
SUMMARY AND RECOMMENDATIONS

CHAPTER 1 - OVERVIEW

1. In evidence all types of interest groups agreed that there is a problem with education of gifted children. These children have special needs in the education system; for many their needs are not being met; and many suffer underachievement, boredom, frustration and psychological distress as a result.
2. Submissions differed mainly in their preferred solutions – in particular, over whether the main focus of intervention should be in the mainstream comprehensive classroom, or in ability grouped settings.
3. All agreed that better teacher training and better curriculum support are essential to ensure that that teachers are able to differentiate the curriculum for gifted children.
4. Gifted children are found in all socio-economic and ethnic groups. Failing to attend to the special needs of gifted children is most detrimental to underprivileged children, because they are least likely to have other supports outside the school.

CHAPTER 2 -DEFINING THE PROBLEM

5. There is a duty to help all children achieve their potential. The common belief that the gifted do not need special help because they will succeed anyway is contradicted by many studies of underachievement and demotivation among gifted children.
6. There is a concern that emphasis on minimum standards and benchmarks in key policy documents such as the Adelaide Declaration on National Goals for Schooling may discourage paying due attention to the needs of the gifted. The Committee agrees with the suggestion that the national reporting framework should be expanded to focus on not only minimum benchmarks but also high aspirations.

Recommendation 1 (paragraph 2.31)

MCEETYA should expand the national reporting framework for school education to focus on not only minimum benchmarks but also high achievement targets for gifted children.

7. In defining ‘gifted’, the practical focus should be on fields of endeavour relevant to planning educational interventions. In view of the special needs mentioned in submissions, the Committee suggests a focus on ‘high intellectual or creative ability’.
8. Negative attitudes and mistaken beliefs about gifted children appear to be widespread. There is a need for research into the reasons for negative attitudes.

Recommendation 2 (paragraph 2.86)

MCEETYA should commission research into the reasons for negative attitudes to high intellectual ability.

9. Special needs (giftedness) should be seen in the same light as special needs (intellectual disabilities) or special needs (physical disabilities). Policy documents should make this clear.

Recommendation 3 (paragraph 2.90)

Peak education policy documents such as the Adelaide Declaration or State/Territory equivalents, where they refer to special needs or individual differences, should make it clear that ‘special needs’ includes giftedness.

CHAPTER 3 - BETTER SCHOOLING FOR GIFTED CHILDREN

10. Teachers need to be trained to identify gifted children. Untrained teachers are more likely to identify as gifted children of the dominant culture and less likely to notice giftedness among minority or underprivileged groups.

11. This training should pay particular attention to the need to identify gifted children who have disadvantages such as low socio-economic status, rural isolation, physical disability or Indigenous background.

Recommendation 4 (paragraph 3.38)

Training for teachers to identify giftedness should pay particular attention to the need to identify gifted children who have disadvantages such as low socio-economic status, rural isolation, physical disability or Indigenous background.

12. The curriculum needs to be differentiated to suit the different learning needs of gifted children. Ad hoc enrichment activities, or enrichment that is suitable for the whole class, are insufficient. In this regard, submissions noted difficulties of inadequate central or regional curriculum support. Problems are exacerbated by the trend of devolution of responsibility to schools. The Committee recommends that MCEETYA should develop a strategy setting out goals for differentiating the curriculum for the gifted.

Recommendation 5 (paragraph 3.67)

MCEETYA should develop a strategy setting out goals for differentiating the curriculum for the gifted.

13. There is overwhelming research evidence that appropriate acceleration of gifted students who are socially and emotionally ready usually has highly advantageous outcomes. However willingness to use acceleration varies considerably from state to

state. The Committee recommends that MCEETYA should develop a more consistent policy encouraging suitable acceleration.

Recommendation 6 (paragraph 3.94)

The Commonwealth should propose that MCEETYA develop a consistent policy encouraging suitable acceleration for the gifted.

14. Ability grouping for the gifted is controversial. Detractors refer chiefly to problems of socialisation. Supporters refer to strong research evidence of improved educational outcomes for the grouped children, and deny that there are significant problems of socialisation. In considering this debate it should be stressed that

- ability grouping of the gifted is very different from streaming the entire year group. General streaming is now widely regarded as educationally unsound, and no submissions advocated it.
- ability grouping of the gifted within comprehensive schools raises different issues from fully selective schools.

15. In the Committee's view there is considerable educational justification for ability grouping for the gifted.

Recommendation 7 (paragraph 3.110)

MCEETYA should develop a consistent policy exploring the options for ability grouping and supporting ability grouping as a way of meeting the needs of the gifted, whether in selective or comprehensive schools.

16. Fully selective schooling is controversial. Issues relating to fully selective schools, and those relating to groupings within comprehensive schools, should be argued separately on their merits. The Committee recommends that the Commonwealth should propose to MCEETYA that states with selective schools or classes should research the effects of selective schooling, including comparison of the fully selective model and the 'focus class' model (a selective high ability group within an otherwise comprehensive school).

Recommendation 8 (paragraph 3.113)

The Commonwealth should propose to MCEETYA that states with selective schools or classes should research the effects and outcomes of selective schooling.

17. It is essential that policies should be backed up by the necessary resources.

Recommendation 9 (paragraph 3.121)

Policies on gifted education should include discussion of the resource implications and the sourcing of the necessary resources.

18. Adequate provision for gifted children in the public education system is essential so that provisions will be accessible to lower socio-economic groups. This applies both generally and in relation to specialist schools or centres of excellence such as performing arts schools. All children should have access to a broad curriculum including humanities and arts as well as more vocational subjects. The Committee recommends that MCEETYA should investigate the options for wider provision of centres of excellence in the public school system.

Recommendation 10 (paragraph 3.135)

MCEETYA should investigate the options for wider provision of centres of excellence in the public school system.

19. The approach of universities to early entry for gifted students varies. The Committee believes that this is a suitable matter for national co-ordination.

Recommendation 11 (paragraph 3.145)

The Australian Vice-Chancellors' Committee, in consultation with school education authorities, should develop a policy providing more flexible university entry and study options for gifted students.

CHAPTER 4 - TRAINING TEACHERS TO HANDLE GIFTED CHILDREN

20. All submissions agreed that teachers are not being adequately trained to handle gifted children, and better teacher training is essential. The teaching skills needed to handle gifted children can benefit all children.

21. Arguably the profile of education of gifted children in university education faculties needs to be raised. However the Commonwealth does not involve itself in the detail of university courses. The Committee does not think it is appropriate to recommend that the Commonwealth should attempt to mandate gifted education units directly. State employing authorities are primarily responsible for ensuring that newly graduated teachers have suitable qualifications. The Committee recommends that the Commonwealth should propose to MCEETYA that State and Territory authorities should require newly graduated teachers to have a unit on the special needs of gifted children in their degrees.

Recommendation 14 (paragraph 4.67)

The Commonwealth should propose to MCEETYA that State and Territory education authorities should require, as a condition of employment, that newly graduated teachers have at least a semester unit on the special needs of gifted children in their degrees. This should include training in identification of gifted children and the pedagogy of teaching them.

22. The Committee thinks that the effects of postgraduate deregulation on gifted education studies is worth further investigation.

Recommendation 12 (paragraph 4.46)

The Department of Education, Training and Youth Affairs (DETYA) should investigate and report on the profile of postgraduate studies in gifted education over the last five years, in particular whether postgraduate funding policies have had detrimental effects on participation in such studies. DETYA should monitor the effect of the new Postgraduate Education Loan Scheme in this regard.

23. In any case, in view of the special needs mentioned in this inquiry the Committee thinks it is reasonable that the Commonwealth should provide targeted places to encourage postgraduate studies in gifted education.

Recommendation 13 (paragraph 4.47)

The Commonwealth should fund targeted postgraduate places for gifted education studies.

24. Inservice professional development for teachers is important because of the aging demographic profile of the service. Submissions raised various problems to do with professional development in relation to gifted education. The Commonwealth assists professional development through the Quality Teacher Programme. In view of the special needs mentioned in this report the Committee thinks it reasonable that issues to do with giftedness should be a priority.

Recommendation 15 (paragraph 4.72)

The Commonwealth should specify professional development on issues to do with giftedness as a priority in the Quality Teacher Programme.

25. In the Committee's view there should be a special responsibility to ensure that teachers in selective classes or selective schools are suitably trained.

Recommendation 16 (paragraph 4.73)

The Commonwealth should propose to MCEETYA that State and Territory education authorities should require that teachers in selective schools and classes have suitable gifted education qualifications. The authorities should ensure that the necessary professional development is available. The Commonwealth should support this through the Quality Teacher Programme.

CHAPTER 5 - THE ROLE OF THE COMMONWEALTH

26. Submissions argued that the Commonwealth should establish a national strategy on gifted education, to ameliorate the changeable and unstable state of policy and practice. The Committee agrees that this is an appropriate goal for national co-ordination.

Recommendation 17 (paragraph 5.6)**MCEETYA should develop a national strategy on education of the gifted.**

27. Submissions recommended that the Commonwealth should fund a national research centre on gifted education. The Committee agrees. This raises the general question of how the Commonwealth could or should co-ordinate the university system to create national centres of excellence in subjects not covered by the Cooperative Research Centre structure.

Recommendation 18 (paragraph 5.9)**The Commonwealth should fund a national research and resource centre on gifted education.**

28. Present Commonwealth targeted assistance relating to ‘educational disadvantage’ defines the term in a way that seems to exclude the disadvantage suffered by unrecognised, underachieving gifted children. The Committee recommends that the guidelines for these programs should be amended to clarify that the disadvantages suffered by gifted children whose needs are not met are within scope.

Recommendation 19 (paragraph 5.13)**The Commonwealth should amend the guidelines for targeted programs for schools to confirm that the disadvantage suffered by gifted children whose needs are not met is within the meaning of ‘educational disadvantage’.**

29. Submissions recommended that the Commonwealth should sponsor national curriculum materials (including online materials) to help teachers differentiate the curriculum for gifted children. The Committee agrees that this is an appropriate goal for national co-ordination.

Recommendation 20 (paragraph 5.14)**The Commonwealth through MCEETYA should support development of national curriculum materials to differentiate the curriculum for gifted children.**