

EDUCATION — GIFTED AND TALENTED PROGRAM

Grievance

MR Y. MUBARAKAI (Jandakot) [9.35 am]: On behalf of students in my local community who need a gifted and talented program at their local school, my grievance today is to the minister representing the Minister for Education and Training. My electorate of Jandakot is experiencing almost unprecedented school enrolment growth. We have lots of families living in, and moving into, the area. Many of them are enrolling their kids at public primary and secondary schools because they know they offer a fantastic local education. We have built, and continue to build, new schools to cater for that enrolment growth. But what is missing for exceptionally able students in my electorate is a gifted and talented program. Our academically gifted young people need an extra challenge to keep them motivated. They would benefit exponentially from a specialist environment that empowers them to excel, with a curriculum that is specifically designed for their needs. I know the existing gifted and talented programs, or GATE, are in high demand because, as well as providing students with an education more suited to their ability, they also give students access to universities, industry representatives and mentoring programs, and the opportunity to take part in competitions at national and international levels. These GATE programs are highly regarded, but they are highly concentrated in the inner metropolitan area, and the majority are west of the freeway. The south-eastern corridor is rapidly expanding and our children deserve the opportunity to achieve their best, close to home and in the public school system. Children in growing suburbs deserve the same opportunities, access to education and quality of education as those in more established suburbs. The gap in access to exemplary education for students in the south-eastern corridor is unfair and inequitable.

Just last week I tabled a petition with 1 952 signatures, calling for a GATE program at Harrisdale Senior High School. As a new and growing school, it has the potential to fill that gap and provide exciting opportunities to young, bright minds. The staff at the school are highly experienced and qualified leaders and teachers who are able to build the gifted and talented program. Some have previous experience with delivery of the GATE program at Rossmoyne Senior High School, including the principal. Principal Leila Bothams and the school board are committed to delivering on the feedback of the foundation parents and the primary school parents and citizens association representatives at a parent forum in 2016. They wanted a “strong school with high standards and excellent pathways for all students”. Part of delivering on that is a GATE program to ensure the most advanced students are also given every opportunity to succeed. The school has continued to grow since it opened in 2017, with a new year group starting at the school every year up to 2022. It already has a focus on academic excellence, with a talented student body and staff that want the very best for their students. Harrisdale Senior High School is the ideal location for a new gifted and talented program as it is accessible all the new families coming to new communities and suburbs in my electorate. I ask the Minister for Education and Training to consider this request on behalf of my community.

MR P. PAPALIA (Warnbro — Minister for Tourism) [9.39 am]: I thank the member for Jandakot for this grievance and for his ongoing support of education and schools in his electorate. I am responding today on behalf of the Minister for Education and Training, who I know is aware of the member’s campaign for a gifted and talented program. I am going to stick to her response so that the member can have it directly.

The Member for Jandakot is a strong advocate for his local community and his local schools, and the minister appreciates his commitment to education. He has put up a strong argument to the minister since he wrote to her in September 2017. Gifted and talented programs are highly sought after. Academic, arts and languages programs are currently offered at 20 public secondary schools, including a fully selective academic school, an arts college, a regional school and an online program for country students.

Earlier this year, the minister asked the Department of Education to map out the gifted and talented programs currently offered at schools across the state. The member is right; a high proportion of these programs are based at schools in the inner metropolitan region. Most recently, a gifted and talented program was established in 2018 at Fremantle College; and, from the start of 2020, Bob Hawke College and Carine Senior High School will have gifted and talented programs.

When planning for a selective entrance program, the department considers a range of factors, including geographical location, proximity to transport options, availability of appropriate facilities, capacity to absorb students from outside the local intake area, availability of sufficient eligible students to maintain a viable program at new and existing host schools, and the school’s capacity to deliver a high-quality program.

The minister is aware of the demand for a gifted and talented program in Harrisdale and at other schools. The principal of Harrisdale Senior High School, Leila Bothams, outlined in the 2018 school report that having a gifted and talented program at her school was one of her aspirations. She said the school is ready and able to deliver the program. Her comments support the member for Jandakot’s comments that the program would give academically exceptional students an education option close to home so they do not have to travel outside the local area for a school that suits their needs.

All schools want the best for their students. They do not want children coming to school only to be bored, unengaged and unchallenged, and each child deserves a quality education. Parents, too, expect a school that will meet their child's needs, whether that student is high achieving or not. As a government, we know it is just as important to provide a great education for those students who are academically excelling, as it is for those students who need an extra helping hand. We know gifted and talented programs are reputable, they are well regarded, and places are highly sought after and extremely competitive.

I can advise that the decision on where and when a new gifted and talented program might open is made by the Minister for Education and Training with advice from the Department of Education. I can assure the member that the minister appreciates his advocacy on behalf of his community, she is aware of the petition he tabled last week, and she is listening.