



## GIFTED AND TALENTED STUDENTS SHORT-CHANGED AGAIN

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The latest budget cuts have wiped measures to support gifted children, only recently put in place after years of pleading by parents and educators for some help for these children. Initiatives supporting gifted and talented education, including funding for professional development delivered through the School Support Services contracts, were set up following recommendations made to the previous Government by a sector working party. Since 2001, advisers in gifted and talented education have worked with schools providing ongoing professional development and support across the country.

The 2009 budget has wiped funding for professional development delivered by gifted and talented education advisers. What is now certain is that many of our gifted and talented students are at risk of an inappropriate, unresponsive education because their teachers will not receive the ongoing professional development and support they need.

This defies logic, as the findings of a 2008 Education Review Office (ERO) report on gifted and talented education demonstrated that the majority of schools had not participated in appropriate professional development and, as a result, were not catering effectively for these students.

“This is a serious **blow** for teachers and other professionals who work with gifted and talented students,” according to Assoc Prof Tracy Riley of Massey University and chairperson of *giftEDnz The Professional Association for Gifted Education*. Ironically, the announcement comes just as teacher and parent groups throughout the country are gearing up for Gifted Awareness Week (15-22 June), designed to encourage schools to be more active in this field. All concerned now look to have a much harder battle on their hands.

“Without ongoing professional development and support how can teachers be expected to overcome these deficiencies in practice?” says Dr Riley. “How can the needs of these students ‘continue’ to be met when the ERO findings clearly indicate that they are not currently being met, except where schoolwide professional learning has taken place?”

“It is harmful and incorrect to assume gifted and talented students will make it on their own. It is equally wrong to believe that teachers, with little or no specific professional development in this specialist field, can effectively adapt the curriculum to meet the special needs of these students,” says Dr Riley. “Common sense tells us that well-trained and supported teachers will lead to better educated students.”

Rosemary Cathcart, REACH Education director and giftEDnz Board member, describes the move as “unbelievably short-sighted – the future once again looks bleak for gifted children.”

Principals and teachers are also concerned with a lack of resources, time and professional development and support to adequately meet the special needs of gifted and talented students. Similarly, parents frequently express their frustration at having to pick up the pieces for their gifted children who often endure daily boredom and emotional stress when placed in a class where there is no support for their special needs.

Deputy Chairperson, Louise Tapper, a University of Canterbury doctoral student and parent of gifted children, states, “We are in danger of pushing some of our brightest students towards underachievement. Gifted and talented students need teachers who understand them and know how to challenge them to achieve highly. If they are forced to work at a level that is below their abilities, they often make the decision that they will just not bother.”

“We must focus on getting these students what they need and deserve – an opportunity to do their best. Every child deserves the right to a high quality education that meets their individual needs. This can only be achieved with high quality, ongoing and specialised professional development and support,” concludes Dr Riley.