



23<sup>rd</sup> May 2018

## ***Human Rights – Rights of the Gifted Child***

### **The Australian educational system is failing to adequately meet the needs of gifted and talented students.**

#### **Introductory comment**

Education is a basic right of every child in Australia. Every child in Australia deserves, and is entitled to, equity of access to the opportunities that education can provide for them to learn, achieve and thrive. The Australian Curriculum advocates for this fundamental right, stating that “all children are entitled to rigorous, relevant and engaging learning opportunities...aligned with their individual learning needs, strengths, interests and goals”.

Gifted students are those who have the potential for high achievement, or who are demonstrating advanced achievement. Research evidence confirms that without appropriately challenging and supportive educational opportunities, gifted children are likely to underachieve, dropout and experience emotional disturbance and impaired well-being. There are approximately **380,000 gifted children in schools across Australia** (applying Gagné’s (2016) estimation of 10% and DET’s (2018) estimation of 3.8 million Australians of school age).

Educational provisions need to be personalised to ensure the best educational ‘fit’ between the demands of the area of learning, the unique needs of the child, and their context. The same content, taught in the same way at the same rate to diverse students will only result in exacerbating educational disadvantage (ACARA, nd). If the federal vision is that education in Australia develops successful learners, confident and creative individuals and active and informed citizens, every child should have a reasonable expectation that this is achievable for them. .

The current Australian educational system **is not meeting the needs** of our gifted students. This was shown in evidence from three separate Parliamentary Inquiries into the education of gifted and talented students held in 1988, and 2001 at the Federal level and in Victoria in 2012. .The 2001 Senate Inquiry found that “in evidence ... these children **have special needs** in the education system; for many their needs are not being met; and **many suffer**

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**underachievement, boredom, frustration and psychological stress** as a result” (Collins, 2001, p. xiii). All three inquiries found that **underachievement is prevalent** amongst gifted children, with the Victorian Inquiry identifying that between 15 and 40% of gifted children would leave school without completing their Year 12. The Senate (2001) Inquiry suggested that up **to half of gifted students underachieve at school** with as many as 20% leaving prior to completing Year 12. And a study conducted in Melbourne ( Byrne,2002) estimated that as many as 40% of high ability students aged between nine and fourteen were underachieving in their own age groups in the key areas of mathematics and reading. Underachievement can lead to emotional stress, dis-engagement, poor well-being, and failure.

In spite of documented and reported evidence over time that Australia is failing to provide for gifted students’ education, little has changed. It is an issue of social justice that gifted students, in all sociocultural, economic and geographical populations of Australia, are disadvantaged by a lack of access to appropriate educational provisions.

The Australian Association for the Education of the Gifted and Talented (AAEGT) is a not-for-profit association formed to promote and protect the educational entitlement and well-being of diverse gifted and talented students, including those at particular risk because of isolation, disability, and socioeconomic disadvantage.

The following (deidentified) story from one of our members attests to the disadvantage that a lack of appropriate understanding and provision establishes. It illustrates how disadvantage negatively impacts the life chances and well-being of a gifted student.

*Five-year-old Brady (not the student’s real name) eagerly started school. Already able to read, he was told he had to learn to read with everyone else. Brady’s confusion and frustration led to scolding from his teacher with a threat that if he continued to misbehave, his mother would have to come and take him home. Soon suspended from school for subsequent poor behaviour, Brady’s parents enrolled him at the next-nearest school, where a similar pattern ensued. At the age of six and having been suspended from two schools and recommended to be sent to a behaviour management school, Brady had developed intense anxiety and fear of attending school.*

In response to evidence of need, and at the invitation of the commission, the AAEGT submits the following manifesto:

**Rights of gifted and talented students:**

1. To have access to individualised equitable and socially just educational provisions.
2. To learn and thrive within a climate of acceptance and to be recognised as a valuable asset within Australia.
3. To be supported by mandated and evidence-informed gifted education policies in every State and Territory.
4. To be taught by educators who have undertaken mandatory professional learning in current, evidence-based practices, and who have access to a range of educational models, options and opportunities throughout all schools across all educational sectors.

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