

# CORRECTED VERSION

## EDUCATION AND TRAINING COMMITTEE

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

Melbourne—10 October 2011

#### Members

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Mr N. Elasmr

Ms E. Miller

Mr D. Southwick

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#### Witness

Mr P. Brown, Executive Officer, Country Education Project

**The CHAIR**—Thank you, Phil, for appearing before the committee today. As you know this is the Education and Training Committee and we are looking at gifted and talented students as part of the inquiry.

The way we will proceed today is we have a number of questions for you. They will be recorded on Hansard. You will have the opportunity to look at the transcript and if there are any typographical errors, you can make changes to those. I also need to point out that the evidence you give today is covered by what we call parliamentary privilege which is the same privilege afforded to members of parliament. The same privilege is not afforded if you hold a press conference once you leave here and say what you like outside of the room. We also give you the opportunity of making an opening statement if you wish.

**Mr BROWN**—Very briefly. In relation to Country Education we look after all those communities that in a very general sense are about an hour and a half from this GPO in Melbourne, and 11 or 12 regional centres, the rest we cover. There are two things that I would probably make a comment about in introduction: one is that if we are talking about the traditional perception of gifted and talented kids, in a rural complex it is more complex because of the networking and the social contact process. Often it is individualised kids within individual communities who fall within that brief. The second is that in a broader context of where learning is going in the 21st century, the concept of gifted or talented, or call it whatever you like, is a responsibility of every teacher and every school community around extending kids learning processes, and the need to provide a learning environment and a learning approach that caters for individual needs might unearth a whole range of other gifted kids that we do not necessarily know about.

In that context it is a much bigger picture to have a conversation around gifted and talented. That raises the question about what is a gifted kid and what is a talented kid, and opens that whole conversation about what teaching and learning looks like in terms of the next 10 to 15 years, or 20 years or 30 years. That is probably the start, David, and we can go wherever.

**The CHAIR**—Excellent, thank you. We will spend some time focusing on your specific program of eKids. Firstly, how did gifted students and their parents find out about the eKids Rural Express Program, and were the students selected to participate in the program, and did you carry out any ongoing assessment of participating students and, if so, what were the results of the assessment?

**Mr BROWN**—Okay. The eKids Rural Express Program came out of the notion that there were a number of parents in rural communities who thought they had a talented kid and who was not being extended by the school. Through a contact that we had with a teacher in the school and an offer of her expertise we developed this notion of, what if we develop a blended learning—and that might be worth exploring in the future as well—approach for those young people. There was no selection criteria in terms of choosing or not choosing kids on the basis that either a parent or a teacher could nominate a child to participate in the program. What we specifically did was develop that online in a learning environment to cater for parents, for teachers and for students, because our view was if we do not incorporate all three, then the support of the learning of the student is compromised to some degree. Out of that we resourced it predominantly around literacy, numeracy and science and looked at those areas as areas of gaps and areas where most rural students felt that they would like some extension work.

Needless to say we received somewhere in the order of three times the number of students expressing an interest to be involved. It was done in an environment where those students could learn at their pace, at their time and in an environment that they chose. The outcomes, what we found was that the kids found it really easy and comfortable.

**The CHAIR**—There was not a selection process as such. You took on whoever applied.

**Mr BROWN**—No. Well, we had general criteria around what we would determine as a gifted and talented student and there were about five areas that we asked schools to document. If they fulfilled all those, then they were in. We did not knock back a kid, basically. What we were saying was that if you wanted your kid to be involved or a student to be involved, either a parent or a teacher needed to support that learning back in their own environment. Then there was a support mechanism provided for both that contact teacher or contact parent in terms of supporting the learning. We found that students learnt in a whole range of different ways and were accessing a whole range of learning activities right across the

spectrum. We targeted the upper primary school area because what we were getting back from schools was that tended to be the area that issues like disengagement from school learning and processes started to occur.

Rather than wait till it became a real issue at year 8 or year 9, we thought we would do a preventative process and start engaging kids at that perspective. We have done a report on it and an evaluation in terms of the data and participation rates and all that type of thing that we can easily give you access to. In terms of the outcomes in general terms, most of the feedback we have from schools, and especially the students who are involved, is that it was a very engaging process and that most of them still utilise some of those learning activities or learning processes and still communicate with one another across the state, both at a parent level and a student level.

What we found really important was the concept of blended learning, rather than digital learning came about, because what we found was if you take a blended learning approach it seems to have the best outcome for kids. What I mean by blended learning is that there is some face-to-face contact, there is online contact and there is a social networking component to it. With those three, research is now telling us across the globe that that has the most powerful outcome for young people. What we did was we provided opportunities for students to come together face to face and be exposed to areas and people of expertise that they might be interested in. The head veterinarian from Melbourne University is one example that those students got involved in and starting talking to. The outcomes we had were huge, and the only reason we did not continue it was because of resourcing.

**The CHAIR**—About 40 kids were involved in it?

**Mr BROWN**—Were started, and we ended up with 95 participating.

**The CHAIR**—Over what period of time?

**Mr BROWN**—Over a period of 2½ years to three years.

**The CHAIR**—From years?

**Mr BROWN**—Year 5 through 6, predominantly. A few grade 5 kids snuck in there but, yes. I should say what we also did was we did not really want to invent something new but build the capacity and utilise the skill base and the knowledge and the involvement out there. We built a relationship with the distance education concept out of Tasmania that did an extension learning program. Students are involved in those on a pro rata process. We utilised the Saskatoon Cyber School concept and developed some links into that, and we also developed some fairly strong links with some interested teachers across rural Victoria to build their capacity around using a blended learning approach to extend kids.

**The CHAIR**—Thank you. Gail?

**Ms TIERNEY**—I think you have answered my first question which was reflecting on your experiences from the eKids Rural Express Program, what makes an effective web based learning program for gifted students, but you have already mentioned it is face-to-face interaction and social interactions.

**Mr BROWN**—It needs to involve those combinations, absolutely.

**Ms TIERNEY**—What would be the best way to select gifted students in rural Victoria to participate in an online extension program?

**Mr BROWN**—That is a tough question. It goes back to that concept and that discussion we need to have about are we talking traditional gifted kids, or are we talking about extending kids in a learning process that they might have an expertise or a special talent within. If it is the second thing I think the concept we need to identify is very much locally determined, and giving the teachers the capacity and the knowledge basically about understanding where those students are at and where they potentially could be. That is an area I think we need to do a lot of work with. The whole area of building a skill base and

knowledge base of our teaching staff, especially around extension learning and extending kids learning abilities, is an area that we need to do a fair bit of work on.

I think the local people will know, either through a parent structure or a teacher structure or a combination of both, to help us understand the talent of those kids and the extension needed of those particular kids.

**Ms TIERNEY**—Okay. The committee understands that online learning is used in some other Australian states to provide for gifted students—and in particular there is a virtual selective entry school in western New South Wales, and an online selective entry academic program in WA. Have you looked at these programs and, if so, what makes these programs good models for online learning for gifted students? Secondly, what other programs are you aware of, either nationally or internationally, that provide effective online learning for gifted students?

**Mr BROWN**—Okay. Where do you start? I mean, I think the whole debate around digital learning needs to be really thought through, and thought through carefully. The conversation we need to have is around the concept of blended learning. Generally what we have done in digital learning is we have centralised expertise and we deliver out. The model we did in eKids Rural Express was to not actually do that but build the capacity in a location where that can then be shared. It is the material we are now working with in terms of the education sector about building the capacity of individual schools, and teachers within those schools, to share that expertise through a digital format.

If you go, for example, to places like Denmark and those types of places, that is the model they are using. They are using this notion of a capacity building process, rather than a centralising of expertise and then delivering out. I can then start saying in my school, 'Okay, this is a gifted kid. So-and-so is going to deliver that kid and I've now abdicated my responsibility for delivering learning,' when in actual fact in my community as a teacher I should be supporting the learning of that particular young people in that process. The challenge that a gifted kid brings is that there is a whole range of social needs and learning needs in a rural context that might be challenging. Where do parents get the networking and support mechanisms when they are the only one within their community? Where do students go for their social networking and I think that is the conversation we need to have.

It was interesting in our recent visit to the UK, Scotland and Scandinavia, the concept of clustering became very powerful. That notion of linking schools of like-mindedness or like students or like teachers through a digital mechanism seemed to be a growing area of interest around sharing learning, but also providing learning. If I have a deficiency in terms of numeracy and you have a gifted kid in numeracy and you have a good teacher, then we might be able to share digitally around how we might be able to link that together. It also builds the capacity of teachers in terms of that peer support mechanism as well. I do not want to see kids in rural communities having to relocate to access a learning process that is not available within that community. We need to look at mechanisms that build the capacity for that community to link with other communities to deliver.

**Ms TIERNEY**—I think you have also answered my next question in part 2. What are the disadvantages of using internet based learning to provide for gifted children in rural Victoria? For example, some students, of course, might not even have internet access.

**Mr BROWN**—Spot on. One of the programs we are doing at the moment at VCE level—two communities we are working with, once you leave the school you do not have internet access. That limits the process. The whole communication and ICT connectivity issue is a big one when you are talking about online. The other one which I think is a real danger is that digital learning is the panacea and the answer to the issues that we face. If we cannot get access to something, let's throw a digital learning process out there. I am not sure that is the conversation we need to be having. I think it needs to be about teaching and learning. How do we build the capacity of teachers and the skill base that we have within our teaching staff and our parent population to be made aware of a whole range of services in there? Then digital learning becomes a tool but also home learning does and also classroom teaching does.

**Mr CRISP**—To extend that a little bit further, what support and resources do schools in rural Victoria

need to cater for those gifted students, because you have given us those two baskets of face to face, and all the other tools. Are there any others we should be aware of?

**Mr BROWN**—If we take that generalised notion of each kid learns differently and at different paces, and will have a challenge in an area of focus, then I think we need to spend a fair bit of time around professionally developing our teachers, and every one of our teachers, around the notion of, how do I extend kids and how do I engage kids in learning to a level that—and I think we also need to start challenging this notion that age based learning is the way of the future. We need to start thinking about a whole range of different ways of doing that. I was in a school in Denmark two weeks ago where ages of 10- to 16-year-olds were in the same class but they were all learning the same material. This concept of, 'We deliver where the kids abilities are and where their interests and passions are,' has a much more engaging process than if we all stick them with all 12-year-olds and all 13-year-olds in a thing called year levels.

**Ms MILLER**—How does the emotional intelligence component work in that environment, or how did it work in that environment, because children of 10 are clearly very different from children of 15, particularly for girls and boys who go through adolescence at different levels.

**Mr BROWN**—The other interesting thing they have put in place is that their learning expertise is different depending on the learning area that they are focused on. In really practical terms I might be talented in terms of writing skills and reading skills and I am a 10-year-old and I can easily cater with having that conversation and that dialogue with a year 9 kid, but in maths I might be the other way. What they have done is they have structured their school whereby the kid moves to the abilities across their learning areas. They have different cohorts of kids that they mix with and they learn from. The really interesting process that came out of that was the powerful learning that is available and provided through peer support networks, that groups of students working together really does enhance that process of learning. What they started finding was that the kids who were slightly slower in their learning process, progressed further down the path much quicker than if they were in an age based structure. It was an interesting model, and the thing that struck me about that particular school was—we were there for the whole day and spent time in two classes of students—the engagement of students was sensational. I have never seen a group of 30 kids engaged in their learning for an hour and a half to the level that these guys were.

**Mr ELASMAR**—Phil, are you aware of any primary schools that offer programs for gifted students in rural Victoria, and what educational programs or initiatives should be introduced for gifted students in primary schools in rural Victoria?

**Mr BROWN**—The answer to the first one is, yes, but it is very spasmodic, and it is very much based on the notion of whether the teacher wants to do it or whether the teacher does not. It comes down to as simple as that. I could give you some examples of schools where teachers are running extension programs or talented programs, if that is what you want to call it, in specific areas for students. It is often done in partnership with other organisations or other schools. In terms of your second question around what programs should we offer, I think we need to start looking at a whole range of ways in which we offer programs in the way in which kids learn. I think, especially in a primary school area, that needs to be our focus because that is when we get some preventative and some developmental work really powerfully developed. It is interesting, I think, what we are starting to see now, especially from our learnings around Scandinavia et cetera that it is down in around five- and six-year-olds that some of that learning starts getting embedded.

How we do that is a real challenge. It is multiple, and obviously some of the work can be done within schools but then we have to support that with a range of other materials that those teachers can then access. The way in which young people work in terms of the social media networks and the way in which they communicate provides some fantastic tools for us to fill the gaps on the way through.

**Ms MILLER**—In your submission you say that most of your schools are located in regional and metropolitan areas, because larger schools are better able to access the resources needed to run a SEAL program. Do you think the SEAL model would be an effective model to use for gifted students in rural

Victoria and, if so, what support and resources do smaller rural schools need to be able to run the SEAL program?

**Mr BROWN**—Yes, look, I think it is easier to put a structured program, like a SEAL program, in a large environment because you have the mass. If you are going down a structural process then SEAL is an easy process to put in place. If you change the thinking and say, 'Talented learning is a mind-set, not a structure,' then the conversation is very different, and the way in which we support that learning is very different. We need to explore how young people learn and how they tap into resources, especially talented kids, in the current structure.

**Ms MILLER**—What about in the small school setting?

**Mr BROWN**—No different. I will use an example. A young man in year 11 shared his story about going to a parent-teacher interview, and the teacher indicated to the family that he was an incredibly talented student and he was not performing to the level that he was at. The response that the student gave was, 'I'm bored and I'm not being extended.' That is the conversation, but the parents now tell the story that when that student arrived home he researched the net himself to extend his own learning. He came across this website called the Khan Institute and he is now accessing his extension learning himself, with the support of his parents, at home through that social connectivity process. If that is the learning environment in which our kids are going to operate, then the notion of a structure like a SEAL program might need to be rethought.

**The CHAIR**—Leading on from that, you talk in your submission about clusters and the fact that promoting rural schools working collaboratively is a good way to optimise learning opportunities for gifted students. What is the advantage for rural schools being part of a larger cluster; what is the best way to operate these clusters and who should oversee the creation of such clusters in rural schools? Finally, what support and resources do you think would be needed to create and maintain such clusters in rural areas?

**Mr BROWN**—I think clustering is the way to go in terms of rural education, full stop. That has been reinforced quite significantly in the last 12 months in the research we have done. There are multiple levels of clusters and we need to understand that. The first one is a geographic one. Based around communities of learning, how can schools work effectively together? Once you start doing that you start sharing staff expertise, you then open up doorways for students to meet with other students and to network that way. Interestingly, if you go back into the 80s and late 70s in rural Victoria that was the way in which we delivered education in this state. Out of that came science extension programs, maths extension programs. We had it there; in fact we had more delivery of digital learning in 1981 than we do today which is interesting. It was purely because we had schools working together and supported that notion. It raises questions about how we resource schools and how we provide support for them, because what we did see in those days—and we are starting to get some interesting feedback around this—is that the expertise was then shared across that cluster of schools. If you had a whiz bang science teacher they were then shared across the cluster and not kept to individual school sites. There is that level of clustering that is the starting point.

There is another level that we started seeing in Europe where they call it cluster links where there might be a notion where clusters need to link with other clusters around common issues. In the western part of England, the cluster link project was developed around gifted kids. The clusters started talking about linking groups of schools and it ended up involving about 110 schools across that district around a gifted kids program. It was based within one particular school and each cluster would develop their own programs, but over the top of this there was this extensive online resource supported by teachers and professional development.

**The CHAIR**—Whereabouts was that?

**Mr BROWN**—It was centred out of the Hereford district which is almost on the Wales border. Out of that I think three or four of those schools in that particular cluster of nine are in the top five per cent performing schools in the country.

**The CHAIR**—That was going to be my next question in terms of some evidence of performance.

**Mr BROWN**—I can get that material for you if you want me to get it.

**The CHAIR**—Yes, fantastic.

**Mr BROWN**—Their whole concept is around a geographic cluster and then what they call a cluster link process which then links clusters around areas of common interest. That is interesting, though they targeted gifted kids or an extension of kids.

**The CHAIR**—In that final part, what resources do you think would be needed if you were going to set something up and who should be providing it?

**Mr BROWN**—If you take the concept of building the capacity of all our teachers to extend kids then there is an initial professional development and training process in that. What the Hereford cluster started talking about was a 'brokerage' concept whereby resources were given to one of the schools to support the cluster and the development of that capacity. They would run PD days, they would set up the platform, they would set up the network and do those things, with the intent that in three to five years time that role will not be needed.

**The CHAIR**—Yes.

**Ms TIERNEY**—It has also been suggested to the committee that there should be a short-term exchange program that enables gifted students who live in rural areas to attend specialist or metropolitan schools. I understand John Monash Science does do that at a secondary level to a limited degree. Do you agree with that approach or notion or idea, and what kind of opportunities could collaboration between metropolitan and rural schools provide for gifted students in rural Victoria?

**Mr BROWN**—My view would be that in terms of talented kids the interface at any level is of value. I do not think we need to restrict ourselves to Victoria, although I understand the scenario you guys are in, but there is no reason why we cannot build those networks in a whole range of different ways. I often think about developing new ideas in this state around remoteness and yet in Australia we are the least remote state. Why build something here when there might be mechanisms, and we are in the process of developing a relationship with a group of schools in Western Australia around those concepts. The simple answer is, yes, but let's not get caught up by the jargon of saying does it have to have to be metro or rural. Let's build the network.

If you look at this state, kids living in Lakes Entrance could learn from linking with kids in Ouyen, the same way as a kid in Kerang can link with Balwyn, the same learning process. I do not think location in that network process is important.

**Mr ELASMAR**—In your submission you say that there should be more opportunities for professional learning in gifted education for teachers in rural areas. What kind of professional learning do teachers in rural areas need to cater for gifted students, and what kind of support do teachers in rural areas need to enable them to undertake professional development in gifted education?

**Mr BROWN**—I mean, this is not only a gifted and talented one, I think it is an issue around the capacity of our teachers in rural and remote. Yes, we do have to build a range of opportunities for them to get access to quality professional development. We need to address the issue of distance, travel time and the models that we currently have in our system to delivering that professional learning. For example, I run a workshop in Bendigo for all my north-west counterparts and it goes for 3½ hours. It takes me 3½ hours to get there and 3½ hours to go home again. Why would I go? We need to be a little bit more creative about how we provide that and we need to start exploring a whole range of possibilities of extending that professional learning. I do not think it is only about talented kids either, it is a general professional development approach that we need to put in place for especially our rural communities. When we talk to our new graduates in our rural communities, the professional isolation issue is a huge issue and the main reason they leave those communities. I do not think it would be any different if you talked about talented

kids or teachers who want to work with talented kids in a rural context.

**Ms MILLER**—In your submission you say that technology could be used to provide professional learning in gifted education for teachers in rural areas. How can technology be used to provide teachers with professional learning?

**Mr BROWN**—No different to what we do with the kids. The difference is the culture. If you reflect about how you use technologies, generally—and in a very general sense—in our vintage we liked to meet the person face to face before we communicated with them over the phone et cetera. With kids today that is irrelevant and does not need to be there. If you are asking young professional people, our teachers, to engage in digital learning then there needs to be that facial contact and that is why we are arguing that notion of blended learning. That face-to-face hand-shaking, 'Hello, this is me, this is where I come from,' all those things are important for me as a teacher. 'Then I will feel comfortable about working with you digitally because I've met you and I know you.' From a kid's perspective that does not seem to be as important. You go onto Facebook and you look at young people and their friendship circles.

**Ms MILLER**—Essentially it comes down to changing the attitudes of the teachers, probably the older ones, because as you said they are more face to face, but for the younger students who go on to do teaching it is not such a big issue.

**Mr BROWN**—We hope so, yes.

**Mr CRISP**—I noted in your submission that you talked about pre-service teachers being involved in eKids as program mentors. What are the benefits for pre-service teachers in being involved in a program like the eKids Rural Express Program and do you think some training in gifted education should be mandatory for all pre-service teachers?

**Mr BROWN**—The simple answer to the last one is, yes. In terms of involving pre-service teachers, what we are starting to find with the teacher training programs that we have involvement with is that they do not get exposed to a whole range of teaching and learning strategies and tools that they will require when you talk about a rural environment. If you look at the teacher education programs across this state, there are about two universities that offer what I would call satisfactory digital learning introductory programs. Part of the process that we developed a relationship with a university in this process was to give a practical exposure to pre-service teachers about how you can provide teaching and learning in a digital way. Initially these guys found it really difficult because what they were saying was, 'We need the kids in the classroom because that's what we're expected to look at.'

We piloted a project with Ballarat University and a cluster of schools around Hawkesdale last year where one of their practical experiences was delivered all in a virtual learning environment. VIT struggled to understand that that could be credentialed as a practical experience in their studies. We won that one, but what it did was we exposed pre-service teachers to a whole range of different ways in which they could deliver learning in that process and what we found was that a lot of the material they were doing was actually extension learning for kids who wanted a bit more, or some of those kids who wanted a bit more talent. As part of that process one of the teacher trainees was involved in a tour to China so they delivered lessons from China to a group of students to extend their learning.

The exposing to those learning environments from a pre-service teachers perspective has provided those three or four pre-service teachers with a whole range of opportunities now to utilise a range of tools in terms of enhancing learning.

**The CHAIR**—In terms of teacher recruitment we have been told numerous times that it is difficult to recruit teachers in—

**Mr BROWN**—Not really.

**The CHAIR**—Next question. Do you see it as being an issue and, if so, what are some of the ways we could look at attracting more teachers, particularly in the area of gifted and talented training, having that



expertise?

**Mr BROWN**—The whole issue of recruitment and retention to rural schools is huge and that is right across the spectrum. In a lot of our school communities we are seeing positions being advertised, even at a principal level, three, four times where they are unsuccessful. It is a huge issue. Some of the pilot projects in relation to work we are doing, there are four key components that are absolutely critical: one is the engagement of pre-service teachers and universities in a relationship with a rural context, and more than a practical experience but a real partnership arrangement, it is an immersion process. This is not only about teaching your class, this is about you living in a community and your job happens to be as a teacher.

**The CHAIR**—Is that happening in some areas at the moment?

**Mr BROWN**—Yes, and we are seeing some successful outcomes. That is the first bit.

**The CHAIR**—Where?

**Mr BROWN**—All across the state. Last year there were about 120 pre-service teachers involved in that program. About 35 per cent to 40 per cent of those are now teaching in a rural school, compared to 12 per cent or 13 per cent of the general population.

**The CHAIR**—Good.

**Mr BROWN**—It is having some impact. The second is the whole notion of recruitment and a more targeted process around recruitment. What we are finding is that clusters of schools seem to have a better outcome than if you actually operate in isolation. The West Wimmera model, which is around Horsham, they work as a group of 14 schools to recruit staff across that cluster. That seems to work much more effectively. The third area is supporting new graduates, and that is one area that we do not do very well at all. It is an area I think we need to develop because we often put new graduates in a school and they are isolated, and they are half an hour, an hour, an hour and a half away from their next new graduate. The final one is ongoing professional development. Often what we see is governments supporting one of those four key elements across the state. We do not see a comprehensive approach to it happening and I think that is what we need to see happen. In terms of gifted, I do not think the issues are any different. They are more complicated and they are probably more severe.

**The CHAIR**—Thank you for that.

**Ms TIERNEY**—Gifted and talented students from rural areas or having rural backgrounds are statistically under-represented. What can we do to improve the identification?

**Mr BROWN**—There are probably a couple of reasons for that—and it is in pockets across the state. If I have a reasonably talented kid or an academic kid then I will take consideration of moving that kid to a regional centre or whatever. Certainly in the western district you will see a migration of young people moving from their location to another. That is generally the kids who academically are talented, or have the potential to go, or have a family history of doing that. Therefore you are taking the pool of those kids out of the rural context. That might be an explanation why they are under-represented. The other side of that process—and it is interesting for those who were at the rural summit this year—is that the expectation in a rural community of educational performance is much lower, and that has a huge impact. It comes from parents, it comes from teachers and it comes from fellow students. That is another area that we really need to start thinking about. They are critical elements that help us get to that point.

**Ms MILLER**—Talking about isolation and students meeting like-minded peers and things, what kind of emotional and welfare support should be provided for the students who do live in those areas?

**Mr BROWN**—I can only share the stories that started happening around the parent social networking process. They started sharing stories, they started sharing resources and they started getting together sometimes.

**Ms MILLER**—That is at a parent level, what about at a student level?

**Mr BROWN**—The same at a student level. It was not planned within the program but what you would often see is that parents would go off for a weekend and catch up with someone else in their location because they have met through the Rural Express Program. What we did was rather than only bring the kids together on a face-to-face occasion we would invite the parents to come as well. It built that social networking process up.

**Ms MILLER**—How often are you doing that?

**Mr BROWN**—In the program, we did one per term. We spent a day at the museum, we spent a day at a high tech facility, we spent a day at Melbourne University to expose kids to different things.

**Ms MILLER**—One a term. Do you think that is enough?

**Mr BROWN**—You could always argue more but economically it was an issue.

**Ms MILLER**—Does that appear, for now, to meet the needs of both the students and the parents, do you think?

**Mr BROWN**—It provided a catalyst for a whole range of other things to happen and it is an area that perhaps a longer-term program might be able to flesh out and get some understanding of what are those long-term impacts of providing those opportunities.

**Mr CRISP**—Many of the submissions argued that the government should play a greater role in setting gifted education policy centrally. Do you agree and, if so, what kind of policy or other guidance is needed, and should this policy or guidance be at a school state or federal level?

**Mr BROWN**—I have the view, and I think our organisation has the view, Peter, that the best decisions practically are made at a local level and that each location will have a different view on decisions. However, we also believe that there needs to be an overarching framework or policy that operates within. Whether that happens at a statewide level or a national level, I am not sure, but I think there is a role for government setting a policy around gifted kids, and then allowing local autonomy to determine the practicalities of how that might happen. Obviously in between that, from a rural context, the facility needs to be there to link those people across the state somehow. What we have found in that networking process is that centralising it does not have the same impact as if you build a more collaborative and networking side of process.

**Mr CRISP**—Thank you.

**The CHAIR**—Phil, we have concluded our time. Is there anything that we have not covered that you wanted to make mention of? We have been pretty broad today and we have certainly covered a lot.

**Mr BROWN**—Yes. No, that is fine, not a problem.

**The CHAIR**—I want to thank you once again for coming along and contributing in the work you have done and also the submissions you have presented. We also look forward to receiving a bit more information from you regarding the Hereford cluster.

**Mr BROWN**—Yes, no problem. Thank you.

**Witness withdrew.**