

Submission

ACER Review of Years 9-12 in Tasmania

Tasmanian Association for the Gifted Inc.

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General Information about TAG

Tasmanian Association for the Gifted Inc (TAG) is the statewide association whose primary objective is to provide support to parents and teachers of gifted children. TAG receives no funding from any other organisation or Government, nor is it formally associated with any education sector. TAG makes no recommendations to members regarding individual school choices. TAG is also affiliated with the Australian Association for the Education of Gifted and Talented (AAEGT) and is represented on its committee.

Functions and Objectives of TAG

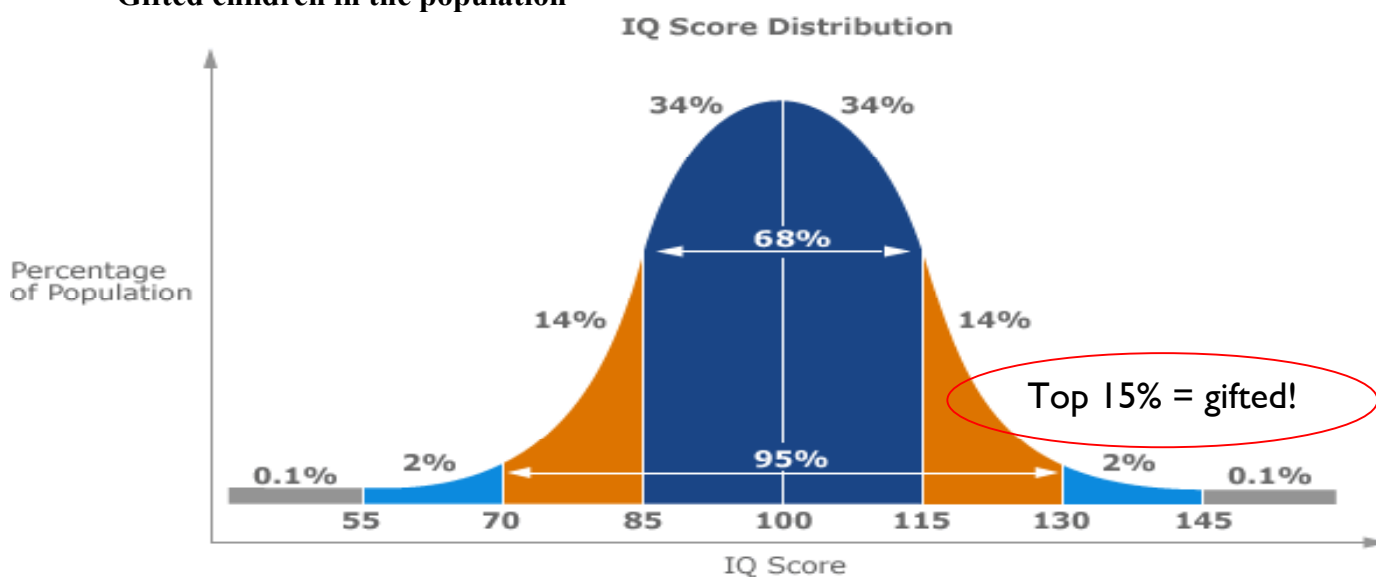
TAG provides support to children, parents and teachers from diverse backgrounds. The children range in age from preschoolers to secondary students. TAG supports teachers and schools by providing information, resources and professional development opportunities by way of conferences. TAG also provides a range of children's activities to meet need that are not met in schools. Members share information and resources and are supportive of fellow parents of gifted children. Membership of the association is open to all interested groups and individuals.

Specific objectives include:

- Support and conduct of activities that provide maximum opportunity for the development of students with gifts and talents.
- Promotion of parent, teacher and community awareness of the needs and potential of gifted children through web presence, meetings, media and conference.
- Promotion of strategies for parents, teachers and others to identify gifted children, including underachieving and other disadvantaged gifted children through newsletters, journals and the TAG library.
- Promotion of appropriate training of all teachers in the education of gifted children by lobbying Government agencies and Universities, and especially conferences.
- Collation and distribution of relevant research work through the TAG newsletter.
- Promotion of flexibility in school programs at all levels to ensure gifted children are provided with appropriate schooling opportunities to allow for their asynchronous development at the pace and level appropriate to their capabilities and developmental stages.

Counselling and the provision of resources to parents who are experiencing difficulties with the various educational sectors in Tasmania forms a large part of TAG's work.

Gifted children in the population



Professor Francois Gagne, Professor of Psychology, Université du Québec à Montréal, Canada, identifies that around 15% of the population is gifted.

While the majority of these children are mildly gifted, with IQ score between 115 and 130, these mildly gifted children, by year 5, are capable of functioning at least one grade level above the majority of their classroom peers.

For those with IQ score above 130 who are moderately gifted, above 145 who are highly gifted, above 160 who are exceptionally gifted and above 180 who are profoundly gifted, the gap between the majority of the class and the level at which these gifted children are capable of functioning increases rapidly.

Gifted children and policy statements

All students, by any statement of student rights, have the right to an education, which enables them to achieve their full potential.

The UN Convention on the Rights of the Child states *“The education of the child shall be directed to the **development of the child's personality, talents and mental and physical abilities to their fullest potential**”*

Article 29 (1)

The Senate inquiry into the Education of Gifted and Talented Children (2001) states *“There is a duty to help all children achieve their potential.”*

Tasmanian Education Department Policy states: *“Students who are gifted should be provided with an appropriate range of flexible provisions in Tasmanian Government schools, to enable and support their development.”*

Policy Statement: Education For Students Who Are Gifted

Gifted students are substantially under catered for the majority of time and in the majority of state schools. They are not offered an education that enables them to realize their potential. They are the subject of a plethora of myths and misunderstanding by teachers who have little training in the area of the education of gifted students, from many uninformed adults within the community and are often the target of bullying by their peers.

Policy statements which target the gifted proportion of school students are simply not being consistently followed and these students are suffering as a consequence. Our education systems are failing them.

Unless educational programs are specifically targeted towards these students to enable an appropriate education for them, they are unlikely to reach their potential.

Years 9-12 in Tasmanian Schools

Retention and Attainment Rates

Trying to compare retention and attainment rates from education systems around Australia is misleading, because the criteria used in each system are different. In most systems the school starting age is lower than in Tasmania and the leaving age is 18 years, and so those students are turning 18 towards the end of their year 12, so most finish at the end of year 12. In Tasmania some students may already be 18 years at the start of year 12 and the rest turn 18 during that year. The official leaving age, currently, is on turning 17 years old, so students can legally leave the education system at the start of, or during year 11. This of itself means that Tasmania will have a lower retention rate.

An additional factor in the Tasmanian apparently lower retention rates is that the figures published by the Department of Education only show students transitioning from years 10 to finish year 12 within the school system. They do not take into account all those students who leave the school system to enter apprenticeships, traineeships, or private education and training colleges. They also miss those students who move interstate or commence fulltime work. The Department of Education informs me that they do not collect information on what happens to students who leave after years 10 or 11, and are unable to provide information on the numbers of students who enter apprenticeships at that stage. Apprenticeships, many of which are 3 years +, are valued and valuable career pathways providing practical education and training, should be counted as such, and students counted in the retention figures as they are in some interstate systems. As an example, Don College has traced students who did not complete the full year 10 to year 12 period (finishing in 2014) and found that of the 257 students, 207 students, or 80%, were in apprenticeships, traineeships, employment or pursuing other educational activities such as TAFE or private colleges, or studying interstate. A further 18 students (7%) were unable to attend for medical or other personal reasons. The figures for 2015 are similar.

The State Government's proposed amendments to the Education Act will require students to stay in the school system until they are 18 years, finish year 12 or attain a Certificate 3. This may be challenging for those students who would like to pursue an apprenticeship because of its physical hands on learning environment, and will need adjustments by TAFE and employers.

Attainment rates similarly should not be compared across Australia's jurisdictions, as the criteria to be met at the end of year 12 differ widely. In some states, apprenticeships are connected with schools, some use completion of courses irrespective of results, some count community or full time work as a school subject. In Tasmania, to attain the TCE students must meet Numeracy, Literacy and ICT standards and achieve a satisfactory level of achievement in 1200 hours of course work or other accredited study such as an apprenticeship. TASC courses are accredited in 50, 100 or 150 hour courses with the vast

majority requiring 150 hours of successful course completion before achievement towards the TCE is recognised. There is no capacity in Tasmania for students to be recognised for partial completion of courses. Many students are not working at Certificate 3 or pre-tertiary course levels in years 11 and 12, so fail to get their TCE for that reason. The application of the ‘ticks’ criteria are also inconsistent.

Year 11 and 12 in Colleges and High Schools.

Tasmania and the ACT are the two jurisdictions which have college systems, so they are often compared. However, the populations are different both on the basis of socio-economic status and geographic distribution of the population. The statement is also made that since mainland schools all go through 7-12 Tasmanian schools should do so too. This does not take into account the fact that many Tasmanian High Schools are small and do not have the student numbers to warrant trying to provide a broad range of subjects. From an economic point of view, it would not be the best use of education dollars to have lots of teachers teaching the same subjects to small classes scattered across high schools which are in close proximity to each other in urban areas.

The current college system allows students to be brought together to provide a critical mass so that a wide range of subjects can be taught. With student enrolments approaching 1000 for years 11-12, senior secondary colleges have the critical mass to provide a wide range of courses from specialised, academic pre-tertiary courses through to the practical vocational courses, utilising teachers qualified and experienced in their fields to engage their students appropriately.

Students physically present in a classroom together benefit from engaging with and being stimulated by each other - this is more difficult online. They gain from taking subjects with like-minded students of a similar ability, instead of in the mixed ability classes with behavioural issues students so common in high schools.

There is some evidence that in the college system some students who became disengaged in high schools become re-engaged when they move into the different college environment with different courses and with a change of peer group from their high school days.

There may be a place for some provision of years 11 and 12 in remote and rural high schools where the travelling time to the nearest college is measured in hours each day, but for students in urban areas to stay at high schools where a college is just up the road does not make a lot of sense. The colleges provide a less regimented environment where the student begins to take more personal responsibility and the move helps build resilience in the transition to adulthood. It should be noted that colleges provide hostel accommodation for students from remote areas.

Year 11 and 12 Curriculum.

Tasmania currently has one year courses which can be taken in either year 11 or 12. Some courses are pre-requisite for others, such as Physical Science before Chemistry or Physics, but most level 3 courses (pre-tertiary) stand alone. Level 2 courses build towards level 3 courses. One year courses allow students to take a range of 8 (up to 10 for brighter students) courses over the two years at different levels – gaining an ATAR from the best 5 of their level 3 subjects. This means that, for example, a student intending to continue to university doing a science course, could in addition to studying science subjects, English and Maths, study

music, a foreign language and outdoor education as well. This has the potential to produce more well-rounded leavers better equipped for their future.

Your research at ACER has demonstrated that the academic results for students in Australia, particularly amongst the top levels, has declined both domestically and when compared with their international counterparts. There is limited provision, funding, expertise, support and knowledge for and about gifted and highly able students. They are often at the bottom of the lists for psychological assessments to determine their needs.

At Primary School level it is widely accepted that students in a class can be separated into several groups and each group can be doing different work at their own ability level. However on entering High School all this changes, and any suggestion that students be grouped with others of similar ability is frowned upon. There are no selective government schools in Tasmania as there are in Victoria and NSW.

Within High Schools most teaching is pitched towards the lower to middle of the class and those at the higher ability end are often not challenged with work at their level. In the last few years the Department of Education has introduced differentiation as a focus within its Teacher Professional Learning. Hopefully with time this will improve the education of all students, but at present many highly able students have good and less good years depending on who teaches them.

Specialist teachers and teachers teaching ‘out of field’.

You have already collected data and reported on teachers teaching ‘out of field’ in Tasmania, and how the numbers of ‘out of field’ teachers increase in rural areas.

One of the benefits of the college system is that it brings together students into one place where there is a core of specialist teachers used to teach a particular subject at the required high level. If students are to stay at High Schools to do years 11 and 12, as is the current State Government’s plan, then many students will be taught by many inexperienced ‘out of field’ teachers for both academic and vocational courses. The importance of teaching ‘in field’ rises in the later years of education, and the college system is the best way to provide that for a small dispersed population such as Tasmania’s.

Lynne Maher
Secretary
Tasmanian Association for the Gifted
30 September 2016
