

Submission

No 58

## INQUIRY INTO CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE 9-14 YEARS IN NSW

Organisation:

Name:

Telephone:

Date Received: 6/05/2008

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Partially Confidential

4<sup>th</sup> May 2008

Committee on Children and Young People  
Parliament House  
Macquarie St  
Sydney NSW 2000  
[www.parliament.nsw.gov.au](http://www.parliament.nsw.gov.au)  
Phone: (02) 92302363  
Fax: (02) 9230 3052  
Attention: Jo Alley, Senior Committee Officer

### Inquiry into Children and Young People 9-14 Years in NSW

The Parliamentary Joint Standing Committee on Children and Young People has recently commenced an inquiry about children and young people aged from 9-14 years in NSW.

The inquiry will focus on:

- the needs of children and young people in this age group;
- the impact of age, gender and disadvantage;
- the activities, services and support required; and
- The impact of changing workplace practices on children and young people.

I formally request that this submission be granted confidentiality. I am happy for the contents of the submission to be made public, however, I would like my personal details made confidential to protect the identity of my children.

There are a number of things that come to mind when discussing this topic with other parents. I have done a mind map of thoughts that were presented. This is attached as Appendix 1.

The area most concerning to me as a parent of a 9 year old, is the total lack of community resources available to my child. From what I have explored, I have found that rather than more resources becoming available at High School level, in fact all community resources cease at Year 6.

I understand that this inquest will surface many organisations that need resources, staff and/or funding to assist this age group and their families.

My particular focus in this submission is as a parent of two formally identified gifted children. I understand there are many minority groups whose voices you need to hear. Please listen to this minority – it represents 10-15% of our population including 9-14 year olds. There is a general lack of understanding of giftedness by the wider community as well as by professionals in education, health & welfare. This has a negative impact on intellectual, emotional, and social development of the gifted children, including widespread underachievement, increased school dropout rates, and other social/emotional problems.

My daughter was formally identified after a disdainful encounter with her school teacher. I was told to “back off and stop pushing her so hard”. For 3 years, I had been attempting to get some measurable feedback from the school. My gut instinct told me she had lost her vitality to learn and was freewheeling. I took her for a psychometric assessment. This is not available under medicare, not recoverable unless you have “top” private health cover. I paid for this myself - \$500 to measure her capability. I have since found out that this is offer free to children who the school identify as gifted. She measured 99<sup>th</sup> percentile – top 1% of our society's intelligence. She had totally masked her capabilities at school, underachieving and even with me asking often “where is she at, what are her weaknesses”, none of the teachers had identified her. She paced her marks with those of her peers in the mixed ability classes she was placed in. In Year 1, she attended Mindquest (a privately run enrichment weekend). She came away from the course, bright eyed, excited to learn and totally fired up. This faded away during the following weeks. I started a weekend timetable of science experiments, museum visits, trips to Canberra, Art Galleries and the like. The pace was cracking. As a sole parent, I felt I would never be able to keep up the running around and the costs that were involved. I felt I would never to be able to give her the stimulation she seemed to need.

When my daughter was identified, it was a shock and a huge relief to me. I thought when I handed the Assessment over to the school they would take over her education and stimulation. It took the school 12 months to move her into a like-minded stream, where she is still coasting. The teacher tells me, I need to let her be responsible for what she does and does not do – Fair enough if she had spent the previous 4 years of formal education being taught the strategies to apply for autonomous learning – but she hasn't.

My son was also formally identified last year. He is twice exceptional in that he is gifted with learning disabilities. He is two years younger. When he started school he was excited, by 6 months into the year he was bored. By Year 1, the boredom was translating into poor behaviour. Concurrently there was feedback from the school to say that his handwriting was not up to scratch. I was also arranging to see his Maths teacher, as I was concerned that in Term 2 of Year 1, he was still doing the same homework as Term 4 Kindergarten. Apparently, the school would only assess his ability based on written assessment. Verbally he could give them the answers, but because he was not performing well in a written timed test environment, they were unwilling to move him to a more suitable group.

This started the merry-go-round of specialist – I attempted appointments with all, but some of these took 6 months to get. First stop was a Behavioural Optometrist who for \$330 (I think only \$75 was through Medicare or through Private Health funds – the rest I had to find), he identified my son had problems not with his eyesight, but the messages from eyes to brain and back. The start of the

identification of learning difficulties. For another \$550, the Behavioural Optometrist would put a program together that he "hoped" would help with my son's reading difficulties. (This program is not covered through medicare or private health funds)

Next stop, Psychometric Assessment – another \$500 and again no safety net or refund. My son also ranked in the 99<sup>th</sup> Percentile. Definately gifted and a Visual Spatial Learner.

The Occupational Therapy assessment was next. This was partially covered through Medicare for the assessment. This showed perceptual fine motor skills and his ability to integrate his visual and motor systems fluidly are hindering him. "Consequently, he needs to work hard to be able to achieve average level results, when he should be achieving higher than average". "He demonstrated some issues with sensory processing, particularly proprioceptive (body awareness), tactile and visual-motor processing. This is hindering his ability to plan and execute certain motor tasks, especially those combining more than one sensory system."

A Paediatrician was next – this was available on Medicare as were the followup visits. His diagnosis was Inattentive Attention Deficit Disorder. He has prescribed Concerta to assist my son in focusing and inhibiting impulsive decision making. This has allowed him to have better control over his actions and consequently learn in the classroom.

The last round of specialists consisted of testing for Central Auditory Processing Disorder. This again had a small portion maybe \$75, which was claimable through Medicare, but the rest of the \$330 was not.

All of this was necessary to identify exactly what my sons learning difficulties were. Once identified, they needed to be dealt with. We have done one term of Occupational Therapy. At \$55 per week and a couple of extra visits during the holidays, this has been over \$700 and no end in sight. None of this is claimable on Medicare. If a GP deems a child has enough issues, they can refer the patient for 10 visits under a Medicare scheme; however, believe it or not, my son does not have enough issues??

Both children continue to participate in outside of school activities. Both play Baseball in the summer season while juggling enrichment activities at other times. Each child costs a minimum of \$80 per day for an enrichment course. My children attend enrichment courses throughout each month approximately on average 4 days. 4 days multiplied by \$80 multiplied by 2 children is about \$640 a month that I need to find, to balance my childrens experiences.

Children do need a balance. They need to be in a safe environment which teaches them community participation, personal excellence and tolerance of cultures. This requires consistent parent modelling and mentoring. Mentoring from third parties, not just in the home. It is exceptionally hard to locate mentors for children.

Children aged between 9 & 14 are extremely vulnerable to peer group pressure. They are transitioning between childhood and youth, trying to identify where they belong and where their new boundaries are. They are exposed to the less attractive sides of life through their peers. If the peer group becomes the only "understanding" influence in their lives and they feel the need to belong (gang mentality), then it is

unlikely they will be able to overcome underachievement, low self-esteem and disengagement from society.

Gifted children are functioning at a higher mental level but can often have asynchronous development. This can lead to lower self-esteem. By Age 9, many girls in particular have begun to mask their giftedness in order to fit in with their age peers, even though this means underachieving.

The continuous, erroneous perception that gifted children do not need support perpetuates under-resourcing in this area.

The need for differentiated curriculum increases with the level of giftedness. Our education system, caters for the majority (67% have an IQ ranging between 85 and 114, average IQ is 100). Children with an IQ of 70 are unlikely to be integrated into a normal classroom, even with assistance. A highly gifted child (Above IQ 145) is expected to work at the same pace and level as children with an IQ of less than 100. Is it surprising that these children switch off?

These children need to be protected and still challenged and inspired to reach their potential. They need to have enrichment and if not provided for during the school day, needs to be made easily accessible and available to all social spectrums. Naturally, these requirements will not come to fruition without the specialist support and training that accompanies properly funded programs within public education and outside of school activities. Thus, it is an imperative of this Committee to ensure that an appropriate solution is found for gifted children. There should be an equal playing field for those who have been identified as above normal. Without this investment into gifted education, the NSW Public Education system will not be able to foster and develop the talents of our brightest minds. Our society as a whole will suffer.

Concurrently to educating the Department of Education Science & Training staff, Interdisciplinary care teams including Psychologists, General Practitioners, Centrelink, Community Clinics, Teachers and Primary Carers and families also need priority training in this area.

When I asked Centrelink for assistance with my son, the woman told me her child was disabled and that she should be entitled to more assistance than I should be, given that my child could function at a normal school level. I do not understand the relationship. I have a child with disabilities too. The fact that he is able to mask this with his natural ability and pull "average" grade does not diminish his deficient or his needs.

### **Nurturing the Needs of 9-14 year olds: The activities support and services required.**

#### 1) Identification

##### a. Recognition of Gifted

- i. Mentoring to Potential ie Converting raw gifts into talents
- ii. Recognition of Underachievement

- b. Recognition of Talent
- c. Recognition of Learning Disabled & Masking
- d. Recognition of Gifted & Talented & Learning Disabled - Twice Exceptional
- e. Recognition of Over-excitabilities & Coping strategies

- i. Education

- 1. Carers
    - 2. Centerlink
    - 3. Pyschologist
    - 4. Training for GP's
    - 5. Training for Community Clinic
    - 6. Teachers

- ii. Medical

- 1. Medicare for Identification Gifted
    - 2. Medicare for Identification of Learning Disabled
      - a. Dyslexia
      - b. Central Auditory Processing Disorder
      - c. ADD
      - d. ADHD
      - e. Anxiety Disorder
      - f. Aspergers Syndrome
      - g. Autism Spectrum
      - h. Bi-Polar
      - i. Depression
      - j. Non-Verbal Learning Disability
      - k. Obsessive-Compulsive Disorder
      - l. Sensory Integration
      - m. Sleep Problems
      - n. Dyspraxia
      - o. Tourettes Syndrome
      - p. Suicide
      - q. Stress
      - r. Vision Problems
      - s. Visual Spatial Learners

- 2) Carers - their needs are totally ignored

- a. Respite Care needs to be available
  - b. Funding
  - c. Support services are required for the Carers.

- i. Education for the Carers of the characteristics of Gifted Children
    - ii. Some parents do not understand why it is so hard to parent these children
  - d. Carers Allowance for Homeschooling
- 3) Understanding Education System
  - a. Compulsory Education of Teaching staff in Gifted kids
  - b. Compulsory Education of Teaching staff in Learning Disabled Kids
  - c. Every school allocated funding for fulltime G&T Coordinator
    - i. G&T Coordinator answerable to DEST G&T
    - ii. Policy driven into integration
  - d. Homeschooling
    - i. Currently self funded
    - ii. Needs to address while these kids can not attend school
    - iii. What support is in place for the parents who have given up income to educate their children?
  - e. How to attain intrinsically motivated children?
  - f. How to teach the strategies of autonomous learning?
- 4) After School Enrichment Activities - Clubs
  - a. Funding for Clubs
  - b. Staffing of Clubs
  - c. Provision of Suitable Premises for Clubs
  - d. Types of Clubs
    - i. Science Club
    - ii. Chess Club
    - iii. Maths Club
    - iv. Acting/creativity Club
    - v. Story Writing
    - vi. Specifically Targeting Coping skills
    - vii. Special Interest groups
      - 1. bushwalking
      - 2. Studies of... eg Paleontology
    - viii. Astronomy club
- 5) Weekend Interest Groups
  - a. Camps
  - b. Break Aways from Weekly Special Interest Groups
- 6) Organisations Funding
  - a. GERRIC

- b. CSIRO
  - c. NSWAGTC
- 7) Professional Associations ie AAEGT & NSWAGTC
- a. Lack of Funding for kids programs
    - i. Camps
    - ii. Enrichment Classes
  - b. Lack of Funding for Parental education
    - i. Parent Advocacy
    - ii. Someone to assist the parents with the education environment – currently only Private consultants exist (difficult to front the school meeting with 5 teachers against one/two parent/s)
      - 1. Not just rights
      - 2. Understanding what options are available
- 8) Like minded Ability Based Peer group access
- 9) Mentoring
- 10) IQ conversion to EQ – This is crucial to develop well rounded individuals for our society (gifted or not)
- 11) Year 7 - Children at the most vulnerable time – Transition to High School
- a. Lack of Parental Care
  - b. No Formal Child Care
  - c. "Drop In Centre" the only formal Option
  - d. Peer Group Pressure
  - e. Little Fish/Big Pond Analogy
  - f. Latch Key kids or Street kids? What choice do parents have? Where is the adult supervision
    - i. Negative factors?
      - 1. Boys act out impulsively to compete with each other
      - 2. Girls conform to their peers
  - g. Maturing of body and hormonal factors
- 12) Children have the following needs
- a. To be safe
  - b. To be Protected
  - c. To be Stimulated
  - d. To be encouraged and enthusiastic
  - e. To be Motivated
  - f. To be Challenged
  - g. To be Inspired
- 13) Societal trends:



- a. Work place changes:
- b. Longer working hours
- c. Parent time/devotion to kids
- d. Increased curriculum subjects on teachers > decreased time on fundamentals
- e. Schools under funded
- f. Schools under staffed
- g. Not enough gifted specialists in schools

Dr Linda Silverman did a prison study of IQ in prisoners. Her research found that five times as many prisoners were in the top 3% of intelligence as occurs in the outside population. Obviously, there is a greater risk of criminal behaviour when acute intelligence is coupled with a lack of opportunity for success.

Our society actively encourages and rewards talented individuals in Sport and lesser so in the Arts. Why do we ignore nurturing intellectual gifts? There are many organisations, departments and corporate who actively sponsor talented sporting or artistic individuals, yet there is no organisation, department or coporate who sponsors intellectually talented individuals.

We expect that talented individuals have coaches and that they dedicated much time to their pursuits. Why then are coaching colleges and tutors frowned on by society, if these people are only attempting to harness the potential in our young?

***"For every year of underachievement it can take eight months to turn it around"***  
***(Pat Schuler, 1998).***

I understand that this submission covers a lot of ground and that many of these recommendations require State and Federal Governement co-operation. However, I think that it is critical that funding is provided for outside of school and after school activities and that, these funds are directed to organisations that can best support the children with extension programs. All children will benefit from a sense of belonging and success, derived from participating in the after school activities suggested. These programs need to be implemented across the state not just in the areas that traditionally can afford extra cirricular activities. Lower socio-economic groups would reap social rewards from inclusion. Positive guidance is what children and society want and need.

Yours Sincerely

## Appendix 1

### Mind Map



## Appendix 2

Research suggests difficulties in identification:

### Preschool to Year 3

Whilst giftedness in children is often evident from a very early age, quantifiable identification of gifted children quite often takes place after the child reached school age. There may be instances where parents/carers seek identification at an earlier age, but in general, short of having experience in the area of giftedness it would be unlikely that many parents would be able to put their finger on exactly why their children were “different”.

In contrast, once children develop and their giftedness becomes more apparent, families are faced with a massive learning curve. By the time the child has reached middle childhood, they and their families have almost certainly dealt with a number of issues all relating to giftedness and/or the overexcitabilities that quite often accompany the “Gifted” diagnoses.

Professional and knowledgeable assistance in these areas is paramount to ensure that the children are able to achieve success in the school environment. The numerous studies quoting extraordinarily high levels of underachievement and emotional problems in identified children between the ages of 9 – 14 years is frightfully sobering to the parent of a gifted child to say the least.

It would seem that these years are extremely influential in how the identified child grows and develops on all levels as they head towards pre-adolescence. Positive life experiences, a positive and challenging school environment and knowledgeable people working together towards a common goal to meet the varied and often challenging needs of gifted children can only help these children meet their personal potential as well as their potential to society as a whole.

### Years 4 – Year 7

At this point, we have identification being a major factor. Identification of the giftedness and potential conversion to talent, but also of learning difficulties that can be masked by the giftedness.

Identifying gifted children and providing the necessary support to aid their school success is extremely important during the 9 – 14 year period.

### Year 8 - Year 12

Should the gifted child have progressed to this level of schooling without professional and targeted assistance, the consequences have been widely researched and published with regards to underachievement, poor self esteem, behavioral difficulties, anti-social and generalised anxieties to name a few.

Not having a sense of belonging and introspectively recognising that they are different from their peers can often lead to a sense of isolation and despair. It would seem that at this point in their life, from a school prospective, it could almost be considered too late to effect and real positive change in the child's school outcomes.

Poor study skills and strategies, learned helplessness, "dumbing down" and generally never having been given the opportunity to either succeed and/or fail and a level indicative of their own potential all make it seemingly impossible for the child to go onto further education considering the need for self regulation, advanced study skills and basically the belief that you can achieve.

## Appendix 3

Terms of Reference Item 2

<http://www.tki.org.nz/r/gifted/reading/casestudies/underachieve>

### Reasons Why Gifted Children Sometimes Underachieve

#### Introduction

This is an edited extract from *Underachievement in Gifted and Talented Students*, a paper presented at the "Now is the Future: The Gifted Student in Today's Secondary Schools" Gifted and Talented Education Conference, Auckland, October 2000.

Prepared by Sonia White  
2001

School marks are determined by many factors, of which intelligence is only one. We need to ask ourselves:

- whether or not the student is consistently underachieving;
- if the underachievement is demonstrated in only some areas, and if so, which areas;
- If there is a pattern of behaviours emerging which is contributing to the student's lack of performance or motivation.

We need to bear in mind that:

- it is normal for a student not to do equally well in every school subject;
- Temporary drops in school performance during certain transitions within a student's school years can be expected, and are not necessarily cause for concern.
- Finally, we need to recognise that changing achievement patterns takes time.

***"For every year of underachievement it can take eight months to turn it around"***

***(Pat Schuler, 1998).***

Therefore, it is important that we examine several key areas when we seek to establish reasons for underachievement, for "one shoe fits all" does not apply. It is helpful to examine:

- the degree of perfectionism,
- the sensitivity of the student,
- signs of possible learning disability which may be disguised by the student's giftedness, and
- The degree to which the educational programme is appropriate for the student.

In doing so, we may begin to build up a picture of the individual student and address the underachievement in a manner appropriate for that student.

Underachievement in gifted students has its basis in a wide range of potential contributing factors, all of which are worthy of close examination. Social and emotional factors contribute heavily, and those people involved in developing individual education programmes (IEPs) for gifted students need to be well versed in them. Not all underachievement can be attributed to only social and emotional factors however.

Arguably, the most frequently unidentified gifted and talented student, the "cross-over" student, is both gifted and has learning difficulties. Those with severe learning difficulties are usually recognised because of their need for full educational assessment. However, the gifted "cross-over" student performing at an average level is most frequently overlooked. The double-labelled or "cross-over" student who has a learning difficulty or a physical or sensory disability may have a high degree of frustration and low self-esteem, especially if coupled with a high degree of perfectionism.

This becomes more apparent when students are assessed on a full educational assessment. Tests such as the WISC III provide excellent diagnostic sub-tests, which can indicate learning blocks caused by skills such as short-term memory or coding. A student who normally achieves in the 55th percentile range yet who achieves in the 40th percentile range for coding or short-term memory, is not as disadvantaged as a student who normally achieves in the 95th percentile range and yet who achieves in the 40th percentile range for coding or short-term memory. The gap between potential and two key areas in their performance is nowhere near as great.

The unrecognised "cross-over" student is not only trapped in a cycle of underachievement, resultant frustration, and low self-esteem, s/he is also an untapped, wasted talent that society can ill-afford to lose.

### **Problems for Gifted with Learning Disabilities (GLD)**

The crossover student can be described under three categories:

- Those who are identified as gifted, but who have subtle, often unrecognised difficulties that usually kick in around middle high school, because the programme is more demanding, for example, they can take it all in but not pour it out.
- Learning disabled identified, but not gifted identified.
- Students not identified for either gifted or learning disabled.

It is these students who are possibly of the most concern, and it is they whose profiles are explored in more depth in this paper.

There is no one way to address the needs of gifted underachievers, and ideally a school should have a very able team of professionals to whom the parents, principal, dean, teachers, or students themselves can turn: counsellors, ESOL (English for speakers of other languages) teacher, learner support teachers, careers advisor, pastor and/or appropriate cultural spiritual leaders where possible, as well as a gifted and talented education (GATE) coordinator. Consultation should occur with outside experts in areas beyond the team's levels of expertise. Through a cooperative team approach, the school can then endeavour to optimise the academic, socio-emotional, and spiritual growth of the student.