in the way that the receiving teacher handles it, and it is people knowing how to answer questions like, ‘Why is that child still four?’, ‘Why are they turning five in October of their prep year?’ or whatever. There are many people in the group who have gone through this, more with acceleration than early entry because getting an early entry seems to be very difficult.

**Ms BROADBENT** — I think when it is your first child you are quite nervous as well about early entry. I was advised with my daughter that she would be able to go to school and that there would be no issues as far as learning. She is confident, capable and tall — she is all of the things that are fine for going to school. But then I was told by the kindergarten teacher who was having this conversation with me, ‘But of course she will be four and most boys are held back so she will be a four-year-old in with six-year-old boys’, and I thought, ‘Oh no, I cannot do that to her. That sounds terrible’. So I did not pursue it, and we did not do our acceleration until the end of grade 1.

If you try to do it in a private school, it is kind of okay — that is very much just a one-on-one conversation with the principal. But in the state system and also the Catholic system it is very difficult. It is so frustrating if you have a child who is a May child: they may be two weeks too young, and yet, as Carolyn said, you absolutely have to jump through hoops to get that child in early. Whereas if I decide to hold my son back because he is a boy, I do not have to say anything; I just have to not send him to school.

**Ms MILLER** — You made a comment about the difference between a private school and a state school. Why do you see one as being more difficult than another?

**Ms BROADBENT** — Because with a private school it is a conversation between you and the principal about whether your child can come in and at what level.

**Ms MILLER** — And at a government school?

**Ms BROADBENT** — At a government school I do not know if it is the principal’s decision, but in our experience it is certainly not. I do not think we have had anyone who has had early entry into a state school without going through a lot of paperwork and work with the department. You cannot just negotiate your child in. There is a system.

**Ms CARAPETIS** — My experience with that is that I did not try because I was advised by a parent support group — it was not GSN; it was the Knox support group in those days — that it was very, very difficult or almost impossible, and you are better off getting them into the system and going from there.

**The CHAIR** — We will have to speed things up a bit because we have quite a few more questions to get through in a short period of time. In your submission you mentioned the fact that there was not necessarily the access for rural and regional students. What suggestions do you have for helping students in rural and regional areas?

**Ms PRIEST** — That is not really our area, but we do get calls and I really feel for those people. But that is not our experience.

**The CHAIR** — Would you consider technology as being — —

**Ms CARAPETIS** — That is exactly what I was about to say. I think technology is going to play a part not just for rural students; it could be part of the solution for all these kids.

**Ms BROADBENT** — But our experience is that we are located in the Glen Iris, Kingston and bayside area, so we do not have a lot of experience in that.

**Ms TIERNEY** — Your submission says that there is a lack of understanding and acceptance of gifted children in the school system. You have talked about that as well this morning. It has been suggested to the committee that the negative attitudes to giftedness should be addressed through educating the community, school leaders and teachers. Firstly, do you agree with that, and if so, what are the key components of an education program aimed at overcoming the negative attitudes to giftedness? How would such a program be delivered?



**Ms PRIEST** — That is a good question.

**Ms BROADBENT** — That is a very good question. The SEAL program is an example. It is a well-coordinated, well-respected and successful program that goes a long way towards helping understand gifted children. In a school running a SEAL program there is a cohort of the SEAL kids and then there are all the other students in the school. There is not an issue with that. There might be some negativity, but on the whole, from the survey in our submission, the SEAL programs were overwhelmingly considered very positive and were often the first time the parents' kids had had a positive experience.

I think the more we can have coordinated education of gifted children within the schools, the more it will be seen to be a positive thing. If we can have something — not necessarily a SEAL program but something — within the primary school system that accepts and provides for gifted children in a positive way, you are not going to have the children being naughty and causing problems and all those other issues you have when they are not educated appropriately.

I think it is a long-term strategy. There is not an advertising campaign. There is certainly nothing we really thought of that would be a way to suddenly turn the community's opinion around. But the better we help these students within the school system, the more positive their experience and the experience of everyone around them is going to be, and that is what is going to filter through.

**Ms PRIEST** — If it is personalised or compared to the other end of the scale, like if you say to a teacher, 'A child with an IQ of 70 or lower is given these sorts of arrangements', teachers understand that. Then you say, 'On the equivalent, if your child is 130 or above, they are equally as away from the norm and equally as entitled to different arrangements'. Schools are not aware of those arrangements, but if it is put into that sort of context, then hopefully people will say, 'Yes, they are so far away from the norm, and my class is teaching for children with an IQ of 100'. These are the sorts of arrangements that need to be in place.

Our sort of story is that it is not children who are like Mozart or writing symphonies at age 4 and things like that; it is the way they read and those sorts of things. I think for a lot of teachers, because they have never experienced it — obviously we do not want to have to go and it is not necessary for parents to go — the PDs could address it at that level too to make it understandable so that when parents like us come in, they see that this is the sort of life they are living. They are not gifted when they are in school; they are gifted all the time.

**The CHAIR** — Do you think we should be celebrating success the way we do in relation to our sportspeople?

**Ms CARAPETIS** — Of course — absolutely.

**Ms BROADBENT** — One of the things we have, and I think it is mostly only in high school, is all the competitions and that sort of thing. That is wonderful, and we do celebrate that, but there is very little in primary school to celebrate that sort of success. However, I do not think we can consider the education of gifted students around half a dozen competitions in their entire 12 years of schooling. It has to be celebrating success in the classroom in what they are doing every day. It is not about celebrating that they have won the maths Olympiad.

**Ms MILLER** — It is just kind of like the milestones they achieve as they progress.

**Ms BROADBENT** — It is the same as any student who has been struggling to do their times tables and then learns them then getting the award that week because they have now learnt their times tables. That is celebrated because they have put in some work. There needs to be a celebration of the success of gifted children when they put in some work and achieve. The problem is that a lot of gifted children get an award when they have succeeded — for example, when they have learnt their timetables — but they knew them four years ago. What does that teach a gifted child? That teaches them that they do not need to put in any effort and they will get an award. It needs to be appropriate for their level — but yes, it needs to be celebrated.

**Mr ELASMAR** — Your submission outlines the difficulties faced by parents of gifted children and says that parents should have access to practical information and resources to help them. What kind of support do parents need, what specific information and resources should be made available to assist parents of gifted children and who should provide this support?

**Ms BROADBENT** — Currently that is exactly what we do. We provide support to parents of gifted children. They need to know they are not alone. They need to know their child is normal for gifted. We often talk about the fact that you talk about normal as having an IQ of 100 and 130-plus as being gifted, but once you are in the gifted ranges, you are normal for gifted. The fact that children have all sorts of various needs and requirements is normal in that area. Parents ought to know that other people are going through it.

We are always getting parents who say when we have a coffee morning, ‘This is the only forum in which I can talk about my child. This is the only forum in which I can talk about something they have done, because if I say that in the school or often with my family, they think that I am making it up and bragging and that it is not really possible et cetera’. Parents really need that support. Should it be a volunteer organisation such as ours that gives it? Should there be something more structured and formal?

**Ms CARAPETIS** — There used to be a support within the education department, when we were accelerating our son from year 5 to year 7. The primary school told me it would not sign off on it. I did not know the primary school had to sign off on it. I rang this woman at the education department, and that was her role — liaising — and she was gifted education. It was some years ago obviously. She said, ‘That is rubbish. The primary school absolutely does not have to sign off on it. If the school where he is going is going to receive him and is prepared to take him, it does not matter what the primary school says’. She was a great support. She understood gifted. She confirmed what I was saying. It was very scary for us to take a 10½-year-old and consider putting him into high school. It was like putting him into a jungle.

**Ms MILLER** — Your submission says that many parents have had negative experiences with the use of individual learning plans in schools. Do you believe there is a role for individual learning plans in gifted education? If so, what are the most effective ways to use these plans?

**Ms BROADBENT** — We have had an individual learning plan negative experience. When we did our survey they almost all came back saying that the individual learning plans were terrible, and there is a list of quotes in our submission. The problem is not the individual learning plan. I think an individual learning plan is exactly what gifted children need for their entire day at school, as their needs in the classroom are completely different. Therefore an individual learning plan is exactly what they need.

The way ILPs are used in schools, though, is not like that. It is much more targeted to, ‘Look, your child might be three years ahead in this and four years ahead in that, but they are not writing enough so we are going to do an individual learning plan to make them write more’. That was my experience. I think a lot of the individual learning plans are focused on their weaknesses rather than their strengths. They are almost used as a bit of a stick, like: ‘Your child might be good at this, this and this, but we are going to focus on this thing they are not so good at’. That is one example. Another one is that parents find that individual learning plans are really used by the schools to say, ‘Well, we are doing something. We have set this up, we have got a bit of paper and we are doing something’. But the experience is they are not.

The other problem with an individual learning plan is that it might say, ‘We are going to provide acceleration in some area’. It is not reported on in the school report, so there is no outcome from the individual learning plan, or it is unmeasurable. Whatever it talks about in there, they are going to be better behaved. How do you measure that outcome? There are a lot of issues with the implementation of them, I think, rather than the concept behind them.

**The CHAIR** — The committee has concluded its questions. Is there anything, very quickly, that we have not covered that you would want to ensure was in your submission?

**Ms BROADBENT** — No.

**The CHAIR** — Thank you for appearing before the committee today. We really appreciate it.

**Ms BROADBENT** — Thanks for the opportunity.

**Witnesses withdrew.**