

APPENDIX 5

RECOMMENDATIONS OF 1988 REPORT

Extract from *The Education of Gifted and Talented Children*, Senate Select Committee on the Education of Gifted and Talented Children, 1988:

Recommendation 1: The Committee recommends that the Commonwealth Government make a clear statement that special educational strategies should be provided for gifted children throughout Australia.

Recommendation 2: The Committee recommends to teacher training institutions that pre-service training courses include sufficient information about gifted children to make student teachers aware of the needs of those children and the special identification techniques and teaching strategies which the student teachers will have to use with the gifted on graduation.

Recommendation 3: The Committee recommends to the Commonwealth Government that the professional development of all teachers in the areas of education currently accorded special assistance, name, the education of girls, Aborigines and disadvantaged children, include the identification and education of gifted children from those populations.

Recommendation 4: The Committee recommends that the professional development of teachers in the education of gifted children be supported by the Commonwealth Government.

Recommendation 5: The Committee recommends that appropriate videotapes and associated materials for isolated gifted children be funded by the Commonwealth Government and developed in conjunction with subject specialists and experts in gifted education.

Recommendation 6: The Committee recommends that a national centre of research into the education of gifted children be established in an Australian tertiary institution and that this centre be financially supported during its establishment phase by the Commonwealth Government.

Recommendation 7: The Committee makes no recommendation about the location of the proposed national research centre, but recommends that the Commonwealth Government consider expressions of interest from tertiary institutions.

Recommendation 8: The Committee recommends that priority be given to expanding the information on the education of gifted children within the Australian Curriculum Information Network and that this information be made accessible to educational institutions and those sections of the community with an interest in this area of education.

Recommendation 9: The Committee recommends that the Government expand its financial support for the various vacation schools, seminars and workshops designed to enhance the skills of gifted and talented children.

GOVERNMENT RESPONSE TO 1988 REPORT

By the Hon. J.S. Dawkins, Minister for Employment, Education and Training. Tabled in the Senate 23 May 1989, Senate *Hansard*, p2431

GOVERNMENT RESPONSE TO THE REPORT OF THE SENATE SELECT COMMITTEE ON THE EDUCATION OF GIFTED AND TALENTED CHILDREN

For the information of the Honourable Senators, I present a statement containing the Government's response to the Report of the Senate Select Committee on the Education of Gifted and Talented Children.

On 17 October 1985, the Senate resolved that the Standing Committee on Education and the Arts should inquire into and report upon the education of gifted and talented children. On 17 November 1986, the Committee tabled a brief progress report. After the 35th Parliament took office, the Senate Committee was re-constituted as the Senate Committee on Employment, Education and Training. The Senate resolved on 22 September 1987 to establish a Select Committee to complete the inquiry and report to the Senate on or before the first day of sitting in 1988. This was later extended to 26 May 1988.

The Select Committee, which tabled its report on 18 May 1988, is to be commended for its efforts. The Government has closely examined the report and its recommendations and I am pleased to present this statement in response.

The Select Committee clearly recognised the difficulty in defining and thereby identifying the gifted and talented child. It also noted that giftedness is not necessarily stable over the years of schooling and is extremely difficult to measure. Therefore, when we speak of the gifted or talented child we must recognise that we are talking of children whose skills and abilities are diverse and multi-faceted, embracing creativity and divergent thinking, originality, sensitivity and improvisation, as well as the more widely acknowledged talents and gifts of academic brilliance and sporting prowess. Recognising this diversity-and responding to it-is a challenge facing all of the nation's school systems.

Although primary and secondary education in Australia is largely the responsibility of the individual States and Territories, the Commonwealth Government has an important role, which includes providing leadership and encouragement in matters seen to be of national concern. The Select Committee's report clearly documents the significant role the Commonwealth has played in fostering and encouraging the development of gifted and talented children.

Since the establishment of the Commonwealth Schools Commission in 1973, the Commonwealth Government has taken an active interest in this area. The Government, especially through its Projects of National Significance Program, gave substantial encouragement and opportunity to educational authorities and parent and community groups to examine ways of enhancing the educational opportunities of gifted and talented students. As the Committee reports, this was a period of considerable development and innovation. Many school systems and other groups explored new approaches to educating gifted students, including the use of withdrawal classes, special schools, advanced placement and out-of-school activities.

It is significant to note that the opportunities provided through the joint efforts of the States, the Territories and the Commonwealth during this period led almost all school systems to formulate policies for the education of their gifted and talented students—policies that, in the main, require systems and schools to strengthen their overall performance and through that means meet the educational needs of gifted and talented children.

The Government considers that its original objective of fostering and stimulating activity, debate and interest in the needs of gifted and talented children has been achieved.

As a general principle, the Commonwealth believes that continuing provision for the gifted and talented should be made by school and system authorities from the general resources made available to them. Most systems now have in place programs for their gifted and talented students and the Commonwealth believes that all should do so.

As the report points out, it is not a time to be complacent or to diminish our efforts. I share the Select Committee's concern that some of our most able students are under-achieving, often lack motivation, and develop well short of their potential. The Government supports the general direction of the Report's recommendations, in particular those dealing with the professional development of teachers, the development of appropriate teaching and learning materials, and expanding the availability of relevant curriculum information.

The Government is now addressing the role of schools more broadly, in the context of a society undergoing significant social and economic change. In a recent statement on Strengthening Australia's Schools, the Government identified a range of issues concerning schooling and invited the co-operation of the States and Territories to develop and implement a national effort to strengthen the capacity of our schools to meet the challenges they face. These challenges ultimately involve ensuring that all children, including the gifted and talented, reach their fullest potential.

Working co-operatively with the States, the Government aims to achieve a number of objectives, including the development of curriculum statements of common principles and agreed areas for collaborative action—setting out the major areas of knowledge and the most appropriate mix of skills and experience for all children. The Government is also seeking co-operation adopting common approaches to assessment, including a

national approach to monitoring student achievement, assessing school performance and public reporting on schooling. Through these and other means of strengthening Australia's schools, educational opportunities for all students, including the gifted and talented, will be enhanced.

The successful education of all children is dependent on the attitudes, knowledge and skills of their teachers, and the support services made available to them. The national collaborative effort the Government has initiated will include ways of improving teacher training, at both the pre-service and in-service levels. Collaboration will also be sought to enhance the quantity and quality of curriculum information available to the classroom teacher. The Curriculum Corporation of Australia will be requested to seek the co-operation of the States and Territories to strengthen the services provided by the Australian Curriculum Information Network, including increased attention to the collection and dissemination of information related to the teaching of gifted and talented students. The Government is therefore responding to Recommendation 8 in the Select Committee's Report.

Commonwealth resources available to schools now stand at their highest ever level. Over the period 1984-92 general recurrent grants for government schools will have increased in real terms by 37% for each primary student and 102% for each secondary student. For non-government schools the real increases will be up to 40% for each primary student and up to 30% for each secondary student.

The Government's recent initiatives are aimed at ensuring that the most efficient and productive use is made of these resources. The aim is a strengthened schools system which will be an important component of an integrated system of education and training. The options and opportunities available to students of all levels of ability, and with different specific talents, will be increased as a result of these initiatives. These initiatives support the Committee's recommendation regarding increased financial assistance (Recommendation 9).

The Government supports the Select Committee's views regarding research into teaching and learning. The practice of teaching needs to be continually informed with new theory. It also needs to be updated in the light of emerging social, economic and technological change.

The Select Committee has recommended (Recommendations 6 and 7) the establishment of a national centre for research into the education of gifted children. This matter is currently under consideration by the Australian Education Council (AEC). An AEC Working Party has sought State and Territory reactions to the report's recommendations, as they relate to research and training, and has prepared its final recommendations which will be considered in discussion at the next AEC meeting.

In its report the Select Committee commended the support of business and industry for assisting the development of our more able students. The Government has encouraged an increase in private sector sponsorship in support of local and national initiatives, such as the annual Mathematics summer school. It also wishes to

encourage greater involvement by business and industry in all levels of education, to the benefit of all students.

I attach a list of recommendations of the Report which relate to the Commonwealth's role and provide a response to each recommendation.

Attachment

RECOMMENDATIONS OF THE REPORT OF THE SENATE SELECT COMMITTEE ON THE EDUCATION OF GIFTED AND TALENTED CHILDREN RELATED TO THE COMMONWEALTH

The Report makes a number of recommendations which advocate advancing 'the talents of highly able students' (9.2).

The basic premise of the Report is that:

the national interest dictates that our education systems encourage gifted children though not at the expense of other children (9.4).

The Report recommends that the Commonwealth become involved in the support of the education of gifted and talented students in a number of ways which are summarised as follows:

SUMMARY OF RECOMMENDATIONS

Recommendation 1:

The Committee recommends that the Commonwealth Government make a clear statement that special educational strategies should be provided for gifted children throughout Australia. (Paragraph 7.17)

Response:

The Commonwealth recognises that decisions about curriculum content, resource allocation to schools and the professional development of teachers are the constitutional responsibility of the States, but it does support the provision of special educational strategies for gifted children.

Recommendation 3:

The Committee recommends to the Commonwealth Government that the professional development of all teachers in the areas of education currently accorded special assistance, namely, the education of girls, Aborigines and disadvantaged children, include the identification and education of gifted children from those populations. (Paragraph 7.36)

Response

The Commonwealth recognises the importance of teacher training both at the pre-service and in-service levels in assisting teachers to provide a schooling environment which helps all children reach their full potential.

Each Commonwealth specific purpose program provides support for children of all abilities within the designated population for which it is designed. In so far as each specific purpose program provides for some professional development of teachers the Commonwealth regards it as appropriate that the needs of gifted children within the target groups be given attention.

While supporting the Committee's Recommendation 3 in principle, the Commonwealth believes the type of professional development provided should be left to the judgment of those delivering specific purposes programs.

Recommendation 4:

The Committee recommends that the professional development of teachers in the education of gifted children be supported by the Commonwealth Government. (Paragraph 7.36)

Response

Commonwealth support for professional development of teachers is provided through general recurrent grants, through specific purpose programs and through post-graduate study by teachers in Higher Education. The States and non-government authorities, higher education institutions and teachers themselves determine the relative weight to be given to professional development related to gifted and talented children.

The Committee's report, however, has highlighted the need for the professional development of teachers to take account of the needs of gifted and talented children. The Commonwealth believes that the interest fostered by the report will result in an increased emphasis on professional teacher development relating to the gifted and talented.

Recommendation 5:

The Committee recommends that appropriate videotapes and associated materials for isolated gifted children be funded by the Commonwealth Government and developed in conjunction with subject specialists and experts in gifted education. (Paragraph 6.55)

Response:

The Commonwealth has no direct involvement in schooling and is therefore unable to influence directly what is taught in schools. It does, however, commend the Committee for raising the matter of the needs of isolated gifted and talented children.

It was accepted by the 60th meeting of the Australian Education Council in April 1989 that the Commonwealth and the States establish a co-operative curriculum structure. The new structure, known as the Curriculum Corporation of Australia will enable the States to evaluate their curriculum needs and the Commonwealth to work co-operatively with the States to develop new curriculum materials. The matter of curriculum materials for isolated gifted children will be referred to the Curriculum Corporation of Australia.

Recommendation 6:

The Committee recommends that a national centre for research into the education of gifted children be established in an Australian tertiary institution and that this centre be financially supported during its establishment phase by the Commonwealth Government. (Paragraph 7.50)

Response:

This matter is under consideration by the Australian Education Council and will be discussed in October 1989.

Recommendation 7:

The Committee makes no recommendation about the location of the proposed national research centre, but recommends that the Commonwealth Government consider expressions of interest from tertiary institutions. (Paragraph 7.51)

Response:

This matter will be considered within the context of the Australian Education Council discussions in October 1989.

Recommendation 8:

The Committee recommends that priority be given to expanding the information on the education of gifted children within the Australian Curriculum Information Network and that this information be made accessible to educational institutions and those sections of the community with an interest in this area of education. (Paragraph 7.56)

Response:

The proposal for inclusion of additional information on the education of the gifted and talented in the Australian Curriculum Information Network (ACIN) will be strongly commended to all those who input data to the system.

Recommendation 9:

The Committee recommends that the Government expand its financial support for the various vacation schools, seminars and workshops designed to enhance the skills of gifted and talented children. (Paragraph 4.64)

Response:

The Government recognises that the activities mentioned by the Committee are important in developing the potential of gifted and talented children. The Government agrees with the Committee's contention that these activities could be expanded with further financial support, but considers that this support should come from the private sector. The Government will encourage such support whenever possible.