



COMMONWEALTH OF AUSTRALIA

# Official Committee Hansard

## SENATE

EMPLOYMENT, WORKPLACE RELATIONS, SMALL BUSINESS  
AND EDUCATION REFERENCES COMMITTEE

**Reference: Education of gifted and talented children**

FRIDAY, 23 MARCH 2001

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**SENATE**  
**EMPLOYMENT, WORKPLACE RELATIONS, SMALL BUSINESS**  
**AND EDUCATION REFERENCES COMMITTEE**

**Friday, 23 March 2001**

**Members:** Senator Collins (*Chair*), Senator Tierney (*Deputy Chair*), Senators Brandis, Carr, Crossin and Stott Despoja

**Participating members:** Senators Abetz, Allison, Boswell, Brown, Buckland, Calvert, George Campbell, Chapman, Coonan, Crane, Crowley, Eggleston, Faulkner, Ferguson, Ferris, Gibbs, Gibson, Harradine, Harris, Hutchins, Knowles, Lightfoot, Mackay, Mason, McGauran, O'Brien, Payne and Watson

**Senators in attendance:** Senators Carr, Collins, Crossin and Tierney

**Terms of reference for the inquiry:**

To inquire into and report on the education of gifted and talented children with particular reference to:

- (a) a review of developments in the education of gifted and talented children since the 1988 report of the Select Committee on the Education of Gifted and Talented Children;
- (b) consideration of whether current policies and programs for gifted and talented children are suitable and sufficient to meet their special educational needs, including, but not limited to:
  - (i) the means of identifying gifted and talented children,
  - (ii) whether access to gifted and talented programs is provided equitably, and
  - (iii) investigation of the links between attainment and socio-economic distribution; and
- (c) consideration of what the proper role of the Commonwealth should be in supporting the education of gifted and talented children.

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**Committee met at 9.09 a.m.**

**DIEZMANN, Dr Carmel, Senior Lecturer in Education, Faculty of Education, Queensland University of Technology**

**WATTERS, Dr James, Senior Lecturer in Science Education, Faculty of Education, Queensland University of Technology**

**CHAIR**—I declare open this public hearing of the Senate Employment, Workplace Relations, Small Business and Education References Committee. On 12 October 2000 the Senate asked this committee to inquire into the education of gifted and talented children. The committee is reviewing progress in this area since the 1988 report of the Senate Select Committee on the education of gifted and talented children.

Before we commence taking evidence today, I wish to state for the record that all witnesses appearing before the committee are protected by parliamentary privilege with respect to their evidence. Parliamentary privilege refers to special rights and immunities attached to the parliament or its members and others necessary for the discharge of the parliamentary functions without obstruction or fear of prosecution. Any act by any person which disadvantages a witness on account of evidence given before the Senate or any of its committees is a breach of privilege. I welcome any observers to today's hearing. At this stage, I welcome our first witnesses. The committee has before it submission No. 25. Are there any changes you wish to make to your submission?

**Dr Diezmann**—No.

**CHAIR**—The committee prefers all evidence to be given in public, although we will consider any request for all or part of evidence to be given in camera, which is in private, but I point out that such evidence may subsequently be made public by order of the Senate. I now invite you to make an opening statement and we will move to questions to your submission beyond that.

**Dr Watters**—It feels like I am in a court of law, but I will take it easy anyway.

**CHAIR**—Unfortunately some subjects are a bit more contentious than this one.

**Dr Watters**—Yes. I have images of the inquiry in the United States on smoking. I hope it is not that contentious. Carmel and I have worked for the last 10 to 12 years with young gifted children so we bring with us a certain amount of experience of dealing with children both in a classroom/teaching situation and in programs run through the university.

In summary of what we have put in our submission, which basically covers each of the points of the brief of the inquiry, there are two major points we would like to try and draw out. I will address one of them and then pass over to Carmel to get to the meat of the other one.

I think an issue that was identified in the previous report of 1988 is that our perceptions of what constitutes giftedness has changed dramatically through research in the last two decades, and that is probably well on the record by now. That is the perception held by people working in the field—by academics, by some policy makers and by people who are part of the field.

However, I still believe that there are very widespread misconceptions about the nature of giftedness in many professionals' minds, in the public's mind and certainly in the media's mind.

We have an image of a gifted child as being the little Einstein; the child who is a high achiever in school who, particularly in the secondary school, is already receiving awards and recognition for their achievements. I think we need to step back from that view. Research has not permeated the profession at a substantial level where, particularly in the early years of schooling, we find many children who are behaving in ways that are quite different to their peers simply because they have intellectual capacities out of step with their age peers. Their behaviour tends to be seen as deviant, non-conformist behaviour and their potential giftedness is not recognised.

In some of the programs we have run many of the children are actually identified by counsellors who see them through their reported misbehaviours in school. Essentially the issue is trying to develop an alternative perception in the profession of what constitutes a gifted child and hence the strategies that are necessary to cater for gifted children. I think Carmel might like to proceed with discussion of how this professionalism affects the role of teachers.

**Dr Diezmann**—Many teachers still lack an understanding of the characteristics and needs of gifted children. Although there has been a lot of information out there—the previous Senate review and much information in Australia—we have not really seen much change in what is happening in terms of teachers' knowledge. One of the reasons for this is that in teacher education programs, although we would look at children with particular needs, gifted children certainly do not come under that umbrella. If you see a course that is offered for children with special needs, we would look at physical disabilities and so on, but certainly not the needs of gifted children. In Queensland in particular there are very few places where teachers can get some professional support. We have a university in New South Wales actually moving into Queensland in the holiday time to fill that need and make some money.

There are also teachers who deny the existence of these gifted children, and this is very damaging, particularly for those children who are already struggling to cope in classroom situations. It would not make sense for us to have young swimmers of the calibre of Kieren Perkins in learn to swim classes, but we have got children who are reading Shakespeare in learn to read classes, and then they go on to the next level and the next level. They never get to the level that they really should be working at. Their interests are out of step with their peers; they often do not have any friends; they are often at odds with their teacher through their lack of cooperation. If you think about Kieren Perkins in a learn to swim class, you are getting a sense of what is happening to these children.

There are also teachers and many others who argue that all children are gifted. It really comes down to two uses of that particular term. Every child is special, especially to their parents. But every child does not have the capacity for outstanding achievement in a particular domain. There are very few of those people and Australia needs every single one of them. At the moment I am sure that we are getting very few of them.

Some teachers do attempt to do the best they can with what they have got. And what they have got in many cases is the commercially produced materials on the market. I have just brought a couple of examples to try and illustrate my point today. This is a science work book. I

chose science. It has got up the top 'For gifted and talented children'. Gifted and talented children—young ones, five- and six-year-olds, are interested in rocketry, in engineering type constructions and so on. In this particular work book it says things like—and I will quote from it:

Colour North America red. Colour South America yellow.

This is what teachers have available to them, but it is not really appropriate. We do have other materials that look like everyday materials. This is a story book called *Night Flight*. This particular book has a lot of issues that gifted children relate to—for example, repeated failure; the need to overcome your failure; the need to persevere and so on. If a teacher were confronted with these two things, one with the label of gifted and talented, this will be the one they will go for when in fact it is this one that would be of help to those children.

Teachers who are struggling out there and doing their best—because it is not teacher education; it is not professional development—are reliant on commercial people, which is making lots of money for those people.

There are three things that we think need attention. The first one is early identification and ongoing monitoring of these children. Particularly in the areas of maths and science we see very bright, keen and enthusiastic children. We have watched them over a number of years and by the middle of primary school that interest has certainly diminished and many of them will not pursue careers in those areas. We have a shortage of teachers in those areas and it is not surprising because we do nothing to support that.

We know from research that career aspirations begin very early. Children are making those decisions in primary school. So the very children we want to target are the ones we need to support. Society also needs to look at the way they are rewarding achievement. We see in some states rewards for the exit performance of students in their final year of high school. By that point in time much is locked in concrete. Many of these young children who were struggling need support at a much earlier time. There really needs to be a think about what in fact people are rewarding there. Many of the gifted children we see as youngsters; when we monitor them years later they are underachievers—in other words, they are not even performing in some cases at the average level in their classrooms.

Finally, we think that Australia needs to look at the strategic long-term approach to gifted education. We see pots of money for short periods of time, but there is very little systematic approach to this. At the moment we have a national priority that teachers and parents know about—and certainly academics—in literacy and numeracy. For some of these children that is their specialty area, but there will be no money for these children. There will be no money for those people who will go on in the area of mathematics and so on because that money tends to be targeted at children who have weaknesses. While neither of us have any objection to that, it is not those people who are providing the competitive edge. We need to give those people an opportunity to develop their abilities. Thanks.

**CHAIR**—Dr Diezmann; has there been any discussion in the research sense about the labelling attached to those children?

**Dr Diezmann**—You mean the terms ‘gifted’ and ‘talented’?

**CHAIR**—Yes.

**Dr Diezmann**—They are very emotional terms for many people. You have something extra, in one sense—that causes a problem. Internationally it is a problem. Internationally the terms are used in different ways. ‘Talented’ is sometimes used in relation to performers—for example; a ‘talented sportsperson’, a ‘talented musician’. It is used, more in the academic literature, as where you have had a gifted person, they have actually done a lot of work and developed their abilities and now we would consider them as talented. So it is like the end point. Those terms are very, very difficult for anybody because according to what you read and where you go to it will differ.

**Senator TIERNEY**—Supplementary to that when, in this inquiry, we call them ‘gifted’, would that be less—

**Dr Watters**—From our perspective we usually look at it from a sense of potential. Our use of the term ‘gifted’ is the potential for some form of excellence—

**CHAIR**—Outstanding achievement.

**Dr Watters**—We could debate the differences between talent and creativity and all those sorts of things, but you have a starting point. Unless you capitalise on nurturing that starting point you will not produce an end product, which may be outstanding achievement, it may be creativity, it may be talent.

**CHAIR**—In terms of some experience I have with school age children now and the use of ‘extension’ programs, perhaps it should be the notion of unextended or unchallenged children rather than, necessarily, ‘gifted’. Has there been any academic dialogue over those issues?

**Dr Diezmann**—One of the issues we have to confront is that when you are looking at an extension program it is an add-on and an extra—when in fact what it is for these children is their basic education. So that is a difficult idea to get around. There are many ways people address this issue. They let children who show some ability in this area or who self-nominate go into these programs. Then quite often, through attrition, these children will say, ‘No, that’s too difficult for me’ and so on. So there are many ways to get around the labelling issue. But it is an issue. For a parent it is a bit like a bumper sticker or something like that. Many parents in affluent areas use it that way. ‘My child is gifted and needs to go into particular programs; the school needs to provide.’ We have seen that over and over again.

**Dr Watters**—The term ‘gifted’ is often rejected in some social settings, where it is seen as a labelling process. It attributes something to that child which the parent does not want to have any association with. If knowledge is not valued in a particular social setting, to be labelled as ‘gifted’ is a derogatory comment.

**CHAIR**—I can see how that can apply either way. I was curious about your experience with how extension programs are currently being offered, particularly at primary schools. My

experience with them is that they are offered as an alternative to the routine program—only as part. My impression has been that they do not seem to be particularly well targeted.

**Dr Diezmann**—No.

**CHAIR**—I am not sure of the extent of benefit those sorts of programs, or that approach in primary schools, is currently having. So I am curious about your experience with them.

**Dr Watters**—We have for about 10 years run a program which you would call a pull-out enrichment/extension type program at the university. We have taken children between five and eight years of age from a whole range of schools around Brisbane. Their capacity to explore new ideas in that setting is quite extraordinary because you are simply concentrating a pool of talent or pool of giftedness. There is a critical mass of discussion and debate and the children build on each other's ideas. When that happens in the school it is less effective because there are a smaller number of children working at that level. So you need to have a relatively large school in order to set up an alternative extension or enrichment program.

I think the research would indicate that a better strategy is an acceleration process, where children are not matched with their peers by age but by capacity, by capability. So a child who is reading in grade 1 and is competent in mathematics is better off in grade 3 or 4. There are some schools around where that notion of age level sorting has changed so that children basically work through bands. Once they have achieved certain learning outcomes they move on to the next band, irrespective of age.

**Senator TIERNEY**—Why do you think there is a contrast between support for elite sports in this country and academic excellence?

**Dr Watters**—We would need to ask a sociologist that question. It must go back, in my understanding, to our pioneer days, when physical attributes and adventure and those sorts of characteristics of people were valued. Giftedness is about what is valued in society. There is a quote from one of the major researchers in the area that if we looked around the world today we would not find value highly creative flint arrow makers because we do not need those people in today's society.

**Senator TIERNEY**—But it is more than that, surely. Take one field of endeavour—sport. People who are particularly gifted in that area we will make all sorts of special provision for. But we have a group that is perhaps creative or academically gifted and we are a bit shy; we have a problem with that. Why, at this point in time, do we have such a schizophrenic approach to those two things?

**Dr Diezmann**—There are perhaps two core reasons. One is that sport is a performance situation. Sport—and artistic and musical talent to a lesser degree—has spectators. Because it is a spectator situation that type of area is going to involve many more people. So it is of interest to literally a lot more people. The other reason is that especially those sports people who have struggled and who have come from low socioeconomic areas or the outback or whatever all have a chance, if they have the ability, to develop and become outstanding sports people. We tend to look on giftedness in quite a different way. We have gifted Aboriginal children, gifted children who are isolated; gifted children in low socioeconomic areas. But we tend to think of

gifted as high income. We tend to look at it in a much more elitist—perhaps associated with money—way, which means that the everyday Australian does not have a chance of having a gifted person in their street, if you like, in the same way as having a potential sports person.

**Senator TIERNEY**—In terms of provision for the gifted in Queensland, I believe the budget is about \$1 million. There is a policy on gifted children but it is not necessarily applied in all schools. Why is that, do you think? Why is there apathy in the teaching profession in relation to the provision of gifted?

**Dr Watters**—I think it goes back to my earlier comments. Work we have done within schools—and take a typical school of 25 teachers—indicates that the majority would argue, firstly, that all children are gifted and therefore the regular program will meet every child's needs, except the child with learning disabilities, who has a specialist teacher who will go in and help that child. But there is no specialist teacher to help a child at the other end of the spectrum. I think there is a certain degree of fear and apprehension in teachers that gifted children will show them up. The sort of knowledge and behaviour of gifted children can be very challenging if you are a teacher who is focused on some content area. Research will say that among pre-service teachers the student they fear the most in their future teaching career is the gifted child, which is a comment on the quality of teaching in one sense. The issue of why teachers are apprehensive about—I guess this is a critique of many teachers—is that they actually fear that they will be shown up in the classroom.

**Senator TIERNEY**—Do you think this has something to do with the way teachers are prepared? I think back to my own training. Mr Carr and I went to the same esteemed institution at the same time. I do not know about Mr Carr, but I cannot actually remember one word about gifted children in the teacher education course that I went to. Two years later I was teaching at Sydney Boys High, which was full of gifted children, and I had absolutely no preparation for teaching those sorts of children.

**Dr Watters**—If you were to enrol tomorrow at QUT, you would probably have a similar experience.

**Senator TIERNEY**—That is what I feared.

**Dr Watters**—In general, there would be one unit on special education and they would receive perhaps one or two lectures in special education. This is not boasting, in a sense, but the programs we run as community service programs in our institution are more powerful and more successful in supporting a small number of students to become experts, because we have undergraduates working with gifted children in a service program. They develop fairly comprehensive understandings of the issues and many of those people have gone on to do further studies or have set up programs in their own schools. But that is not part of the core.

**Senator TIERNEY**—Possibly a reason why we are having such problems with this is that, because you have a policy and there is a budget for the gifted and talented, there is some expectation that teachers are going to prepare the gifted child, and yet they are not trained to do that. So how on earth can we expect anything positive to happen if the people out the front of the classroom have no preparation for doing it?

**Dr Diezmann**—But the other issue is that they have no awareness. If people know that they have a child with a particular difficulty in their classroom—say an autistic child is in your classroom—quite often you know to go and seek information. These teachers in many cases do not identify the child to start with, and then there are very limited avenues for them to go and seek help. I think it is also very much related to the balance of funding and the priority of the education department that, if you look at both ends of the spectrum, you have got a similar number of students who you would classify as gifted and as having learning difficulties. And if you look at the proportions of money, there is no comparison between them. It would just be ridiculous to compare them. Yet one group has the potential to repay that money over and over again.

**Dr Watters**—Ed Queensland has many policies, but there is no compulsion on schools to implement those policies. I think if you approached many principals in Queensland, they would not know about the gifted policy. I do not think it has ever been distributed to the schools. They have to find out in response to parental pressure or pressure from some—

**Senator TIERNEY**—So the Queensland government has a policy but it has not bothered to tell the teachers.

**Dr Watters**—I think it has had that for about 10 years.

**Senator TIERNEY**—That is absolutely amazing.

**Dr Diezmann**—We did a study on early entry last year as part of a government report. Parents would request early entry with substantial evidence and in a state system they would say, ‘You can’t do this.’ In fact, there is a policy on early entry. So parents are more knowledgeable in many cases than the principals whom they are approaching.

**Senator TIERNEY**—How much do you think this is ideological? Is it tied in with mainstreaming views and people thinking that all children in a classroom should be mainstreamed so therefore we should not make special provision for the brighter end—that maybe they can look after themselves better than the others? Do you think some of that thought is driving it?

**Dr Diezmann**—I think what is happening is that teachers have been asked to cater for a larger spread of abilities. The mainstreaming, I think, has had an effect on the gifted children because, in their everyday work, teachers have to target the middle of the class and they have to look after those children who are going to make a fuss or are going to be problematic. And so we see many withdrawn gifted children who do not want to go to school exhibiting many of those antisocial behaviours.

**Senator TIERNEY**—Could I just read to you a little bit from the Australian Education Union policy on curriculum. It says that the AEU opposes the withdrawal of so-called gifted children and the use of accelerated progression. Do you think this is perhaps a driving force of this attitude in the schools?

**Dr Diezmann**—The Queensland Teachers Union holds a similar position, if you have a look at their policy where it relates to gifted education. As soon as you deny the existence of a

population, you are casting doubts in everybody's mind about their existence. But if you look at the Olympics and so on, we would not do that with sport. If you look at some of the extremely high performers, winners of Nobel prizes, we certainly do not do that. But it is not something that we look for. We do not go out with talent searches in mathematics, in language and so on, in the same way we do for sport.

**Senator TIERNEY**—Do you think the attitude of the state system is actually assisting the acceleration of movement to the private system by some parents who feel that their children—

**Dr Diezmann**—There are serious concerns in Queensland about the percentages. They are dropping in the state system.

**Dr Watters**—I believe that the movement with parents of gifted children is more towards home-schooling because I do not think the private system does any better than the state system. In fact, I think the private system may even do worse in some situations because they—

**Senator TIERNEY**—Maybe they are not trained either to—

**Dr Watters**—They are not trained either. And it is a ploy in some private schools to attract parents of gifted children by saying, 'We have a gifted education program, which is tournament of the minds or future problem solving.' It is some add-on competition which is outside the mainstream curriculum.

**Senator TIERNEY**—In America, evidently, particularly in teacher education, there seems to be more provision for this. Why do you think there is such difference in practice in the two countries?

**Dr Watters**—In the US it has been, to my understanding, mandated in federal law.

**Senator TIERNEY**—In federal law?

**Dr Watters**—I believe so. I am not an expert on that.

**Senator TIERNEY**—Do you know where the committee can get hold of that?

**Dr Watters**—Historically, you go through—

**Dr Diezmann**—In the report that we did we have got a listing of the particular—

**Senator TIERNEY**—Could you provide that to the committee?

**Dr Watters**—Yes.

**Senator TIERNEY**—Thank you.

**Dr Watters**—And many of the states—and I would not know the percentage off the top of my head—have gifted education identification and programming mandated and, in a number of states, they require teachers to be trained—

**Dr Diezmann**—Certified.

**Dr Watters**—or to be certified to work within gifted education programs. So a number of schools, even some of the worst educational sites in the US—for example in the south—have programs for gifted children which are mandated and require certified teachers to work with them.

**Senator TIERNEY**—That is very interesting.

**Senator CARR**—Can I begin with this issue that you have raised here under section 3 of your submission. On page 8 you talk about the socioeconomic links between class and giftedness. You say there is no research. That struck me as odd. Have I understood you correctly: there is no research into the relationship between class—

**Dr Diezmann**—There is very little research in Australia on this issue at all.

**Senator CARR**—What about internationally?

**Dr Watters**—Internationally, to summarise, the perception is that the capacity to be gifted is to a large extent independent of socioeconomic circumstances. However, if you consider giftedness to be essentially an innate capability that a person has, the capacity to develop that depends on the resources, the experience and the environment. And that is interactive. If you improve the environment, you improve—

**Senator CARR**—That would be my intuitive response.

**Dr Diezmann**—When parents have more money to spend, if they choose and can find the right programs—

**Senator CARR**—That is right—in more affluent suburbs there is more money for additional tuition.

**Dr Watters**—And that was the point I was making before: in less affluent areas parents will reject the notion that their children are gifted, whereas in the more affluent areas all parents will argue their child is gifted. And if you did a controlled analysis you would find no difference really in the capacities of children.

**Senator CARR**—So you are saying here that the situation is complex and in need of research. Is the university not interested in undertaking research in this area?

**Dr Watters**—Our experience is that—and we have been very successful in getting grants in a large range of areas—if you put in an application to do research in gifted education you do not get outside the university.

**Senator TIERNEY**—Why is that?

**Dr Watters**—It reflects why there is little emphasis in the institutions on gifted education.

**Senator CARR**—So it does not get outside the university, so there is—

**Dr Diezmann**—It goes through a screening process inside the university before it leaves.

**Senator CARR**—So the university itself does not regard this as a high priority.

**Dr Diezmann**—Absolutely.

**Senator TIERNEY**—Even though it is full of gifted and talented people.

**Dr Diezmann**—That is exactly right.

**Dr Watters**—Well, that is questionable!

**Dr Diezmann**—But that is the point; it may not be.

**Dr Watters**—You are dealing with an education faculty!

**Senator CARR**—It is just that the question arises that you are criticising the public education system for its lack of priority.

**Dr Diezmann**—Absolutely.

**Senator TIERNEY**—I am sorry—did you say it did not get outside the educational faculty within the university?

**Dr Watters**—The research application is usually built in a number of tiers. In order to start a program of research you need to apply for internal grants, which are within the faculty within the university. The more successful research centres have tended to be outside faculties of education.

**Dr Diezmann**—We do manage to get funding through means other than putting ‘gifted’ on it. We look at the difference between children working in classrooms and when they work with a peer of similar ability. But we do not put ‘gifted’ on it; we do not put ‘talented’ on it; we do not put anything on it, and it is funded nationally.

**Senator CARR**—Nationally. So where does that money come from?

**Dr Diezmann**—From the Australian Research Council. But if we had ‘gifted’ on it I do not believe it would be funded.

**Senator TIERNEY**—It would not get it outside the university but could be funded by ARC.

**Dr Watters**—It could be. If you build up that track record of ARC funding in that area, who your application actually goes to depends on what criteria you put on your application form. I suspect that once it gets outside the university it probably would go to critical reviewers working within the fields.

**Dr Diezmann**—There are very few researchers in this area in Australia; so that is another problem. So it may not necessarily go to a researcher in gifted education—which would immediately cause a problem in assessing the application.

**Senator CARR**—The question of individual learning differences is the conventional method of discussing this matter, as I understand it, in teacher education faculties. That is the way it is put, is it not?

**Dr Diezmann**—Yes.

**Senator CARR**—No-one on the education committee is actually arguing against the catering for individual learning differences, are they?

**Dr Diezmann**—No, but in terms of the way they train their teachers and allocate resources it is a token gesture if you actually do nothing.

**Senator CARR**—Say you have a teacher in a working class district and you have 35 students in your class. What priority should you give to the people with the greatest learning difficulties and the ones who find it easiest to come to grips with the material put before them? Where would you put your priority if you were a teacher, with 35 children in front of you?

**Dr Diezmann**—I have been a teacher with 35 children and probably the one thing I regret is that I did not invest more time in the gifted and talented students in my classroom because they are the ones now who are entering university—or maybe they are not entering university. It may be that they are in jobs they are ill-suited for because they were totally turned off education.

**Senator CARR**—That is true. But there would be a whole lot of inadequacies in our performances as teachers.

**Dr Diezmann**—Absolutely; that is right. I think it has to be looked at though in a long-term perspective. If you put all your eggs into one basket then you cannot expect to have—

**Senator CARR**—Can I put it to you this way? The Commonwealth Government insists on people meeting literacy and numeracy benchmarking. Everyone now is moving towards this sort of output measurement. You are an individual teacher—would you not be tempted to go towards ensuring that everyone could read and write?

**Dr Diezmann**—Absolutely.

**Senator CARR**—Rather than necessarily moving towards the extension programs?

**Dr Diezmann**—We have to be conscious that at the end of the day we are in an internationally competitive marketplace. Australians at the highest levels are highly valued overseas but they are not highly valued in Australia; which means that you perpetuate the brain drain, if you like. You do not give people here the opportunity to work with those really talented people and so on. So we are not looking at a ‘within Australia’ situation. We are looking at the US, where since Sputnik they have invested huge amounts of money in developing intellectual talent and at Singapore, where they have the International Thinking Conference and, again, where they invest huge amounts of money in developing intellectual talent.

**Senator CARR**—You will not get an argument from this committee that we should be spending more money on education.

**Dr Diezmann**—No. It is a finite amount; we are well aware of that.

**Senator CARR**—That is the question. You mentioned the United States. What percentage of GDP do the United States spend on education?

**Dr Diezmann**—No idea.

**Senator CARR**—I would ask you to think about it. Would it be considerably more or less than the amount of money spent on education in this country? If we then look at the amount of GDP spent on schools, you see that it has been a declining level of GDP, over the last few years in particular. And even within that, the bulk of the money has gone to the non-government sector; which you say is no better than any other.

**Dr Diezmann**—Yes.

**Senator CARR**—I am just putting the point to you that if we are talking about the question of educational priorities—and you have a particular interest in this area, naturally enough—

**Dr Diezmann**—I have a particular interest in many areas. Do not think either of us are only working in this area, please.

**Senator CARR**—It comes back to this point. It is a question of priorities. You say the Commonwealth has a special role, a leadership role.

**Dr Diezmann**—That is right.

**Senator CARR**—Again, sitting on this side of the table you would see considerable support for a strong national interventionist role in education. What particular programs would you like to see and where do you think the money should come from to fund them?

**Dr Diezmann**—It is not always a matter of asking for more money. I think that is a mistake. In the US, for example—just from a visit there last year—it was not that it took any more money; it took reading books from a different age level to be used with gifted children. Those reading books existed; they were in the school. It just took an awareness that this child needed those books. It was no additional money.

One of the things I think we can get away with at the moment in schools is leaving these children out of factoring their needs. We can look at what we have to do for people to meet the benchmarks. We interviewed a little girl recently who told us about her reading. She was reading at the year 2 level and the teacher praised her. She told us that she would much prefer to go home and finish her Shakespeare story and she told us all about the characters, et cetera. That teacher was not aware of that at all. To me, it is more than a funding issue. It is an inequitable way to treat people, to put them in a situation like that for six hours a day.

**Senator CARR**—What would you like the Commonwealth to do?

**Dr Diezmann**—Some of the literacy and numeracy funding, for example, which exists at the moment should be directed to excellence in literacy and numeracy—not just bringing children up to scratch. Many of the strategies in gifted education benefit all children because they make teachers look at where children are at; and how they can help them. Quite often teachers just present their plan without really looking at where children are at.

**Senator CARR**—So you want some of the \$1.5 billion spent on literacy and numeracy to be directed towards this?

**Dr Diezmann**—That is right.

**Senator CARR**—What else?

**Dr Diezmann**—One of the things we have to be conscious of in literacy and numeracy is that if you have a child talented in music or sport, parents can actually pay for outside programs. If your child is excellent, or has potential for excellence, in academic areas, they cannot access that same out-of-school program, which means that school is the only place that they can get that support. So that to me gives literacy, numeracy, science—those sorts of things—priority in schools in terms of these types of children. It is looking at what is available inside and outside school and perhaps moving money in directions where there are no outside facilities.

**Dr Watters**—There is another area where the Commonwealth has a role to play. Documents like the Hobart declaration and the Adelaide declaration put certain things on the agenda. Those declarations, even though they are only a set of words, are taken seriously within universities in terms of targeting priority areas. So the raising of the esteem, the acknowledgment of this as a national priority area, has a flow-on effect within institutions. The whole crux of the question that you asked was the assumption that in that classroom, where you have 35 kids and a teacher, you have such a diversity of abilities. We have to restructure schools in ways that diminish that diversity so that the child who is—

**Senator CARR**—You want streaming in schools, do you?

**Dr Watters**—Streamed vertically in the sense that the child who is working at intellectual capacity of a high level should be with peers of that higher level. If they are two or three years older, and what you would see as mainstream children for that age group, that is fine—but they are working at a level with intellectual peers.

**Senator CARR**—But schools do that now. They put people up above their age limits.

**Dr Watters**—Very rarely.

**Dr Diezmann**—Very few of them. And there are big fights, and many parents would have to change schools.

**Senator CARR**—You have diverted me. I was interested to get your ideas on the specific Commonwealth initiatives that can be taken. You have told me that you want special allocations within existing targeted assistance programs; I understood you to mean that. What about other things, like teacher education.

**Dr Diezmann**—Clearly, we are very strong advocates for teacher education because the awareness cannot be raised without teacher education—both pre-service education and professional development in service education.

**Senator CARR**—The professional development program has been abolished. You want one reintroduced, do you?

**Dr Watters**—The NPDP program had some impact nationally with the key learning areas—science education and maths education—

**Dr Diezmann**—That is right, huge.

**Dr Watters**—It created across Australia a common language among teachers. We do not know what happens in South Australia or in Western Australia because we talk different languages.

**Senator CARR**—The Schools Council was abolished as well. Do you think that independent advice to government might be a useful avenue on these sorts of questions?

**Dr Watters**—I am not quite sure why that happened but it seems to be a backwards step.

**Senator CARR**—Neither am I but that has happened, and that is the issue. I am asking you to tell me what you think would be worthwhile initiatives. You are a bit slow off the mark, I might say, for teachers.

**Dr Watters**—We do not play the political game. Our concern is primarily with trying to cater for a particular group of children and whatever strategy—

**Senator CARR**—I was having a joke at your expense.

**Dr Diezmann**—I might just respond, though. You cannot make progress without research. If you want to know what difference it makes whether children are from impoverished families or whatever, research is clearly needed. We are disgusted with some of the books, for example, that are out there that schools are spending, not hundreds, but thousands of dollars on and that teachers are religiously following. Teachers need to know that this not going to work but then they need to know what will work. Without some research you are going to make little progress.

**Dr Watters**—These things are not based on research.

**CHAIR**—You need to go broader, to the socioeconomic factors there as well. In regard to your example of the girl reading Shakespeare, the first question in my mind, from my privileged status, is: what on earth are her parents doing?

**Dr Diezmann**—They are providing her with that. They are taking her to museums and art galleries.

**CHAIR**—But they are not engaging her teacher who is giving her grade 2 readers.

**Dr Diezmann**—They have tried very hard to engage her teacher.

**Dr Watters**—I bumped into an undergraduate student yesterday who had a child who attended one of our programs a couple of years ago. We know the child and we know the parent—the parent is a pre-service teacher—and she has given up with her school. She cannot make her school do anything different for her child, who is an exceptional child.

**Senator CROSSIN**—What proportion of gifted children are undiagnosed or misdiagnosed?

**Dr Diezmann**—If 10 to 15 per cent of people might be categorised as gifted in any particular area, that would mean in every single classroom you will have three or so children in particular areas—in music, in sport, in language and so on. You might know the sporting ones because they have made it on to the cricket team or whatever, and you might know the music ones, but you probably do not know the others unless they get their tables right every week. That will be the extent of what happens—they might get a sticker. Some teachers will know; some teachers will not know.

**Dr Watters**—I think US research in the high schools suggests that something like up to 20 per cent of dropouts from high school could be gifted.

**Dr Diezmann**—You have suicide rates and you have gaol populations, and when they look at the number of gifted people in those populations they are higher than they should be. There is this view that these children start off by being bored, withdrawn and dropouts and so on and then it leads to further problems down the track. So there is research of that type available.

**Senator CROSSIN**—In your submission you have given us two columns of the 1988 recommendations from the Senate report. Is the proposed action in the 2000s your work?

**Dr Watters**—Yes. These are our responses to what we had seen from the previous report and taking the invitation to respond on what happened.

**Dr Diezmann**—For example, in number 2 it mentions teacher training. We have not seen any evidence of that. So we have said that that is the case.

**Senator CROSSIN**—In number 4 you say to us that the Commonwealth was able to provide substantial funding to undertake professional development of teachers being supported in terms of gifted and talented. I am assuming that has now stopped?

**Dr Diezmann**—No, not in gifted and talented—in key learning areas such as science.

**Dr Watters**—The eight key learning areas. Under the National Professional Development Program in 1996 and 1995 Queensland got a couple of hundred thousand dollars, or something like that. That enabled a flow-on professional development program to be developed in Queensland. We were part of the implementation of that program, wearing our science hats. That had, at the time, useful content in terms of the impending introduction of syllabi into Queensland. So the new Queensland syllabi were essentially developed as a flow-on from those key learning areas and the professional development that was experienced. The point is that funding was provided federally for that to happen.

**Senator CROSSIN**—Are you saying that has now stopped or that it never included professional development in the area of gifted children?

**Dr Diezmann**—That is right. What we are saying is it was provided for key learning areas. A similar thing could be done in gifted education.

**Dr Watters**—The model was interesting because the model involved the collaboration between professional bodies—the Science Teachers Association, universities and the education department. So it was a collaborative, ground-based approach. The model, if that were to be implemented again with gifted education, would involve some national association or the state associations for gifted and talented, the departments or education systems and professional academics.

**Senator CROSSIN**—In point 6, is the one university that has developed the centre QUT?

**Dr Watters**—No, it is New South Wales.

**Dr Diezmann**—The University of New South Wales. Miraca Gross, who is there, is the only professor of gifted education in Australia.

**Senator CROSSIN**—Finally, I want to go back to something that Senator Tierney raised. You are not advocating that gifted children should be withdrawn in a school setting; but you are advocating accelerated progression.

**Dr Diezmann**—We would differ.

**Dr Watters**—I think catering for children has to be done basically within the existing curriculum structure and involves a restructuring of schools in ways that enable children to be catered for within that school system. I think that is a long-term goal. To get there we need to have substantial professional development strategies. In one sense what Ed Queensland tried to set up in the notion of FOCA schools, which were essentially sites for professional development, had some potential. I do not think they were successful in the sense that they have not been able to be continued to the extent that they should be. The professional development

issues have to be addressed first. Teachers have to know what to do. In the New South Wales system basically you have select schools but, as Senator Tierney said, you could come in there with no experience of dealing with gifted children. It takes a gifted teacher to teach gifted children.

**CHAIR**—The suggestion is that Dr Diezmann had an alternative view on that final question.

**Dr Diezmann**—My view is that when you have teachers who do not know what they are doing and where you have one or two children isolated in classrooms, the only way you can effectively deal with that is to gather some of those children together and put them with people who do know what they are doing. But I see that as an interim step on the way to approaching a more long-term model. For example, one of the ways we work with schools is that they like to pay us to go in and do it for them. We do not like to do that because it depends on us being there. What we prefer to do is work with the teachers to get it under way and then withdraw from the situation. That is what I mean. If we wait until all teachers are trained, there is another generation of children who miss out again.

**Senator CROSSIN**—So let us go back to the quote Senator Tierney used from the Australian Education Union policy. Let us set aside the controversy where they labelled them so-called gifted children, because your evidence today is that you have already said that that is an international debate. Their policy says that they oppose the withdrawal of these children. One of you has said you would agree with that policy. Is that correct?

**Dr Watters**—In broad terms. I do not see any disagreement between Carmel and myself in the sense that I look at the longer term perspective. To get there we do need hot spots of some form of support. So I guess we are talking in terms of stages. We sat down and designed a series of stages for this to happen. At the moment the only way that the kids in schools who need support now get it is if some expert goes into the school and says, ‘I want a withdrawal program. I will take all the kids we identify in grades 1 to 5, put them in a room and we will tailor a program that meets their specific needs’. That program is quite different to what would happen in the mainstream and with lower ability children.

**Dr Diezmann**—We have seen this evolution with learning difficulties. Very few people were aware of how to deal with these children and what to do with them; they were removed from the school in their best interests. But over time, as more teachers developed their professional understanding and there were more support structures, it has been a more integrated approach. It is a similar sort of a thing.

**Senator CROSSIN**—You are saying in an ideal world you would oppose the withdrawal of these children?

**Dr Watters**—Yes.

**Dr Diezmann**—And I probably would not.

**Senator TIERNEY**—I just want to get clarification. You mentioned that the University of New South Wales were coming up into Queensland to do something, presumably because it was not being done in Queensland. Could you explain what that was?

**Dr Diezmann**—It is a Graduate Certificate in Gifted Education. It is not that teachers are uninterested—that is probably one point we should make. They are very interested and very concerned and we deal with many phone calls from them. But it is very hard for us to cater for. The University of New South Wales has had many Brisbane people, many Queensland people, go to their programs. That has reversed, and they have started to come to Queensland to do the program here, and that will probably attract more people.

**Senator TIERNEY**—So they do that by distance ed and then do summer school or something like that?

**Dr Diezmann**—Something like that, yes.

**Senator CARR**—Why doesn't the Queensland University of Technology do that?

**Dr Diezmann**—We would really like to know the answer to that question.

**Dr Watters**—I think it has something to do with internal politics within the University of Queensland. My colleague at the back from Griffith would explain that Griffith has programs, and I am sure he is facing similar situations there. But there is an attitude existent with academics, within faculties of education, that focuses on remedial education before it focuses on gifted education. I think the academics are frightened of these kids as well.

**Dr Diezmann**—But where you have had a university that has evolved from a teacher training college that is full of ex-teachers, that is exactly why.

**CHAIR**—Thank you very much for appearing today.

[10.02 a.m.]

**MILNE, Mr Henry James Ogston (Private capacity)**

**RUSSELL, Professor Neil, Faculty of Education, Griffith University**

**CHAIR**—Welcome. Do you have any comments to make about the capacity in which you appear?

**Mr Milne**—I appear as a private individual. However, I do coordinate the gifted and talented learners strand for the Masters of Special Education and also the Graduate Certificate in Special Education. I also teach the undergraduate subjects in gifted education. The reason for appearing in a private capacity is that I only became aware of this committee accidentally while accessing the Net, so I thought the best thing to do would be to act quickly.

**CHAIR**—Thank you, gentlemen. We have your submissions before us. Are there any changes that you would like to make to the written submissions?

**Mr Milne**—I have made some typographical changes that I would like to submit at this stage. They are basically just removal of commas, making words plural and things like that—nothing of any substance. Also, for information purposes I would like to offer this set of materials, which is basically a catalogue of resource materials from the University of Connecticut in the USA.

**CHAIR**—Thank you. I now invite you both to make an opening statement. Perhaps Professor Russell can go first.

**Prof. Russell**—Thank you for the opportunity of appearing before this committee. As I have outlined in my submission, it is a time of change with education around the world. If Australian schools do not adopt changes, we are going to be left behind. Looking after the needs of gifted children is just crucial. We know that one of the ways that we can attend to the needs of children with talent is to develop differentiated curriculums in our classrooms for these children.

I want to address in my submission aspects of teacher education that are critical to the development of differentiated programs in our schools. I agree with the earlier witnesses that in undergraduate programs around Australia there is very little emphasis on preparing teachers for teaching gifted children or producing differentiated programs that they can use to develop their gifts. At the postgraduate level, the situation at Griffith University is a little better, and I have outlined in my submission the attempts that we are using at Griffith University to instruct teachers involved with gifted and talented children. We run spring schools for teachers of gifted and talented children, and we have been doing this for some 10 years.

I have outlined in my submission an area in which I hope teacher education can move in the future, and I have outlined this as a case study provided in the instance of A.B. Paterson College on the Gold Coast. This school is a private school on the Gold Coast, and members of this committee will be aware that there has been quite a shift of pupils from government schools to

private schools across Australia. The Australia wide average of the proportion of children in private schools is about 32 per cent. On the Gold Coast, about 40 per cent of children go to a private school. I would argue that one of the reasons why parents are taking their children out of government schools and putting them into private schools is that some of the private schools, particularly on the Gold Coast, are changing their pedagogy. They are changing their pedagogy to develop differentiated programs that will cater for gifted and talented children.

In the case of A.B. Paterson College, the school has developed a partnership agreement with the university. The school and the university conduct a graduate certificate in education, which is actually taught out at the school so that all the teachers in the school go through this program. This overcomes one of the great difficulties we have with the in-service training or professional development of teachers who come into the university on a course and do a course without the support of others in the school. I think the impact of this change in professional development, where the university and the schools work in partnership, will have a significant impact on the professional development of teachers, certainly in the Gold Coast region. That is the main comment I want to make at this stage.

**Mr Milne**—I wish to thank the Senate for this opportunity to present a submission and also to defend it in this meeting today. Basically I would just like to highlight some points from my submission. I think the Australian community as a whole needs to directly address the issue of developing the potential of all children, especially those who have the potential for a high level of achievement. I think it is time that maybe Australian education agencies actually redefine in their mind what is the purpose of education, because I think it has changed in the last 100 or so years, particularly in relation to the movement from the industrial revolution into the technological revolution era.

I think also the education system, specifically in relation to gifted education, needs to move beyond the ad hocery of finding little bits and pieces from all over the place and dumping them together to make some sort of an activity that is presented as a gifted program. Gifted programs are as complex and as deep in terms of their theoretical bases as those in other areas. I think there is an attitude in Australia generally that giftedness is easy and anybody can do it with a 10-minute in-service presentation. My experience, and I think those of my colleagues, is that that is not the case because there is a lot more there that needs to be understood.

I think we need to recognise the special education needs of children at the upper levels of potential in the field of giftedness and that these children do have special needs that are different to those in many cases of other children in the regular classrooms. I am talking about those children whom we might define as moderately, severely and profoundly gifted. That is language I use which is not overly popular in the field, but it does relate quite nicely to the concept in special education where I also work and have experience. I am talking here about children of two, three, four, five and six standard deviation, which is beyond the mean. I think we need to look upon these services as falling along a continuum—from the regular classroom to very special exclusive, if you like, programs that are attached to universities and other centres of research and higher learning according to the special and specific nature of the individual child.

We need to explicitly recognise the special needs of creative productive children. These are children who are different from the traditionally defined children that Renzulli and Reis have defined as ‘schoolhouse gifted’—the children who do well at schoolhouse tasks such as writing

assignments, satisfying exams, getting their work in on time and so on. It is the creative productive gifted children who are generally now being recognised as those children who produce the greatest gains in our society. Many of them are seen as not achieving very well at school—in fact, quite often being a nuisance at school. Hence their special needs.

Griffith University has a history as a provider in this area and a supporter of gifted education. I have talked in the submission about its involvement in the inauguration of the Queensland Tournament of Minds, which helped in the development of the Tournament of Minds in Australia. Also, it sponsored Excellence Expo. It sponsors a whole range of other things. Being a university, it caters for those children who would currently be defined as gifted children in our society as they transfer into adulthood. So Griffith University has a long and significant contribution in Queensland in its efforts in gifted education.

Probably the most critical aspect that we need to look at is the changing of attitudes in the Australian community. We have noticed how changing attitudes to sport have resulted in the development of extensive elite sports programs. This has taken Australia from being a fairly average, I understand, sporting country in the international scene to fourth in the world in the last Olympic Games and, in terms of the contribution of our persons with disabilities, to first in the world. I think that is an outstanding example of how funding and training of teachers and athletes can contribute to one particular domain of giftedness and how similar types of funding and training of athletes and teachers could contribute to a similar increase in the contributions made by other people in the area of gifted education and so on.

We need to address ongoing and service development of teachers. I think all the one-year trained teachers have probably retired and probably most of the two-year trained teachers. There are still a number of three-year trained teachers and there are a number of four-year trained teachers now, an increasing number who probably feel that their contribution to further education is almost done. I would like to suggest that we reaffirm the notion of lifelong education in education and look maybe towards the direction of the United States, which has a requirement for continued demonstration of in-service training and development, both formal and informal, to maintain accreditation. I suggest within that context that there be a requirement to demonstrate increasing knowledge and training, et cetera in the fields of special needs as one category within that whole program and particularly, again as one category, in regard to the children with gifted education needs.

**Senator TIERNEY**—Mr Milne, you mentioned there was a special pedagogy relating to gifted and talented. In a nutshell could you tell us what is different about the pedagogy of teaching gifted children as opposed to mainstream?

**Mr Milne**—The pedagogy, which is basically the language and the strategies of educating gifted children, has been probably different in the sense that gifted education has looked at the elite end of education. Like special education, it has been prepared to challenge new ideas and to experiment. There is also a pedagogy that is specific to special education. I am also trained in mental retardation and have worked in that field. I find a lot of similarities in concept, although the pedagogy varies. So we are looking at an area where researchers in overseas countries predominantly have come up with new ideas, developed new programs, developed new language and developed new strategies, courses, et cetera, that specifically address those needs.

I looked at the Education Queensland documents of 2010, where quite a bit of the language and the pedagogy of gifted education is being included in the language of normal education. So there is now—as there has been from other special education areas—a movement of the special pedagogy of the language of gifted education into the normal stream of education.

**Prof. Russell**—I think the pedagogy for the gifted and more advanced students in the past is moving more down the track of having more project oriented work in the classroom. We are going to see the differentiated classroom having individual children, or maybe small groups of children, working on individual projects that are set up by the teachers. In this respect, I see the provision of computers in schools making a substantial contribution to the ability of children to get involved with individual and group projects. This is one of the major trends in American schools, which are trying to prepare differentiated curriculum for their children.

**Senator TIERNEY**—You mentioned that you had a graduate certificate running at the university. How long has this been running and how many graduates would you have a year?

**Prof. Russell**—We have had a graduate certificate in education in the university in the gifted area with Harry Milne for a number of years.

**Mr Milne**—In 1995 it started.

**Prof. Russell**—On the Gold Coast we have started this graduate certificate in education over the last two years. The special nature of this graduate certificate is that the graduate certificate is delivered out in the school. So rather than teachers coming into the university on a Friday afternoon and spending three hours in the university for fourteen weeks to complete a subject, the staff and the school design the subjects that are going to be studied. The university staff go out to the school and so you get large numbers of teachers in that school—in the case of A.B. Paterson College all the teachers—doing this graduate certificate. I think this is a major advance on the professional development of staffing in schools.

What happens in normal situations is that different teachers come into university to do a course on preparing for gifted children. Then they go back to their schools and they do not have the support sometimes in the school to create the programs that are going to make a difference.

**Senator TIERNEY**—Mr Milne, in the course that you have run since 1995, how many students on average graduated?

**Mr Milne**—In 1997 I went over to the United States for a 15-month sabbatical to do the course work and residency requirements for a PhD program at the University of Connecticut at the National Research Centre, which is run by Joseph Renzulli and Sally Reis and other leaders in the field there. During that time the course stopped because I was not here to actually run it. In the first round, I think we had about 12 people enrolled in the course. In the subsequent rounds, since I got back when it was opened up again in 1999, we have had five people enrol per year. That is in the masters degree course.

**Senator TIERNEY**—Right. So is there any other provision in Queensland for specialist training for teachers such as that?

**Mr Milne**—My understanding is that at the masters level we are the only university that offers a course in gifted education.

**Senator TIERNEY**—So we have coming out on average about five teachers a year for the whole of Queensland in the area of gifted and talented?

**Mr Milne**—Yes.

**Senator TIERNEY**—In the undergraduate courses, do all universities who offer teacher education have it as an elective? Does anybody have it as a mainstream?

**Mr Milne**—Griffith University has in two core subjects, ‘educational psychology’ and ‘teaching to difference’—which is the core subject in special education—a three hour component in each on matters relating to gifted education. In the educational psychology one we look at Sternberg’s, Gardner’s and Renzulli’s conception of giftedness. We look at intelligence and so on. In the inclusive education one we look at program offerings for gifted children. Basically I use the Renzulli model because I think it is the most defensible and inclusive. If I am going to teach students then I want them to have one model, at least, with some knowledge rather than a few tips of icebergs to go away with.

**Senator TIERNEY**—So they get three hours in a three-year course?

**Mr Milne**—That is sensitisation in two core subjects. And there are essay options there.

**Senator TIERNEY**—So if they miss that day, it is gone.

**Mr Milne**—Precisely.

**Senator TIERNEY**—They miss gifted.

**Mr Milne**—Yes.

**Senator TIERNEY**—Why is it such a small proportion?

**Mr Milne**—I think it reflects the attitudes of the education system and it reflects the attitudes of the community.

**Senator TIERNEY**—Do you mean the education faculty?

**Mr Milne**—The system. I have talked to my dean, Professor Des Power—the head of the program—and said, ‘Why don’t we set up a specialist strand of this to offer, with our specialist strands in vision impairment, hearing impairment, learning disabilities and so on?’

**Senator TIERNEY**—Did he say, ‘What are you going to take out to put that in?’

**Mr Milne**—No, he did not. He said, ‘The department of education—Education Queensland—does not guarantee or does not support the training of specialist teachers and they

do not have within their structure an employment hierarchy for these people to work in, therefore we cannot support that. But we can support your masters strand as an offering that the university makes.' And the faculty and the university have supported that even though Education Queensland and other areas have not directly supported the need for gifted education teachers. However, all the students we have get snapped up pretty quickly once they are involved in the course.

**Senator TIERNEY**—Why do you think the Queensland department has that attitude?

**Mr Milne**—I do not know.

**Senator TIERNEY**—Why is it trying to interfere with what is happening in courses in the university, particularly such courses that are so much needed? They do have a gifted policy, I believe.

**Mr Milne**—I do not think Education Queensland interferes. As far as I am aware, the Education Queensland authorities are quite happy for the course to operate. It is here. It is something that is available to teachers in the Catholic system, in the independent system and Ed Queensland. So they are not interfering. Certainly the people who qualify from this course are employed in specialist positions in Education Queensland. But, as in the application of their policy statement, I do not think there is any mandatory sort of direction to in fact do something more explicit. In other words, we like it, I assume, but we are not going to actually say, 'Right, we want gifted education teachers at this point in time.'

**Senator TIERNEY**—To just come back to the general course that teachers do, if you put up a proposal—let us expand this and make it a semester unit or perhaps within ed psych or somewhere or other; let us give a bit more emphasis to it—what would stop that occurring?

**Mr Milne**—First of all, I must say that we do have two elective subjects in gifted education in the undergraduate program. One elective subject is a day subject which is offered in first semester. The other elective subject is a subject that is offered in both semesters via distance education. On average we have about a dozen people—I think there were 14 this semester—in the gifted education subject by distance ed. We did have about seven or eight offering to go into the day subject, but that is economically just not a viable number for a subject to be offered by the day. Most of those students went into the distance ed subject when they were advised.

**Senator TIERNEY**—How many do you graduate a year in the undergraduate education course?

**Mr Milne**—I would not be able to give you that figure. I understand it is probably in excess of a thousand right across all faculties—would that be correct?

**Prof. Russell**—Yes.

**Senator TIERNEY**—Of teachers? A thousand teachers graduating?

**Mr Milne**—I would say so—across all the campuses.

**Senator TIERNEY**—And somewhere between eight and 12 take an elective on giftedness?

**Prof. Russell**—On the Gold Coast campus, about five per cent of our undergraduate students take the elective subject on gifted and talented children.

**Senator TIERNEY**—But at Griffith, and I assume it is this campus, it is closer to one per cent?

**Mr Milne**—I cannot give a percentage number, but I would say that—

**Senator TIERNEY**—Just on your figures it comes out at that,

**Mr Milne**—for a semester we would probably be looking about 24 per year. So, of a graduating group, it is hard to say how many it is—one per cent or five per cent—because students can take those subjects in any semester during the four-year course.

**Senator TIERNEY**—Do you think governments should actually mandate, like they do in the United States, that teachers be trained for giftedness?

**Mr Milne**—I certainly do. As I put in my submission, I think there should be a requirement for certain minimum levels of training, as there are for special education, in the areas of gifted education so that every teacher in training does a minimum amount in a number of core subjects that are relevant. At Griffith we do it in two, and there are odds and ends in other areas as well done by other lecturers. I think that there should be that requirement right across Australia because at the moment it does not exist. It does exist for special education because there has been lengthy lobbying by the special education lobby groups, which are very powerful.

I cannot understand why the parents of gifted children are not as powerful a lobby group or are not as listened to, apart from the ethos that exists to chop down tall poppies, I guess. But certainly I think that should start because that would then provide a minimum awareness which I do not think exists at the moment. Then I think all universities in Australia should have on their books either a gifted education subject as an elective or access to a gifted education subject that is offered by another university, either through distance ed or through electronic media. And I think that we should have formal training for all teachers who wish to go and work as specialist teachers of gifted children, as we do for other areas of special need.

**Senator TIERNEY**—It would have been very handy for me at Sydney Boys High.

**Senator CROSSIN**—Mr Milne, could you provide me with some background as to what the school-wide enrichment model is and how it operates.

**Mr Milne**—The school-wide enrichment model I would define as a mega-model in gifted education. It is a model that has a number of submodels within it. It is one of the big models, if you like, to provision for gifted children. It comes in a number of elements. The reason I like it is because it offers all components for the development of a comprehensive gifted education program that can be delivered as an inclusive program for all children, gifted or otherwise, as well as an exclusive program for those children specifically identified as gifted.

It starts off with a definition which is developmental, diagnostic and leads into a program. So first of all we start with the definition that Renzulli has talked about—his three clusters—which gives us information about the children through his instruments that actually identify patterns in relation to those three clusters. We then move into a submodel that he calls a total talent portfolio, which includes the curriculum compacting submodel, whereby we have something like an individualised education program where we actually assess the child using a comprehensive range of devices including, if required, psychometric measures. But, because we are dealing with teachers who do not have formal qualifications in the use of psychometric measures, and they are therefore not allowed to use them—or many of them—the bulk of the strategies there can be used by teachers and involve a lot of school based activities and observational things; things that can be reported and demonstrated by parents and teachers.

So it is a very comprehensive approach that can be built into what we now understand as a portfolio. It indicates the interests of the child; the learning styles of the child; the directions the child wishes to go in; the strengths and weaknesses the child has in academic areas and other areas as well. It suggests what sort of program offerings need to be developed.

The enrichment triad model component of that school wide enrichment model addresses how to go about identifying, stimulating and developing the child's potential as well as actually developing the three clusters of above average ability, task commitment and creativity that Renzulli has identified as the major elements, not the only elements, in the realisation of potential. So we can actually use the type 1, type 2 and type 3 as part of the regular program development sequence for all children, whether they are doing maths, spelling, reading or writing at preschool, primary and secondary levels. That will enrich and extend the programs and stimulate those children to find out if they have an interest in an area, and it will enable them to demonstrate an interest in that area. Then teachers will be able to proceed to actually enable those children to pursue those passions or interests to some sort of real product. Where this has happened, there have been some quite outstanding real products produced by children that one would never expect children to be able to do.

**Senator CROSSIN**—I am assuming it is not based on a withdrawal method then.

**Mr Milne**—The model itself is an inclusive model on the continuum. It can be used as a totally inclusive program in the classroom; it can also be used as a totally exclusive program and all positions along that continuum, depending on how you want to use it. A one-teacher classroom and a one-teacher school could actually implement this model. It can also be used as a whole of school model.

**Senator CROSSIN**—What role do you see the Commonwealth has to play in the area of gifted and talented children and education thereof?

**Mr Milne**—I know that over the years the Commonwealth has a definition of giftedness, and it is produced every time there is a relevant funding program going forth. I am also aware that there is no extant program that I know of that states its national position. The definition that is used is one that is used occasionally in funding proposal requests. I think the first thing I would like to see the Commonwealth do is set up a definition of what the Commonwealth perceives as being giftedness, gifted education and so on. I suppose the first thing I would like to see before

that even is that the Commonwealth takes, as a first line priority, the development of programs for gifted children in Australia as a Commonwealth thing.

So from the definition I would like to see the Commonwealth come forward with guidelines as to the identification and assessment of children who may have the potential to be gifted. I prefer the concept 'potential to be gifted' because that is developmental and it is positive. It means that we can start looking for underachieving gifted, hidden gifted, culturally different gifted, disabled and handicapped gifted children. Those children are there. Quite often they are not seen because their disabling condition masks and shrouds their potential for gifted behaviours and giftedness. Some of them have learned not to demonstrate their giftedness because it does not pay and they get punished by their peers for these sorts of things. I think that would then suggest that the Commonwealth should look systematically and urgently at the development of a continuum concept in programs for gifted children at the early childhood level before schools and preschools even start.

The early childhood care of children is now becoming a major component in Australian life. We know that it is the home environment that young children develop in that is responsible by and large for developing the potential that children have for gifted behaviours. I think it is very important that we look at that pre preschool level—the time many children or some children are placed into care because their parents have to go out to work—in terms of developing an awareness and programs for gifted children from kindergartens and preschools right through to primary and secondary schools and so on.

**Prof. Russell**—Could I just say that at the heart of this question of the Commonwealth's contribution is the development of teachers. I have just been to a conference in Dallas, Texas, where one of the foremost educators in America, Professor Sanders, has come up with some research which suggests that, if a child has three really good teachers over three consecutive years, the gains that those children can reach surpass all issues of class, ethnicity and a whole range of other factors. I am convinced that the quality of the teaching is at the heart of the issue, so I would be asking the Commonwealth to put some resources into the professional development of teachers in this area to help them create the differentiated programs that are necessary in the classroom.

Without the teacher having the skills and the materials to develop these differentiated programs within the regular school class, we are not going to progress. Across Australia we are now embarking on an outcomes-based approach to education. Each of the states now has a curriculum structure where there are different levels of outcomes to be produced across the eight key learning areas. If we are to get children to progress at an appropriate rate within the one classroom, then teachers have to move from the one size fits all model—where one concept is taught in a didactic fashion to the whole group of kids at the one time—to another model. That is going to require assistance with professional development, because everything that this committee has heard this morning has suggested that teacher education institutions are not doing anything at the undergraduate level and they are doing very little at the postgraduate level. My suggestion is that this professional development be organised on a partnership model between the universities and the schools so that these changes are embedded in the schools. Then we will no longer have individual teachers coming out of their schools, getting a top up on the gifted and talented education practices, going back to the schools and not being able to implement something. It needs a circuit breaker.

**Mr Milne**—I would certainly endorse what Neil has said, and I have said similar things in my submission. I would like to endorse the Senate and the federal government's movement towards recognising the continuum of program needs, whereby most of the children who have the potential to be gifted would be catered for in the regular classroom. Then there would be a continuum of pull-out opportunities on a regular basis or on an as needs basis right through to classes in the district level right through to classes or schools at the university level, as exist in some states already, to cater for those children as they move along the continuum of giftedness from borderline through to moderate, severe and profound.

There is evidence in the literature that has been done by Miraca Gross, and also by people in the United States, that children with 170, 180, 190, 200 plus IQs and attainment levels have significantly different needs to those of ordinary children. I would like the Commonwealth to actually fund, organise and coordinate this as a national priority. I would like to see as part of this process a committee established at the national level that is representative of major groups, and I have listed some of them in my submission. I would like to see teacher education training, as Neil has talked about, increased and I would like to see this done sooner rather than later.

I think we have waited 30 years since the 1970-75 ministers of education and directors-general of education meetings started talking about this, and still we do not have a national program in this area. It seems to me that, for the value of the individual child in terms of achieving their potential at whatever level of the continuum they exist, there is a need to facilitate the development of their abilities. As a national priority, we certainly need to do something to give our children the opportunities to develop much better skills than they have at the moment. I am astounded at the bright children who come here as young adults who do not have even reasonable skills in some areas because they have not been challenged. Quite a lot of the less able students compared to them—who had to work hard because they have not been able to get through easily—are people who have got better skills in solving problems.

**CHAIR**—Thank you, Mr Milne, and Professor Russell. That concludes this session. Thank you for your appearance today.

[10.41 a.m.]

**De LEON, Mrs Lisa, Parent Member, Queensland Association for Gifted and Talented Children**

**HEWTON, Ms Judith, President, Queensland Association for Gifted and Talented Children**

**OPALKA, Mrs Gabriele, Parent Member, Queensland Association for Gifted and Talented Children**

**CHAIR**—The committee has before it submission 30. The committee prefers all evidence to be given in public, although we will consider any request for all or part of evidence to be given confidentially. I point out, however, that such evidence may subsequently be made public by order of the Senate. I now invite you to make a brief opening statement, Ms Hewton.

**Ms Hewton**—Thank you. As President of the Queensland Association for Gifted and Talented Children I welcome this opportunity to assist the Commonwealth to find ways of supporting the under-resourced area that is known as gifted and talented. I need to say that I am also a state government employee on leave and as such will not answer questions that breach the code of conduct to which all public servants are bound. I have been so advised by Education Queensland—that is, that I may not give evidence on any matter which I could only know about through my employment. My associates, Gabriele and Lisa, and I will decide who takes up any questions that you put to the association today. Please remember that I speak only for QAGTC today.

As an association we have 10 objectives written into our constitution. In summary our work for gifted children has a strong educational focus. I believe it has become so as ‘into the breach’ or filling the gap. Our counselling service is in great demand and our workshops, seminars and conferences are very well attended. To the best of our resources as a band of volunteers we conduct activities for children also. We attempt to cover this vast state. We receive no funding whatsoever from any government sources. The two main issues confronting us on a daily basis are: who are the gifted children, because this is not easily or well defined, and what are their needs—their social and emotional needs as well as educational needs. Parents and teachers who are not equipped to recognise giftedness indicate to us their later regret that they took no action to support these children.

Underachievement is rampant, even in the early years of schooling. This is a very typical story. One of the parents I am counselling at the moment told me only a week or two ago that her young son—who is now in year 1 at school, his first year of compulsory schooling—went to school reading at the level of being able to read the newspaper. He said to her one morning last year, ‘Mum, if we’re going to be at grandma’s by 9 o’clock, it is now 8.32’—he is looking at a digital clock—‘and we only have 28 minutes in which to arrive there, so we had better get a move on.’

This child, now in year one, in an attempt to fit in with his chronological age peers and also to please his teacher, now counts slowly on his fingers, '1, 2, 3'—dumbing down his abilities and his skills. He also no longer reads; he sounds out letters. Because the other children do that he thinks that is how he should behave. So his mother's heart is breaking and she needs skills to negotiate with the school. She and others need these kinds of skills so that the schools recognise what these children can do; what they bring to the school, and can take them on from there so that the challenge is at their appropriate level of depth and complexity and the children can proceed to learn at their own individual rates of learning, which in some cases is rather quick.

Gifted children have special educational needs. They are not included in special education in Queensland. Those who are interested in the needs of these children have never been able to have that included under the 'special needs' umbrella. Our conservative estimate is that 50,000 school children in Queensland have gifts and talents. That is a figure somewhat less than 10 per cent of the school population. Queensland has no schools for the gifted. However, there are some schools who put into practice sound gifted education principles.

The Queensland association is currently investigating a proposal. We have a working party for a school for the gifted in Queensland. It is now several years since the triennium funding period expired. That was the funding from the Commonwealth. In that time some excellent work was achieved here which has provided models that are still being used in schools today. Every day the association receives calls from distressed or angry or confused parents who just want to know what is going wrong for their bright children. What we are asking is straightforward enough. We want acceptance that gifted children have special needs. We want all people, especially teachers, to actively search for talent in their students and to know what to do to extend and challenge these students at appropriate levels of depth and complexity.

It is straightforward enough but, given the low levels of awareness and low levels of knowledge and negative public attitudes, it has proved to be a task that has confounded us for many years. This is only my second year experience as the president of the association, but going back some years before that from an interest point of view and from involvement with the parents, the depth of our frustration in this area is the reason why I suppose there is a considerable turnover and people give up in frustration. Unfortunately, people take their children out of our schools.

So to this end the Queensland Association would like to strongly recommend that the Commonwealth renew its former interest in the educational welfare of gifted children as a matter of urgency. The failure of state governments to take up the initiative shown by the federal government last decade is widespread, I believe, not just particular to Queensland. We would like to recommend that giftedness be established as a national priority in recognition of the nation's need for the development of the talents of its citizens.

We recommend that funding be made available by the Commonwealth for such activities as the establishment of some form of national body or commission, and grants to schools and organisations for innovative programs—for example, training programs. Then there is the notion of a training centre for each state, which would involve education systems, tertiary institutions and key stakeholders such as our association as well as other qualified groups and individuals. This would be over and above any existing piecemeal current providers and

provisions. We also recommend that there be research programs into priority areas of giftedness.

We have no preconceived ideas and little knowledge—this is our first appearance at anything like a hearing—of what the Commonwealth actually is able to do; the parameters within which you operate. Given that we do not know what is possible, we can only say that we would like to be part of it. The recommendations of the 1988 report probably have not been implemented beyond the three years of funding which we enjoyed. Given that we repeatedly hear party campaign platforms giving priority to the development of human potential and the need to maintain the cache of Australian talent for this nation, this notion that giftedness can continue to remain in the elite basket is probably ill-founded and ill-placed.

We also believe that tying funds for gifted education to other areas of disadvantage, which was the former case, does not encourage giftedness as a national priority. The wholehearted commitment to the development of human potential which can be achieved through gifted education will provide a much needed solution to some of the problems facing society in this new millennium. Both state and Commonwealth governments could take some responsibility for recognising that long-term improvements for society will require concerted ongoing efforts to develop the talents of all gifted Australians. Thank you.

**Senator TIERNEY**—Given the attitude of Australians to things like sport and how elite provision for sport occurs right through to the national institute, why do you think in other areas, academic and creative, there is a prejudice against giftedness in this country?

**Ms Hewton**—I think giftedness seems to sit well when you have ‘sportsperson’ following it—so we find it easy to say ‘gifted sportsperson’. Mind you, I think there is an elite hierarchy within sports. Only some sports are extremely well regarded and they also suffer from that kind of public perception generally tied to where the funding is and where the media is putting all the emphasis. I think it is acceptable to be a gifted musician, a gifted person in the arts, probably considered as somewhat over on the side and off the planet, which is not real in our experience.

In some areas it is acceptable to be a high achiever. It depends on what sort of environment the gifted person is operating in. There is definitely a stigma attached to the word ‘gifted’ because even when schools are operating in ways that we would say are catering for bright children, there is still a reluctance to use the word ‘gifted’ and people will go to great lengths not to. The reason why is probably a notion of cultural cringe. We should be able to say that tall poppies are no longer chopped about. I would like to pass that over to Gabriele, if she wants to comment on the use of the word ‘gifted’, because she has had some recent experience with that.

**Mrs Opalka**—Just at the end of last year we established a parent network for gifted and talented children at our school. We have been fortunate that the concept was taken up by the school and supported by the school and we have been fairly active since then. We have arranged for playtime activities to help the children overcome their social isolation. However, now we have heard that they are thinking of using a different term. They just feel that the term ‘activities for gifted children’ is not well received in the school community. That goes back to the point that in general society thinks that supporting gifted children would lead to elitism and then I think the general assumption is—and that is I think due to the lack of knowledge in society—that the gifted children will go okay anyway. They do not recognise the special needs which

at the gifted children will go okay anyway. They do not recognise the special needs which these children have.

Coming back to your example of sport, how many Australian Olympic gold medal winners would we have, or well-recognised sports people, if we just let these talented people in sports go okay. In contrast, it is well recognised and the talents are searched for. People are looking for the slightest talent popping up in a child as far as sports are concerned. It is recognised that there is a need to foster that and the whole nation is proud of their sporting heroes. So I, as a parent of a gifted child, can only ask, 'Why can't it be that there is a recognition of the fact that even intellectually gifted children need to be searched for and need the full support they can get to achieve their full potential, not only for themselves but also for our country. If they have good support they are more likely to become the future leaders of this country—be it in politics or in society. So I think it is quite important.

**Senator TIERNEY**—I believe Education Queensland has a special fund for talented children—the princely sum of about \$1 million a year. Are you aware of how that funding is used?

**Ms Hewton**—The state government allocates \$1 million per annum at this stage. It has done so for the last three years. Some \$65,000 of that goes to the non-state sectors. I think that has got something to do with a notion of basket and nexus. We are aware of how the funding was used until 1999: it went to schools in small grants for gifted education programs and that it was used for the development of focus schools as centres for gifted education and talent development. Do you want to make any more comment, Lisa?

**Senator TIERNEY**—Just before she does, do you know how many schools receive money?

**Ms Hewton**—I believe it was some hundreds every financial year.

**Mrs De Leon**—My understanding is that that funding is used in lots of small programs. It is not used to its maximum benefit if it was going to make a true difference to gifted education in Queensland. I think it is not set in stone exactly where that money has been spent. Certainly a lot of schools have never seen any of that funding to support programs.

**Senator TIERNEY**—Mrs Hewton, you mentioned coming out of the 1988 Senate report on gifted children that there were three years of funding.

**Ms Hewton**—I believe so.

**Senator TIERNEY**—Do you know anything about what that funding was used for?

**Ms Hewton**—I know what it was used for in Queensland. There were three main programs. The first one was Zigzag, as in the notion of gifted children zigzagging their way through school with underachievement as one of their predominant characteristics. The second was Cygnet, which was conducted up in North Queensland. The third was Unicorn, which continued until the end of 2000 with state funding. It was a joint project with Catholic education initially—and they dropped out when they could no longer fund it after the Commonwealth

funding ceased—and the Association of Independent Schools of Queensland, with whom it has continued until the end of 2000.

Basically it funded a teacher type salary and a person who worked intensively in a number of schools to train teachers to help them to identify and increase the number of children identified as gifted or potentially gifted and to generally raise awareness and work within the community of those schools. So it was generally small numbers of schools and it had to be schools where there was a high incidence of low socioeconomic background or disability or non-English-speaking background. So there had to be some other area of potential disadvantage as well as the notion of gifted and talented.

**Senator CROSSIN**—Is this the funding you are talking about on page 3 of your submission? You have identified those three programs.

**Ms Hewton**—They were funded with Commonwealth moneys.

**Senator CROSSIN**—Is that the funding that commenced in 1993?

**Ms Hewton**—Yes.

**Senator CROSSIN**—When was it stopped?

**Ms Hewton**—Three years later.

**Senator CROSSIN**—In 1996?

**Ms Hewton**—Yes.

**Senator TIERNEY**—Why did it take until 1993 to start that funding, because that report came—

**Senator CARR**—Why was it stopped in 1996?

**Senator TIERNEY**—The report came out in 1988 and it took five years to get any response to that. Is that right?

**Ms Hewton**—That is my understanding. I was not involved in this area at the time.

**Senator TIERNEY**—What do you think the attitude of educational unions would be to your recommendation that all children need pre-testing before entering schools?

**Ms Hewton**—Could you refer me to where I made that statement?

**Senator TIERNEY**—It is on page 4.

**Senator CROSSIN**—You have not made it in reference to the education unions, though.

**Senator TIERNEY**—No, I am asking what—

**Senator CROSSIN**—You have not made it in reference to an education union policy.

**Senator TIERNEY**—Order, through you, Chair. I am asking the question. Can I do it without interruption, please?

**Ms Hewton**—Just let me find it, first of all.

**Senator CROSSIN**—It is the third paragraph up on page 4.

**Senator CARR**—You are very wise to check your own quotes.

**Senator TIERNEY**—It is the recommendation that the children need pretesting before entering school. I assume you want this so you can identify who the gifted are.

**Ms Hewton**—That does not say before they enter school; it says that when they enter school the teachers should find out what the children know and make sure that they do not sit there repeating childish work before they can go on at their own level according to their own ability. I am not saying we should test the whole population with an IQ test.

**Senator TIERNEY**—No, I understand what you are saying, but I am asking what you think the attitude of the teachers union would be in Queensland to that sort of testing.

**Ms Hewton**—I cannot imagine any problems. If you have 20 children in your classroom, to just find out whether they read or write or know their number facts already and take them on from there, I cannot see why it is a union issue at all.

**Senator TIERNEY**—Well, I could not see why it would be either, but they tend to be very much against testing.

**Senator CARR**—That is not true.

**Senator TIERNEY**—It certainly is.

**CHAIR**—Senator Tierney, can we please confine ourselves to asking questions.

**Senator TIERNEY**—They fiercely oppose testing through the system.

**Senator CARR**—That is not true.

**Senator TIERNEY**—We will have that debate another time.

**Ms Hewton**—Can I make just one statement? I was not referring even to formal testing. It might just be sitting down with the parent of the child and asking, ‘What does your child do?’ We do not ask the question.

**Senator CARR**—Every competent teacher surely does that.

**Senator TIERNEY**—We would hope so.

**Ms Hewton**—They do not ask the question: ‘What does your child already do? What do they bring to the school?’ I see you are laughing. Do you want to comment on this one? Did anybody ask you what your daughter could do when she came to school?

**Mrs Opalka**—No.

**Senator CARR**—Did they ask you or did they ask the child? You are saying there is no diagnostic assessment at all.

**Mrs Opalka**—No.

**Senator TIERNEY**—Very interesting. I would like to know, because it has come up in discussion this morning, what your association’s opinion would be of withdrawal classes for the gifted and selective schooling for the gifted.

**Ms Hewton**—First of all, there is no one association opinion; we are made up of several hundred individual opinions.

**Senator TIERNEY**—Sometimes such associations have common views on a number of things.

**Ms Hewton**—We would suggest a range of provisions. We would suggest that separate provision is a viable alternative as well as in class and in school. Ideally, we would like things to be happening in the classroom all day for these children, not just for the half-hour withdrawal program on Friday afternoon. At the moment we have no separate provision, unless you count some of the elite private schools that are so well resourced that they have the funding to cover all bases. But as a result of our frustration and also because of the inability of teachers and the communities to come to terms with giftedness, we are now very favourably looking at separate provision. The research does indicate, if I can quote a little, that gifted children benefit from learning together; they do not become egotistical and overbearing, and they do not become isolated from society.

It also indicates that it is extremely difficult for regular classroom teachers to differentiate the curriculum to meet the needs of the gifted students in regular classrooms. Also, many gifted students think and learn differently from their chronological age mates and therefore they need depth, they need to be able to go faster and they need complexity. Some of the time something has to happen for these children, and I do not mean that they should help the teacher teach the slower learners. They do need to have something happening for them at an appropriate pace and appropriate level.

**Senator TIERNEY**—I am from New South Wales so I am not totally familiar with the Queensland situation. In New South Wales in primary schools there are what we call OC classes, where children who are gifted are withdrawn to be given special additional work. Is there such an approach in Queensland at all?

**Ms Hewton**—Are they withdrawn full-time?

**Senator TIERNEY**—I would have to check on how it is currently working, but that is how they used to do it.

**Ms Hewton**—I think it is a full-time withdrawal.

**Senator TIERNEY**—Yes, there are special classes—OC classes.

**Ms Hewton**—I do not know of any in Queensland. Do you know of any full-time withdrawal classes?

**Mrs Opalka**—No.

**Senator TIERNEY**—I take it you do not have selective high schools; you do not have centres of excellence in high schools as they have in New South Wales either?

**Ms Hewton**—I think there are such things as centres of excellence. They are not generally associated with the gifted education movement.

**Senator TIERNEY**—What are they centres of excellence for?

**Ms Hewton**—Golf, basketball—

**Senator TIERNEY**—All sport?

**Ms Hewton**—Dance and music.

**Senator TIERNEY**—Okay. It does not stretch to the academic area?

**Ms Hewton**—It may, but if it does we are not aware of it.

**CHAIR**—Ms Hewton, you refer to Zigzag as reflecting one of the characteristics of gifted children in schools. Just for our information, because I do not think a number of the submissions have actually gone to how you characterise the experience of a gifted child in school, can you give us a bit more detail, from your association's perspective, of how a typical gifted child currently experiences, say, primary school?

**Ms Hewton**—I wish there was a typical experience. These children bring as many different—

**CHAIR**—I am sure there would not be, but there would be some sort of stereotype you might be able to give us from your experience. As I said, this program was called Zigzag because that was seen as one of the characteristics. Are there others?

**Ms Hewton**—Of the child's experience at school? It comes back to whether they are appreciated and whether their talents are recognised, because in an effort to fit in with their

peers they will become either generally compliant and sit and daydream or they will act out and be challenging and aggressive. There will be truancy. Some of them sit quietly all day and wait until they get home and then take it out on mum and dad. Some of them are just refusing to go to school. I deplore that the systems—and there are several in Queensland—do not seem to be able to cater appropriately for these children, and that the home schooling movement is on the increase.

More and more of the bright children are being home schooled and are seeking enrolment in schools of distance education so that they can knock that over in a couple of hours and then come back to things that are really important to them, which may be several years ahead. One of our greatest problems is the grouping of children by chronological age, which is an administrative convenience rather than an educationally sound activity in schools. It was not all that long ago that that was not the case. Now with the numbers increasing perhaps it has become necessary to do some grouping. But to group by chronological age rather than something like mental age seems to be a totally false way to look at how children develop.

**Senator CARR**—Could you give us some further information on that issue? In my experience it was not difficult—and it may be out of date, that is the reason I ask you—to actually accelerate students through a school program so that a student could be advanced a year or two years ahead. Are you saying that that is more difficult now?

**Ms Hewton**—There is some growing acceptance of the notion of acceleration, and advancing through the years is only one aspect of it. It seems to be the easier one so people are happy, if under pressure or because they understand somewhat, to let children skip a grade. The other more interesting angles of perhaps compacting the curriculum and subject acceleration is that they are fairly resource intensive and demand greater skills of the teachers, so they tend to be neglected. But, yes, it has become easier to talk about acceleration in terms of grade skipping. Lisa might be able to comment on that.

**Mrs De Leon**—Acceleration is often limited to a single grade skip and often that is not enough to cater for the child's needs. Often the attitude of the school is, 'Well, your son has already been grade skipped. Surely he is happy where he is now.' It is a token gesture and not one that really addresses the problem of the fact that he is out of sync with the position that he has in the classroom and an individual program is probably the only way that would address his needs, but it is unavailable.

**Senator CARR**—There has been the abolition of the disadvantaged schools program which was able to provide additional teaching resources to schools, the abolition of targeted assistance to gifted children in 1996, the abolition of the National Professional Development Program—it was all part of the budget cuts in 1996—and the abolition of the Schools Council. There has been a whole series of measures undertaken by this government to actually constrict the amount of resourcing going to supporting teachers in their job. You can understand perhaps why the administrative formula might be resorted to rather than having to do more in resource intensive.

**Mrs De Leon**—But the children do not understand that.

**Senator CARR**—No. this committee's job is to talk about those resourcing issues. It is not the children's job to do that, nor the parents' necessarily.

**Ms Hewton**—If you have a chronologically five-year-old with, say, a mental age of 10, what is a one-year acceleration going to do for that child?

**Mrs De Leon**—Absolutely nothing.

**CHAIR**—It is interesting that deceleration seems to be starting to get some interest. I am aware of one school, for instance, where if you are concerned about enrolling a five-year-old whose social maturity is not quite there yet you can put them in a pre prep—it would be equivalent to your pre grade 1 program for that first year—in an attempt to accelerate their maturation to then go into a standard grade 1. But there is nothing at the other end, it seems.

**Ms Hewton**—I do not think it is two ends. We have a major issue there also because socially and emotionally development is usually somewhere between the chronological age and the mental age. But if gifted five-year-olds are with normal five-year-olds, they may well appear socially immature because they do not know how to relate to children who cannot talk about the black hole, or whatever their current issue is. That is one of our extreme frustrations: what is seen as social immaturity and emotional immaturity in some of these young children—have you experienced this—

**Mrs De Leon**—I have.

**Ms Hewton**— is in fact a result of them not being placed with their mental age peers.

**Mrs De Leon**—I think it is a common trait in gifted children that they are very emotional and it has even been documented in the literature that it is an over-excitability—I think that was Debrusky—to the point where they are affected to the extreme by things that other children are not affected by, and that is perceived as being immaturity. To give an example, the class might be looking at a news article where somebody got killed. My son would get upset by that and the teacher would wonder why he was crying and say, ‘Oh, that’s because he is immature’. But it is just that he is taking that on board and dwelling deeply on that, and you are not supposed to do that when you are 5½. It is just not generally recognised that a child of that age could think on that deep a level about an issue such as that. The only explanation that is given is that he is immature.

**CHAIR**—I can understand your concern that people could be mischaracterised into those sorts of programs, but it does not deny that the programs are in place and that they are perhaps meeting an identified need that some gifted children perhaps are being misplaced into. My point was that the need for children who might be of an age to be going into prep or grade 1 but who are ahead is not catered for, whereas those who might be regarded as being behind the standard seem now to be in some places with these sorts of programs.

**Ms Hewton**—There is provision for early entry to year 1—to the first compulsory year of schooling.

**CHAIR**—I think even as your submission indicated, that is pretty much discouraged these days.

**Ms Hewton**—We do not believe it is encouraged.

**Senator CROSSIN**—Could I ask a question from a parent's point of view in terms of when you might have realised that you had a gifted child? I guess it would not have started once your child first went to school. I am interested to explore what support you might have had in your child's very early years as a baby at child-care or community care centres. We are talking here I guess about the focus on support in the school system, but let us go three or four years beyond that. I am interested to know what your experiences were there.

**Mrs De Leon**—I became aware that my child was different when he was 18 months old. When I say 'different', I mean talking in sentences and making associations between things that other children just were not doing. By the time he was two he was playing complex card games. He was just not doing things that other two-year-olds would do. If we went to a party I would have to sit and play snap with him for three hours because he was not interested in running around with the other children. When he was three he would sit for hours and draw cubes. That was fascinating to him. Other children would be running around. He just would never do the accepted milestones that other children go through. He had been through them or skipped them.

**Senator CROSSIN**—Was he in child care at that time?

**Mrs De Leon**—When he was two, I put him into a child-care centre because I felt that he was searching for social contact. Of course, he was placed with children he could not carry on a conversation with, so that did not work. He became more frustrated because he was in a room with other two-year-olds and he wanted to be in with the four- and five-year-olds and that was not allowed. I then withdrew him and tried to cater for those needs at home with excursions. I became a member of the association. When he was 3½ I enrolled him in another child-care centre and they placed him in the preschool room. That catered to his needs to a degree but even that was not enough because they were learning their alphabet and he already knew that. It was like all the problems that we are experiencing now at school but at an earlier stage because he was always ahead.

**Senator CROSSIN**—So the arguments we have heard all morning about resources in schools and programs in schools, you would say, could equally apply to child-care centres or even maternity care nurses, if that is what you have in Queensland.

**Mrs De Leon**—Most people would not be taking their children at 18 months for a clinic check-up. I think there just needs to be more public awareness and public acceptance, and that even extends to family. We have become distanced from our family because of the way our children are. They cannot accept that they are gifted and they cannot accept that my son started school earlier than he should have. They just cannot discuss that because it becomes a competition of 'your children are better than ours'. They are not accepting him for the way he is. So he does not even get support from family.

**Senator CROSSIN**—Okay.

**Ms Hewton**—It is a Zigzag pathway for families also. They may stumble on an enlightened individual in an early childhood situation who actually will support them, or parents who ring and say, 'The day care person is saying that there seems to be an extremely accelerated advancement in this child. What do I do about it?' I do think the Queensland association is the main support for parents of young children at this stage.

**Mrs Opalka**—I would just like to comment on that as well. I cannot say anything about child-care centres because we only came out here to Australia when my daughter was four. We had been living overseas before that. For half a year she attended a Montessori school when she was three. Very soon after she entered that school she was recognised as being gifted and she really thrived in that environment and really enjoyed it. When we came out here and she started preschool, she was very disappointed and she said, ‘Oh, Mummy, look they only play. It is nice but they only play’. She was disappointed that they were not concerned with letters or anything like that. It had started so successfully and she was really very, very enthusiastic about school. Basically most of the preschool year was lost time for her. In a way she could not relate socially to most of the other children because she was concerned with other issues and could not relate to their games and things they were doing.

Then she was very, very much looking forward to grade one. I still see that beaming smile, which we have even got on video for the grandparents, on her first day when she was going into grade 1. At the end of term one I said to her, ‘Where did that beaming smile go?’ She said, ‘When I started grade 1 I thought, “Finally this is going to be really difficult”, but it is not.’ It is so frustrating for a parent to see a young child who has a deep desire to learn and to achieve something always having to go back through things which she knows already. It is this constant problem of being underchallenged. The big danger in that area is if they are constantly underchallenged. She comes home and says, ‘We didn’t learn a thing today again’ or ‘We had to do the same things over and over again like we’ve done the last couple of weeks.’

I notice this in other ways. When all of a sudden there comes a challenge she is about to lose confidence in her own ability to tackle complicated tasks, because she is waiting for this all for the time and then she is getting bored and nothing is happening. Then she does not trust herself any more that she can do it; although I know she has the ability to do it. This might be the path to underachievement. I think in certain ways she is starting in that area already. That is why I think there is a big need for help for these children.

**CHAIR**—Thank you very much for your appearance.

[11.21 a.m.]

**MAHER, Mrs Lorrie, Executive Officer, Education Services, Association of Independent Schools of Queensland**

**ROSSER, Mrs Jenene Merle, Education Officer, Association of Independent Schools of Queensland**

**CHAIR**—The committee has before it your submission 24. Are there any changes or corrections you need to make to that submission?

**Mrs Maher**—Only to the second paragraph on the first page; words seem to have been eaten up by the gremlins. It shows there the last word as ‘success’ and it should be followed by ‘is extremely high’. I apologise for that.

**CHAIR**—The committee prefers all evidence to be given in public, although we will consider any request for the committee to go into private sessions. I point out that such evidence may subsequently be made public by order of the Senate. I now invite you to make a brief opening statement and we will move to questions beyond that.

**Mrs Maher**—The Association of Independent Schools represents the voices of approximately 155 independent schools across Queensland. We are not an employing authority. We are a collective which is established by the principals of the schools and the chairs of their governing bodies, boards of trustees. The membership is by subscription. Our role is one particularly of information dissemination to the schools, liaison with various government agencies and, in particular, the state government people and the Commonwealth government. We at times take on the role of lobby group for our membership. We then provide fairly extensive professional development, resource development and resource access, in-service education and implementation of particular syllabuses or government initiatives through the sector. So there is no mandate on independent schools to follow our lead. Our role is to provide for them if they require that.

In that capacity the association has been committed to support for our schools the education of gifted and talented children throughout my time with the association, which is now in its sixteenth year. Our submission to the inquiry is done as an umbrella submission, with contributions from the schools, but it is in no way replacing any individual school submissions that you may have got.

**CHAIR**—We heard earlier that the state government provides a fund of \$1million per annum. Can you inform the committee of what portion, if any, independent schools receive and how they use that funding?

**Mrs Maher**—I was interested to hear that it was suggested that \$65,000, as part of the basket nexus on that \$1 million, goes to the non-government sector. If that is the case then it certainly will get through to the schools but they will not know that it is there. It will not be visible to the schools. It is just part of a recurrent grant to the schools. So unless I know it is there, then the

schools do not know that they have actually been given a state contribution towards that purpose.

**Mrs Rosser**—But how much of that is Catholic?

**Mrs Maher**—As I said, it is non-state, so about 20 per cent of that, I would expect, would be coming through to the schools through their recurrent grant. I would have to check that up.

**Senator CARR**—The Association of Independent Schools represents the non-Catholic private sector. Is that right?

**Mrs Maher**—No. Some of the independent Catholic schools have membership of our association as well—for funded programs from the Commonwealth, in particular. Funding for those schools to participate in a targeted program will go through the Catholic commission, not through us.

**Senator CARR**—So how many private schools are there in Queensland? What percentage of the school population would be going to the schools that you represent?

**Mrs Rosser**—Number of schools or students?

**Senator CARR**—Let us start with the number of schools—because you are quite right, I asked two questions there.

**Mrs Maher**—It is about 20 per cent of the schools—of the non-state schools.

**Senator CARR**—Which is what percentage of the total number of schools in the state?

**Mrs Rosser**—There are 1,800 schools in Queensland, approximately.

**Senator CARR**—But how many non-government schools are there?

**Mrs Maher**—I think it is getting towards 500. I just did those figures last term.

**Senator CARR**—So you represent 20 per cent of that 500?

**Mrs Maher**—No, it would be more than that.

**Mrs Rosser**—There are about 155 independent schools out of approximately 1,800 schools in Queensland.

**Senator CARR**—Sure. So you represent about 155 schools; is that right?

**Mrs Maher**—Yes.

**Senator CARR**—And how many students would that involve?

**Mrs Rosser**—It is a larger number of students.

**Mrs Maher**—I think it is 65,000. But you say it is more than—

**Mrs Rosser**—The proportion of students is greater than the proportion of schools to the total.

**Senator CARR**—Yes. But you do not represent the Catholic Education Commission, do you?

**Mrs Maher**—No.

**Senator CARR**—Which is 80 per cent of the non-government sector?

**Mrs Maher**—Approximately. It could be higher, but I did not bring those figures with me.

**Senator CARR**—But that is roughly consistent with the national pattern.

**Mrs Maher**—That is right.

**Senator CARR**—Thank you for that. How much money do you get from the state government for special education?

**Mrs Maher**—Is that for students with disabilities?

**Senator CARR**—Special education is more generally defined as a student with disabilities, but some of them say it is also for gifted students.

**Mrs Maher**—In Queensland, there is a special state grant that goes through the Catholic Education Commission and the Association of Independent Schools. That is only in respect of the students ascertained of educational support need in distinct impairment areas at level 5 or level 6, and that is in line with the Commonwealth.

**Senator CARR**—So you are saying that none of that money is for gifted children?

**Mrs Maher**—No. It is tied to that purpose—impairment education.

**Senator CARR**—All students with learning disabilities?

**Mrs Maher**—No, not learning disabilities—impairment education.

**Senator CARR**—So physical disabilities?

**Mrs Maher**—Physical, vision, hearing, social, emotional, intellectual impairment and speech language impairment.

**Senator CARR**—We have heard evidence that that could include students who are profoundly gifted.

**Mrs Maher**—Yes.

**Senator CARR**—But we do not know how many of those might be in that category.

**Mrs Maher**—No. Part of their ascertained educational support need is an individual education program that is established by the schools and the committees in schools, which include parents. So some of those IEPs would be reflecting a giftedness of the children.

**Senator CARR**—So we are not actually clear how much money is going to gifted children?

**Mrs Maher**—None of that is particularly targeting giftedness.

**Senator CARR**—We do not know what is giftedness, so how do we know what the target is?

**Mrs Maher**—For every student who is ascertained with an impairment level of low incidence that requires an educational support in Queensland, of the state funds that come to the association, we last year allocated \$2,000 per student to the school to support those.

**Senator CARR**—\$2,000 per student.

**Mrs Maher**—That is for their education.

**Senator CARR**—How many teachers trained with specialist skills for the teaching of gifted are employed by independent schools?

**Mrs Maher**—To my understanding, none are employed under that category. There are special needs support teachers who often have university qualifications, particularly postgraduate, in that area. But that is not differentiated at our level.

**Senator CARR**—There are very few teachers employed with special education qualifications, are there?

**Mrs Maher**—No. There would be at least one in most schools which are in receipt of special education money. But the special education money in Queensland, particularly in independent schools, is seen to be from the disability or impairment side rather than the giftedness side.

**Senator CARR**—Could you tell me how many teachers are employed in independent schools?

**Mrs Maher**—No, we do not employ them.

**Senator CARR**—I understand you do not. But as an education officer, presumably you would have an idea of how many are employed.

**Mrs Maher**—I am the Executive Officer of Education Services, Senator. I would get that if you ask me that. I would go to the—

**Senator CARR**—To be absolutely blunt with you, what sort of priority do managers of schools that you represent actually devote to this particular issue?

**Mrs Maher**—This morning I opened a full professional development day for the contact teachers or specialist teachers for gifted and talented students in our sector. We had to contain that professional development day to 30 teachers for primary and 30 teachers for secondary because it was very much an interactive workshop for each of the two levels. We had a waiting list from our sector of over 50 teachers on each of those two workshops, and we were trying to include some state schoolteachers.

**Senator CARR**—So clearly there is a demand for professional development in this area, but it does not take me very far to the answer to my question.

**Mrs Maher**—These teachers are employed by the schools to provide for the students with special needs, which is inclusive of the gifted and talented.

**Senator CARR**—Could you help the committee by providing this information on the number of teachers who are employed specifically for this area?

**Mrs Maher**—Definitely. Yes, I will do the very best I can.

**Senator CARR**—If you could provide how many of the total number of teachers are employed in that area, that would be very helpful. We have heard some advice this morning which said that the performance of the public education system was less than ideal in regard to teaching of students with special needs, particularly in regard to allocated giftedness. Also, it was said to us that the performance of the independent sector was equally very poor. Would you like to respond to that proposition? Are you as good or as bad as the public system?

**Mrs Maher**—I would believe, Senator, that we are more focused in the independent sector. So you would find evidence—of which I have some supplementary evidence for you if you are wishing to look at it—

**Senator CARR**—I would appreciate that. We are always interested to see evidence.

**Mrs Maher**—But they do not work alone. Wherever possible we work across sectors. I heard Judith Hewton explain the Unicorn program to you. We are still extending that in our sector even though the other two sectors have pulled out. So you asked a question about how I would see it. I see it as a very high commitment in the independent sector. I think it is translated in different ways in individual schools, depending on their own background affiliation. I would be surprised at someone thinking that it is not given due—

**Senator CARR**—I wonder whether the committee secretariat can send across to you the particulars of the *Hansard* where these matters were referred to. We would look forward to your response on those matters.

**Mrs Maher**—I would be very happy to respond.

**Senator CARR**—It has clearly been put to us by expert opinion in these matters that the performance across schools in both the public and the private sector in this state is not up to scratch. Obviously we will ask representatives of the public sector in a moment to respond to that criticism, so I thought we would give you the opportunity as well. There is obviously a range of philosophical issues which we can read about in your submission, but I am particularly interested in how you see that the Commonwealth might be able to improve current circumstances. Do you believe the Commonwealth has a role in this area?

**Mrs Maher**—I certainly do in the same way as other targeted programs have been devised and implemented through DETYA in that they give at the highest national level a credence to the devotion of time within the schools and within the staff deployment for young people who are identified as gifted and talented. If there were to be a program initiated as with any other Commonwealth one, you do not expect it to be everlasting, but it gives the ability to schools and sectors to really value and celebrate what is going on and to work towards sustainability within these sectors. So that sort of funding and the creation of such a program do make a huge difference in the schools.

**Senator CARR**—The National Equity Program was abolished in 1996. Did you have cause to draw upon that program?

**Mrs Maher**—We did. Then within that—in the students at risk element of the NEPS funding, which came out of the Disadvantaged Schools Program—we actually had a project running by request from the schools for underachieving students, particularly for identifying those who were apparently underachieving because they were gifted.

**Senator CARR**—How much money did you draw upon?

**Mrs Maher**—I would have those records at work. From memory, it was the salary of the coordinator and the person with the background qualifications, then small amounts of funding to the schools that participated. So I think, quantifiably, over two years we probably would have put about \$140,000 towards that.

**Senator CARR**—What has the loss of that program meant to you in terms of the provision of services?

**Mrs Maher**—AISQ itself, by charging a fee for service to the schools, has maintained many of those things—some of which Senator Collins is looking at now. The green booklet Senator Collins has in her hand represents a program that we have sustained across the sectors for Days of Excellence. There are 54 activities listed in there from individual schools, which the schools are supporting and paying for, and it covers 21 schools. But we are coordinating that from within our own AISQ resources.

**Senator CARR**—So did the schools make up the money or did individual parents?

**Mrs Maher**—Parents have paid to the schools, and the schools are prioritising that money towards gifted and talented support.

**CHAIR**—Is this just the independent systems?

**Mrs Maher**—No, there are usually state and Catholic schools within that as well. It has come out of what Senator Carr asked me—from the small amount of money that was injected initially.

**Senator CARR**—So the money that used to be provided by the Commonwealth is now being made up by the schools—is that what you are saying?

**Mrs Rosser**—And through AISQ.

**Senator CARR**—What other things would you like to see the Commonwealth do to improve the situation? I presume that you would like that program restored.

**Mrs Maher**—Yes.

**Senator CARR**—What other initiatives do you think the Commonwealth—

**Mrs Maher**—I believe it is timely for further research to support the earlier reports that have come through with the Commonwealth's work, because we have a changing situation. We have the outcomes based education thrust which, if implemented carefully, will help to provide for these young people. So I suppose there is a need for support, rather than just in literacy and numeracy, both across the KLAs and for outcomes based education.

**Senator CARR**—So targeted financial assistance and research funding. What about professional development? Do you think there is a role in that area?

**Mrs Maher**—I think that would be part of the targeted assistance, but I think it is critical.

**Senator CARR**—What about a distinct program for professional development? The National Professional Development Program, of course, was abolished as well.

**Mrs Maher**—Yes.

**Senator CARR**—Has the abolition of that program had a consequence for you?

**Mrs Maher**—It has, yes. Because of the nature of the sector, if it is important to the schools, the association itself will respond in some way to continue to provide those things. So that with the abolishment of the National Professional Development Program, it was probably the earlier one which terminated at the end of 1985 that had a bigger effect.

**Senator CARR**—Are there any other initiatives you think the Commonwealth ought be undertaking?

**Mrs Maher**—Probably not from our point of view, I would not think, no. It is just that there is such a great deal of energy and there are wonderful things going on within schools across the country, and they need the support of the Commonwealth to be able to see their work as valued and continue it.

**Senator CARR**—So it needs national leadership?

**Mrs Maher**—Yes.

**CHAIR**—Thank you for your attendance today.

**Mrs Maher**—Thank you.

[11.45 a.m.]

**DIESSEL, Ms Jacquelyn Jo, Director, Teaching and Learning, Education Queensland**

**YATES, Mr Kendall James, Acting Manager, Learning, Teaching, Literacy and Numeracy Unit, Education Queensland**

**CHAIR**—Welcome. The committee has before it submission No. 31. Are there any changes or corrections you need to make to that submission?

**Ms Diessel**—Yes, I do. I have brought with me today the signed off copy of our submission from the Minister for Education. I think you have an electronic version of an early draft that we sent up to the minister. We have been in caretaker mode, as you know, and this week she signed off on the submission. I have brought that with me, with quite a number of attachments. The official letter plus copies for you are here.

**CHAIR**—So the electronic version was an earlier draft?

**Ms Diessel**—Yes.

**CHAIR**—Are there substantial areas of change you need to highlight?

**Ms Diessel**—No, there are not. There are just a couple of additions to it.

**CHAIR**—The committee prefers all evidence to be given in public, although we will consider any requests to go in camera. However, I point out that such evidence may subsequently be made public by an order of the Senate. I now invite you to make a brief opening statement and perhaps then you can address the additions that you have made to the draft that has been circulated.

**Ms Diessel**—Education Queensland makes universal provision for some 469,000 students in government schools across Queensland. The department has a charter to make provision for the full range of students. The delivery occurs across a geographically diverse state through 1,282 state schools, which is a mix of primary, special, secondary schools and schools of distance education. Following extensive consultations in 2000, Education Queensland released a document called *Queensland State Education—2010*. There is a copy attached to your submission. This sets the direction for our state schools in the coming decade.

The strategy recognises that the challenges faced by us come from a changing external environment and from the current approaches to learning and management. Through a number of objectives and strategies it provides some guidance to change, specifically as it relates to gifted and talented education. Through one of the objectives it talks about schools providing a safe, tolerant and disciplined environment that allows all students the opportunity to learn. It calls for a strategy of ‘providing special assistance and targeted programs to gifted and talented students’. That is on page 16 of that document. I believe that provides us with a springboard for

the current review that we are doing into gifted and talented education, to look where we need to position ourselves for the future so that we can provide quality education and outcomes for all of our students.

Provision in the area of gifted and talented education in Queensland state schools has been largely influenced by emerging research in the area, changing practice at the school level in response to the needs of students and parent pressures, as well as changes in education generally. The submission outlines the types of provision and organisational structures that are used by our state schools, as well referring to our policy around the area of gifted and talented. I would like to note that over the past decade, like other states and territories and following international trends, Education Queensland has moved to a model of school based management, recognising the need to build local capacity and responsiveness within a system policy framework. Over this period we have made a concerted effort to devolve functions and decision making to the school level, where appropriate, and hence maximise funds to the school level. Education Queensland has made a strategic decision to put as much funding out to schools as possible. Hence, there are no large centralised pools for systemic projects.

Education Queensland has had since the mid-1980s a range of gifted and talented initiatives over and above the school based activities. The Commonwealth and state have funded the initiatives, and over the last four to five years we have had a strategic initiative around gifted and talented students—of which \$935,000 has been allocated annually to activities under that. If I can just give you some of the activities and initiatives in the area, first of all we have the 1993 policy statement for gifted and talented education, and we have included that in your attachments. There is also a guide on teaching practices for the education of gifted students, which was produced for use by the schools, and that has been attached for you as well.

Over the years we have also attempted to develop a multifaceted approach to providing gifted and talented education, which has included things such as learning and development opportunities for teachers, and the development of materials and educational programs for students with gifts and talents. Currently we have seven learning and development centres for the gifted and talented, providing outreach learning and development activities to other schools through face to face and online activities, as well as supporting intensively a small number of schools in their area in developing whole school approaches to gifted and talented.

We have a residential program for students in the area of information technology. We have looked to trial a program internationally in partnership with the UK, the United States and France, et cetera, on advanced extension awards this year, or at the end of last year, whereby senior students may obtain internationally benchmarked recognition of achievement in areas such as English, science, chemistry and geography. Through our strategic initiatives we also run, and have run, a range of programs supporting and showcasing excellence for our students. For instance, we have programs in music. We have a musically outstanding student program, which is a residential program, bringing very gifted or talented young musicians to a residential program. We have the minister's awards for art. We have a set of awards and medals called the T.J. Ryan awards and medals. Each year we recognise 10 state and non-state school leavers who have shown academic excellence in their end of year results as well as leadership capacity. Yesterday, those 10 people were awarded their medals and are provided a scholarship of \$2,000 each year for five years to participate in their university courses.

**CHAIR**—Could you expand on how the \$1 million per annum is allocated? How is it allocated across the system?

**Ms Diessel**—I want to reiterate that we did make a strategic decision to put as much funding out to schools as possible. So first of all our policy aim would be that all schools would provide for all students, including those who were gifted and talented. To that, we have policy that we set the expectations for schools and the accountabilities for principals, and we also would run some strategic activities to help schools to engage with the area of gifted and talented. So, over the years, we have run a number of activities under that \$1 million. At the commencement of the program, there was some funding that was put to running a PR campaign to raise the awareness of schools and the community around the area of gifted and talented.

We also established eight focus schools made over a couple of years as centres of research, visitation and training to develop models of whole school initiatives or whole school programs in gifted education. We also had provided a range of learning and development activities to teachers. We have run a number of vacation schools as well, and we have also provided some seed funding to a range of small projects in schools to start their work around the area of gifted and talented.

**CHAIR**—So the seed funding would have been of what nature? What sorts of programs would that include?

**Ms Diessel**—The types of programs could include learning and development activities. The school may have participated or wanted somebody to work with their teachers in the area of gifted and talented.

**CHAIR**—So professional development.

**Ms Diessel**—Professional development. It could have been time for planning in the school to introduce a program to look at that planning for the needs of gifted students in that school.

**Senator CARR**—We have taken evidence today which has suggested that the record of performance in this area is not up to speed. I was wondering whether you would be prepared to take on notice the details of those complaints and give us a response to them in terms of the evidence that has been presented this morning.

**Ms Diessel**—I am happy to take that on notice and take that back with consideration by—

**Senator CARR**—Thank you. I think it is important for the committee to get your views on those matters. In essence with the program that you run, particularly since it is localised, you are saying you want maximum school autonomy and that the implications of that are that, where needs are not recognised by a local school community, students may well miss out. That is the thrust, I think, of the criticism that has been put to us. So I am interested to know what mechanisms you have to ascertain whether or not students are missing out within the present policy framework.

**Mrs Diessel**—I am happy to respond to that now if you want.

**Senator CARR**—Yes, if you could, please.

**Mrs Diessel**—We could also provide you with some further information should you want. As I said, we have a policy that was established in 1993 outlining the definition of what we believe are gifted and talented students, and it also clearly outlines the expectations that we have of school principals. It is referred to on page 4 of our submission. It requires that principals assist teachers to incorporate gifted education into the curriculum, including the needs of gifted and talented students in school planning and review processes, for developing strategies for the identification of gifted students and for accompanying curriculum modification using extension, acceleration and enrichment.

At our local level, we have 35 districts across the state. Each one of those districts has a district director who has responsibility to mentor, coach and work with schools in the implementation of the systemic policy framework for Education Queensland. So it would be the responsibility between the principal and the district director around the conversations they had about what they are providing for young students in that school. Should there be a complaint that a parent may raise in relation to the education of their particular child, we do believe in the first instance that they should negotiate and work with the principal on that matter but, should that not be resolved, they have the mechanism to work through it with the district director of that district.

**Senator CARR**—Let us have a look at your answers in detail in terms of how many complaints there have been and what, in your judgment, have been the responses. In essence, though, the complaint has been that students go unrecognised and that schools do not necessarily appreciate the demands for these particular children. I presume that there will be a number of people who will make an assertion that their children are gifted, which may not necessarily be borne out in any objective assessment. Do you undertake any diagnostic assessment of students?

**Mrs Diessel**—We do not have one system that would be used by Education Queensland to identify students who are gifted and talented. Our submission does refer on page 8 to a range of mechanisms that we would use within schools. It does talk about the types of identification procedures. We have resisted adopting one particular process for the identification of young gifted students, based on practice and also from what we believe research was telling us. But over the time we have had a shift in the types of identification processes. The focus schools that we have had over the last three years have been working in that area of identification and I believe that there is a wealth of knowledge that they would have to share with other schools around those.

**Senator CARR**—Could I turn to the issue of the Commonwealth's role, which is obviously a matter that is of immediate concern to this committee. You say in your submission that:

The Commonwealth does not appear to have a current role in gifted and talented education.

Why do you say that?

**Mrs Diessel**—Mainly because there has not been, I understand, since the mid-1990s any funding that has been provided to the states around the area of gifted education. If I also look

across the forums at national levels between the Commonwealth and the state, the area of gifted and talented education is not one that has been raised by the Commonwealth as a high priority area.

**Senator CARR**—So, by MCEETYA—

**Mrs Diessel**—At MCEETYA, at the SESCEO meetings of chief executive officers, et cetera.

**Senator CARR**—So what impact, for instance, has the abolition of the National Professional Development Program had?

**Mrs Diessel**—Is that the gifted and talented program you are referring to?

**Senator CARR**—It is the general program for the professional development of teaching and the abolition of that program by the Commonwealth. Do you think that has had an impact on the capacity of the education systems across this country to respond to specific needs?

**Mrs Diessel**—I would refer to the fact that just recently the Commonwealth and the states have introduced the Quality Teaching Program, which provides funding support to teacher renewal opportunities, particularly for those teachers who have been in the work force for over 10 years. There is a range of priority areas that that Quality Teaching Program has identified, such as literacy and numeracy, and VET in schools, just to name two.

**Senator CARR**—I do not recall seeing gifted and talented as being much the criteria.

**Mrs Diessel**—No, it is not, and I think that that could be an area that again could be supported by the Commonwealth. But under that program one of the things that we have been keen to do is to make sure that it actually gets to the individual school teachers. We have run a process whereby there is an electronic two-page form that is very easy for teachers to fill out and to send to us about the types of activities that they want to do under that program, or professional development. In a very preliminary look—actually it was a telephone call to the person who is coordinating that program—we have already received one or two requests from teachers asking for support in gifted and talented.

**Senator CARR**—That is a new program, but the NPD program actually collapsed in 1996. There have been a number of years when there has been no money at all provided. My recollection was the Quality Teaching Program contained a much smaller amount of money than the old NPD program, so there is actually a considerable shortfall. It has to be welcomed I suppose that there has been some acknowledgment of it. How much money comes from the Commonwealth for that particular professional development program now?

**Mrs Diessel**—For the Quality Teaching Program?

**Senator CARR**—Yes.

**Mrs Diessel**—I have not got those figures with me but we can provide that to you.

**Senator CARR**—Thank you very much. What other actions do you think the Commonwealth could take to improve the situation for teachers and for students?

**Mrs Diessel**—Our submission talks about three areas, particularly around a leadership role on page 10 of the submission. The whole area of raising the awareness of the public and of educators in general in relation to gifted and talented, as well as fostering a sharing of information at that national level, would be quite appropriate for the Commonwealth. Also, there is a research role, particularly in the areas where you might have intersecting disadvantage from various at-risk factors for young students; for instance, we could identify underachievement as well as low socioeconomic factors for a particular gender—boy or girl—someone from a Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander background, et cetera. They are all factors that could contribute to educational disadvantage. It is in that area and the connection with gifted and talented that we believe research would be welcomed.

**Senator CARR**—And you refer also to the extension of the Quality Teachers Program.

**Mrs Diessel**—Yes.

**Senator CARR**—They are the three that stand out. What about a targeted equity program such as the old National Equity Program—the gifted and talented component of the NEPS program? Was there any value in that program?

**Mrs Diessel**—I believe that there was value of the program in that it did create very innovative curriculum designs in a number of our project schools. The types of curriculum models that we have spoken about in our submission were funded through that and sprang from that funding, and they have been used also in our following initiatives funded by the state.

**Senator CARR**—So you think there is a role for Commonwealth initiatives in terms of curriculum development that could be expanded upon?

**Mrs Diessel**—Depending upon what you mean by curriculum development, but as for practice in schools, yes. In particular, good model practice and sharing of that nationally would be beneficial.

**Senator CARR**—Do you think the Curriculum Corporation could have a role there?

**Mrs Diessel**—It could play a particular role. I think there is a range of mechanisms that the SESCEO group, the chief executive officers group, and MCEETYA have looked at and tried to share. I think it could be a combination of the curriculum incorporation and also states and territories because there is a range of good initiatives that we believe we have that we could share.

**Senator CARR**—What about the actual provision of additional teaching resources or special education resources, particularly for those teachers with the qualifications in the gifted and talented area? Do you think there is a role there?

**Mrs Diessel**—For the Commonwealth?

**Senator CARR**—For the Commonwealth, in terms of supplementary assistance.

**Mrs Diessel**—I think it goes back to the learning and development opportunities that we provide for teachers. We believe that we have gone for an approach that says that it is a whole of school approach to gifted and talented and it is in the classroom of every teacher that we need to be able to effect some provision for students who are gifted and talented. It is that support for those teachers in the area of gifted and talented and how you actually embrace it in the classroom for the wide range of students.

**Senator CARR**—That might be the case and I understand the policy framework you are working under. But my experience in a number of places suggests to me that there has been a reduction in the level of ancillary support provided to schools. The old psych and guidance branches that used to be in existence and the special education divisions of departments across the country seem to have been wound back. So the capacity of the state department to actually come in and assist a school that is having learning difficulties with particular groups of students is not necessarily as strong as it used to be. Would you agree with that?

**Mrs Diessel**—No.

**Senator CARR**—Why not?

**Mrs Diessel**—I would say that we have had a changing face in the way in which we have our structures around particular special areas such as the guidance areas, et cetera. However, we have retained in Queensland at the local level a range of support mechanisms for schools to use in that area—for instance, our guidance officers and senior guidance officers. We also have a range of support for students with significant impairments and disabilities through things such as advisory visiting teachers and specialist teachers, support through grants, support through equipment and those sorts of things. I believe it is there. What we have potentially created also within our structures is their being embedded in mainstream education. In embedding that in mainstream education, whilst there could be potential capacity to lose the visibility, it has also given us strength because one of the greatest things that we always seem to be is an add-on. I do not believe that it should be an add-on; it has to be integral. That is hard to do. I am not saying that I believe that we have got it right in every aspect, but we have been able to effect quite a bit of change from being inside rather than outside.

**Senator CARR**—I think Queensland in many ways has a number of advantages in its education system that other states do not enjoy. Can I just say to you that this trend towards localisation of school autonomy may well have consequences that are not necessarily articulated through the position papers and policy papers of state authorities. One of them is that, if you allocate resources to schools, like the squeaky wheel it will be the one that makes the most noise that gets the oil. Is it possible that allocation of resources at a local level will not necessarily be on the basis of which they have in fact been allocated and that they will be used within the school as the school sees its most pressing needs?

**Mrs Diessel**—I think what is important is getting the policy frameworks right and the accountability frameworks right for schools. To that we provide resources. We provide the flexibility for schools to meet those needs through being able to allocate their resources in the way they need to. But I believe what we need to do is get our accountability frameworks right,

and that is what we have been trying to do over the last few years through our school based planning and accountability mechanism.

**Senator CARR**—And you are satisfied those accountability mechanisms actually tell you what is going on in the schools?

**Mrs Diessel**—From a system point of view?

**Senator CARR**—Yes.

**Mrs Diessel**—I think that is one of the causes we are still working with: what do we need to collect systemically and what do we need to have at the local level? It is between the local level and the local community that accountability needs to occur. So what it is that the school needs to account to their parents, to their community and to the system is still an area that we have been working on. The whole area, can I just say from my other perspective in teaching and learning, is about what we collect systemically in relation to curriculum outcomes for students. Why should we collect it at state level? Or is it a conversation that should really be occurring between the teachers, the parents and the school about what are the outcomes that we have delivered in maths, science, literacy and numeracy, because that is where the change has got to occur? Then we should put around that the district director structures to support schools in that.

**Senator CARR**—Can I just say to you, speaking as a parent, that it sounds terrific but it is often difficult to know how resources can be allocated to children I know need assistance because the resources are not there; they have been used in other areas. The system may well say that it provides X amount of material—that is, staff, infrastructure, et cetera—but the principal and the staff will determine the allocations needed for a particular area.

**Mrs Diessel**—The parents and the community should be involved in that as well.

**Senator CARR**—Yes, I know about that; like school councils.

**Senator CROSSIN**—There still seems to be in my mind a disparity between your documents here and what you are saying today happens. You have got policies and directors who are responsible for making sure the principals know about those policies. But we hear about kids who are starting school and they are intelligent enough to play the game. So instead of the advanced drawings there are blobs of paint on the paper and they are counting slowly when they can actually do sums in multiples of 10. There is a reluctance by the school to actually cater for these children individually. So on the one hand we hear these sorts of stories today, but you seem to have a policy that is telling us that that should not be happening. Why will I leave today still thinking there is a disparity between the two?

**Mrs Diessel**—What I am trying to say is that it should not happen. I would not necessarily say that it is not happening in all schools. Perhaps it does happen. But what I believe we have to do is put those mechanisms in place that ensure the capacity of schools to engage with it, and that is what our focus has been.

**Senator CROSSIN**—What mechanisms are there in place to help schools, for example, come to terms with accelerating children in classes? If you have a very bright six-year-old who

is reading at the capacity of a 10-year-old, obviously that jump in two or three years of schooling is not beneficial for that child in terms of their even physical interaction with kids who are 10 years old. What does the department do in making schools aware and supporting them in terms of individual programs?

**Mrs Diessel**—I think we can do a range of things in the provision of types of materials and resources that we can provide, particularly online. We have spent a lot of money in the last few years in connecting our schools to a system that will allow us to provide quality resources to schools or for schools to access that. Also we have been attempting to work through a range of learning and development opportunities for teachers. In the area of gifted and talented, for instance, we have attempted to run over the past few years some vocation schools for teachers.

The whole notion around what we call learning and development centres in the area of gifted and talented is an attempt to actually set up localised learning, whereby it is not what I call the ‘sheep dip’ treatment of teachers but whereby you come to a one-off program, listen to the expert and then go back and try to translate it into practice. It is actually about having it happen in the school, where they can deliver that professional development. Teachers and other schools can be mentored into the program and can come and see what it is about, and the coordinators from those learning and development centres can work with other schools in that. We have not got great coverage across the state at this stage, but that is the aim of what we are trying to do through those centres.

**Senator CROSSIN**—Finally, what liaison is there between the teacher education faculties of universities in Queensland with the department of education in terms of you letting the faculty of education know about your policies and encouraging more undergraduate units in terms of gifted and talented? Where is the liaison between the practice and the training?

**Mrs Diessel**—There are a number of things. First of all, it is my understanding that, through the Board of Teacher Registration guidelines for registration, universities undertaking to develop particular courses of study must include students with special needs components, particularly those students who are gifted and talented. So there is that there. I understand also that the deans of the various universities have ongoing consultation and input through that Board of Teacher Registration. We would regularly have meetings with the various deans on particular strategic initiatives. For instance, last year we did a major review in the area of literacy. The whole area of preservice training, particularly in the area of reading, was a major issue. We will run a number of forums with universities about what our policies are and what we believe needs to be done for preservice training.

**Mr Yates**—There are seven centres for learning and development, which Jo has mentioned. Two of those have indicated that one of their focuses this year will be on establishing links at the local level with universities.

**Mrs Diessel**—It is getting those practicum sites going that is very important, and those linkages going at that local level.

**CHAIR**—Ms Diessel, is the department currently conducting research into the provision of gifted education?

**Mrs Diessel**—No.

**CHAIR**—Not that you are aware of?

**Mrs Diessel**—No, not that I am aware of.

**Senator CARR**—Did you say you are having a review?

**Mrs Diessel**—We are having a review.

**CHAIR**—Who is conducting that review?

**Mrs Diessel**—Mr Ken Imison has been contracted by Education Queensland to undertake the review for us.

**CHAIR**—Where is he based?

**Mrs Diessel**—He is a consultant in the area of gifted education and he comes from Toowoomba. He was chair of our Senior Secondary School Studies Board for many years.

**CHAIR**—When are you anticipating the results of that review?

**Mrs Diessel**—That review is to go to the minister by the end of May.

**CHAIR**—That will be before we report, so could I ask that once that has been cleared through the minister you make that available for the committee also?

**Mrs Diessel**—I would have to refer that to the minister for her consideration.

**CHAIR**—I appreciate that.

**Senator CARR**—What we would be interested in particularly is the government's response to the review. Anyone can have a range of opinions, but it would be interesting to see what the government's response is to the review.

**Mrs Diessel**—As I said, I could refer that to the minister for her consideration.

**CHAIR**—That is what I said: if it is cleared through the minister, could you make it available to the committee?

**Mrs Diessel**—Yes.

**CHAIR**—Thank you for your appearance today.

**Committee adjourned at 12.26 p.m.**