Perceptions, practices, and potential: An exploration of school choice for academically gifted students

Sherrol Gane

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Perceptions, practices, and potential:
An exploration of school choice for academically gifted students

Submitted by
Sherrol Gane

Thesis submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Education

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Date submitted: 02 February 2018
Statement of Authorship and Sources
This thesis contains no material that has been extracted in whole or in part from a thesis that I have submitted towards the award of any other degree or diploma in any other tertiary institution.

No other person's work has been used without due acknowledgement in the main text of the thesis.

All research procedures reported in the thesis received the approval of the relevant Ethics Committees.

Signed: [Redacted]

Dated: 02 February 2018
Acknowledgements
My gratitude is extended to Sydney Catholic Schools for providing the financial scholarship and time required for me to conduct my research.

I sincerely thank the students and parents for engaging with my study candidly and fairly, and the principals and teachers who were involved, for their insights and shared experiences that contributed so valuably.

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Finally, to my husband Phil for his firm but loving commitment and endless support and faith in me. His patience and love inspired self belief. This, with his own educational expertise, enabled me to share considerably my research in numerous discussions to which I am eternally grateful.
Abstract
This thesis explores the experiences academically gifted students and their families are having within a Catholic education system of schools and the impact that these experiences are having on the choice of future schooling. Parents are making the decision to commence their academically gifted child at a Catholic school and throughout the child’s schooling, choices are being considered as to whether to continue with Catholic schooling or seek an alternative. This Australian study investigates the interconnection between gifted education, school systems, school practices, families, and student experiences when deliberating the choice of school.

The literature review considers the place of gifted education in the wider field of school education and sets a context for considering the educational learning experiences of the academically gifted students in this study. The review considers: characteristics of academically gifted students, theories of human development, beliefs about giftedness and gifted education, Catholic school ethos, school leadership, pedagogical practices, and school choice. Case study data from 14 primary and secondary school students, including 55 interviews, surveys and extensive document investigation, are presented and analysed. Based on Gagné’s Differentiated Model of Giftedness and Talent (2008) two major themes are guiding this analysis: intrapersonal factors and environmental factors. Bronfenbrenner’s Ecological System Theory (1977) is used in bringing the findings together. Key strengths of the Catholic schooling system in supporting academically gifted students are detailed. These strengths are: the obvious Catholic identity and ethos of the schools; the pastoral and nurturing care exhibited; and, the Newman Gifted Program for students of high ability generally in the top 15% of the population.

Directions for future development are suggested. These directions are: ongoing professional learning for school leaders and classroom teachers around academic giftedness and gifted education; system resource support; and, making a clear distinction between the provision for students who are the top 15% of the population and students who are in or close to the top 1% of the population, based on a psychometric test. This research contributes to the literature about school choice, specifically for academically gifted students. The research also answers questions of why some academically gifted students are choosing to stay with the Catholic education system, and others are choosing to leave.
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Chapter 1: Introduction

Brooke Lumsden: Are we leaving our brightest children behind? As gifted students continue to disengage from our education system, parents are fighting an uphill battle just to have their children’s needs met. (Lumsden, 2017, para. 1)

There is a common misconception that academically gifted students will learn regardless of their classroom environment. This assumption is restrictive and it can be argued that to engage, challenge, excite and motivate academically gifted students, they require specifically adjusted educational learning experiences. The Australian culture of the ‘tall poppy syndrome’ is another barrier to the acceptance and support of gifted students (Gross, 2004). The pressure of societal norms and the desire for acceptance and equity can limit our perceptions of giftedness. True equality is the provision of different learning opportunities. As many notable scholars have written, “there is nothing more unequal than the equal treatment of unequal people”. From social justice and educational perspectives, there needs to be provision for those in greatest need. Therefore, identifying the marginalised, which includes the academically gifted, and providing them with access to an education that matches their capacity to learn (Munro, 2017) is essential.

The purpose of this research is to explore the experiences of academically gifted students and their families within a Catholic education system of schools, and the impact this experience has on the choice of future schooling. This Australian study is based on research that was conducted by the Catholic Education Office, Sydney, showing that students are choosing to leave Sydney Catholic primary schools at the end of Years 4 and 6 (Laughlin, 2010). Many of these students are leaving to attend schools that provide for gifted and talented students, such as government selective schools, and independent schools that offer gifted and talented education programs. The focus of this research is the school choice decision-making process by parents.

---

1 Due to a name change during the writing of this thesis, Catholic Education Office, Sydney will be referred to as The System.
of academically gifted students, and the interconnection between gifted education, school systems, school practices, families, and student experiences.

The school choice decision-making process is multifaceted and individualistic in nature. The research within this study examined this process through the following five themes: the beliefs about gifted education and giftedness, Catholic school ethos, school leadership, pedagogical practices, and school choice. Research has shown that within those identified as academically gifted, there is a profound distinction between the moderately gifted and the exceptionally gifted (Gross, 2004). This study acknowledges the needs of academically gifted students but will focus on the particular needs of the highly to exceptionally gifted. The students included in this study were in the top 1% of the Australian population, based on a psychometric test. This study of parents, students, and educators is significant, as it adds to the body of knowledge available to system and school leaders, to help them understand why many academically gifted students leave their current school and what would attract them to stay.

1.1 Who Are The Gifted?

1.1.1 Definition of giftedness and talent

Francoys Gagne’s Differentiated Model of Giftedness and Talent (DMGT) 2.0 is the most broadly accepted and used definition of giftedness and talent (Gagné, 1985, 2009a). His fundamental definition of giftedness and talent are as follows (Gagné, 2008, p. 1):

**Giftedness:** The potential to perform at a level significantly beyond what might be expected from one’s age-peers in any area of human ability.

**Talent:** An achievement at a level significantly beyond what might be expected from age-peers.

Gagné conceptualises the range of gifts as extensive and makes a clear distinction between giftedness and talent. Giftedness is innate and is a person’s natural ability, whereas talent is the achievement as a result of this ability (Gagné, 2008). It is the
catalysts that can develop or impede the growth of talent from the gift. Gagné places a considerable emphasis on the factor of chance, the genetic makeup of the family, and the fact that the social environment cannot be controlled. The psychologist, Atkinson (1978) suggests that human accomplishments depend upon luck and the “two crucial rolls of the dice... these are the accidents of birth and background” (p. 221). We cannot control our genetic makeup, nor the family and social environment we are raised in. These are two major impacts on the development of talent. For example, Don Bradman had an outstanding physical gift. As he was born in Australia his gift was developed into a cricketing talent. However, had he been born in America his gift may have developed into a baseball talent.

Gagné’s model highlights two important concepts (Rogers, 2002b). Firstly, “it is possible to be gifted but not talented” (p. 34). A person may have a natural ability or gift, that is potential, in one or more domains but through circumstances this ability is not realised as a measurable achievement. It is these circumstances that Gagné (2008) has called ‘catalysts’. Secondly, “it is not possible to be talented without being gifted” (Rogers, 2002b, p. 35). If a person is achieving or performing beyond expectation, then they have potential or a natural ability to begin with. No matter how hard a person works or is exposed to enriching opportunities, if the natural ability is not there to start with it cannot be developed.

Gagné’s definitions of giftedness and talent (2008) is detailed in his model in Figure 1.1. It shows the various domains of giftedness, and how natural abilities can be channelled into measurable talents depending on the impact of the catalysts and the chance factor.
Figure 1.1. Gagné’s differentiated model of giftedness and talent (DMGT) 2.0 (2008).
1.1.2 Definition of academically gifted

The process of identifying academically gifted students is multifaceted, including psychometric testing, characteristic categorisation and other standardised testing to create an overall profile. The identification of intellectual ability (as opposed to achievement) must be assessed using a psychometric instrument that is administered and interpreted by trained psychologists. Two commonly used psychometric tests are Stanford–Binet Intelligence Scales (SB5) and Wechsler Intelligence Scale for Children (WISC-IV). Schools within The System² are encouraged to use the results of the SB5 when identifying giftedness. Raw scores attained on these two tests cannot be compared because of their very different theoretical base.

All the students in this study have participated in a psychometric test and are in the top 1% (i.e. 99th percentile and greater) of the population. Smith and Nguyen-Hoan (2010) give a succinct summary of academic giftedness and demonstrate that percentile ranks are a clear way to compare scores not only between students, but also within the components of the test (Table 1.1). See Appendix A for a detailed description of giftedness categorisation, often termed “Ability Levels”, when referring to psychometric testing results (Smith & Nguyen-Hoan, 2010). It should be noted that the research Rogers (2015) presented in the report A Nation Empowered concludes that academic acceleration is an educational strategy that can cater for many more students than just the top 1%.

Table 1.1

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Ability Level</th>
<th>Percentile Rank</th>
<th>Possible Academic Interventions</th>
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<tbody>
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<td>High Ability</td>
<td>85th – 94th</td>
<td>Differentiate/cluster</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gifted Ability</td>
<td>95th – 99th</td>
<td>Group/extend</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Highly Gifted Ability</td>
<td>&gt;99th – 99.9th</td>
<td>Accelerate/group</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Exceptionally Gifted Ability</td>
<td>&gt;99.9th</td>
<td>Accelerate/extend/mentor</td>
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(Smith & Nguyen-Hoan, 2010)

² The System refers to Sydney Catholic Schools, which prior to 2016 was called Catholic Education Office, Sydney.
1.2  Context of Research

1.2.1  Personal context

The researcher has been employed by Sydney Catholic Schools for the past 15 years and has held various office-based and school-based roles over this time. She has a particular interest in Gifted Education and was confronted with the problem of academically gifted students leaving the Catholic system to alternative education systems. As Adviser Gifted Education K - 12, her main purpose was to provide leadership, advice and support to primary and secondary schools on contemporary issues, understandings and developments in curriculum, and pedagogical practices in Gifted Education.

1.2.2  Schooling options in New South Wales (NSW), Australia, for gifted and talented students

All schools in NSW must be registered with the NSW Education Standards Authority (NESA) and meet their mandatory requirements. Parents have four options when selecting a school for their child. The first option is the Department of Education (or government) schools which the Federal and State Governments predominantly fund. There are primary, Kindergarten to Year 6; and secondary, Year 7 to Year 12 schools. Students start school at around the age of five and complete thirteen years of schooling. Within the Department of Education schools, there are two main options for academically gifted students. For primary school students, Opportunity Classes are available for students in Years 5 and 6 at a number of schools throughout NSW. For secondary school students, academically selective high schools that are dedicated to catering for high-achieving students are an option. Selection to either of these possibilities is based on a ‘placement test’ that is administered by the NSW Department of Education. Additionally, there are schools that are ‘specialist’ secondary schools for those students with talents such as sport, music, and other creative arts.

The second option is the independent (or non-government) schools. These schools are autonomously governed and are either denominational or non-denominational.
Many offer highly sought after academic scholarships for high-performing students. The third option available to parents, is educating their child at home. This is called home-schooling and must be compliant to the NESA requirements.

The fourth option is the systemic Catholic schools which are part of a system that provides governance. The Catholic schools that are not part of the system are classified as independent schools. This fourth classification of school type, systemic Catholic schools, is the focus of this research.

1.2.3 Systemic Sydney Catholic Schools (‘The System’)

There are 172 Catholic schools in the Archdiocese of Sydney, with 152 of these affiliated with the system of schools administered by Sydney Catholic Schools. The remaining 20 are independently governed. Almost 75,000 students are enrolled in Sydney Catholic Schools and there are approximately 15,000 employees, including teaching and administrative staff. Prior to 2016, Sydney Catholic Schools was known as the Catholic Education Office, Sydney (CEO). Hereafter, in this study, Sydney Catholic Schools will be referred to as The System.

Through the Central Office and three Regional Offices, The System provides schools with many services and resources. It supports schools in helping to ensure every student receives a high quality Catholic education. Procedures such as the School Review and Improvement (SRI) (Catholic Education Office, 2006) and Cyclic Review, assist in this process. There have been two system strategic plans implemented during the research and development of this thesis. The first strategic improvement plan Building on Strength: Future Directions for Sydney Catholic Schools (Sydney Archdiocesan Catholic Schools Board & Catholic Education Office, 2010) set out a priority plan for the years 2011 to 2015. Within this plan, a clear direction for gifted education was specified. Key Area 2 Section 2.5 stated: “Increased enrolment, retention and sustainable provisions for gifted and talented students” (p. 17). Coupled with this plan was the document How Effective is our Catholic Education Office? (Catholic Education Office, 2010). This itemised a framework with indicators to assist in assessing the effectiveness of the support services The System provided
the schools, and ultimately the students. The ratings are specific about the needs of diverse learners.

The second strategic plan, *New Horizons, Inspiring Spirits and Minds* (Sydney Catholic Schools, 2015b), covers the three years 2016 to 2018. ‘Learning and Teaching’ is one of the five strategic priority areas identified in this plan and is the priority that has the most explicit links to gifted education. Within this priority, two Key Improvement areas relate specifically to gifted education. These areas are to “provide experiences of learning which engage, challenge, extend and empower students” and secondly, “enhance the provision of and support for students with diverse learning needs such as gifted and talented needs” (pp. 10 - 11). Each school’s strategic plan and annual improvement plans are expected to align with The System’s strategic improvement plan. The System’s Vision and Mission are also an underlying premise of these documents (as discussed in detail in Chapter 7).

Enrolment information and priority for enrolment at a school within The System is outlined clearly in The System’s ‘Enrolment Policy’ (Catholic Education Office, 2011a). Each school has Religious Education and Wellbeing programs, a variety of curriculum options, and recognises the diversity of learners such as LBOTE students (Language background other than English), and students with learning disabilities and special needs. The System is committed to encouraging parents to be actively involved in their children’s education, and schools are expected to establish and support a formal Parent Association.

1.2.4 Gifted education within The System

The System’s Diverse Learning Team manages gifted education initiatives. In addition to this team, The System has a Gifted Education Committee consisting of personnel from each of the three regions that make up The System. The aim of this committee is primarily to respond to the educational needs of students identified as academically gifted. In doing so, advice is provided and recommendations are made. A series of documents have been developed which support and guide principals and schools in implementing gifted education strategies and programs.
1.3 The Research Issue

Despite all the planned processes and documentation, there are academically gifted students attending schools within The System who are disengaged or becoming disengaged in their learning experiences and are not achieving to their potential (Laughlin, 2011). The System, as stated in The Mission, is committed to “providing a stimulating and challenging curriculum which links faith and culture” (Sydney Catholic Schools, 2015b, p. 4). The Archbishop clearly acknowledges right of all children to have access to an educational environment that, “nurtures students’ love of learning through Catholic pedagogy that fosters the development of the intellect, moral knowledge, understanding and reasoning” (Catholic Education Office, 2015a, p. 2). Academically gifted students and their parents justifiably expect a Catholic education that meets their specific and individual learning needs.

1.3.1 Academically gifted students within The System

Within The System there are some major considerations regarding academically gifted students leaving The System’s schools.

Each year, approximately 500 students leave schools within The System at the end of Year 4 (Laughlin, 2010). This figure includes boys who leave to enrol in single-sex boys’ independent schools, which begin at Year 5. However, a considerable number of the 500 students left at the end of Year 4 to attend government schools that had Opportunity Classes. Unfortunately, the data collected at the time was not granular enough, and it is only from anecdotal information that it was deduced by Laughlin that a ‘considerable number’ left to attend the Opportunity Class. The NSW Department of Education, that is public or government schools, has implemented Opportunity Classes in selected primary schools across the state. These are “specialist classes for academically gifted students in Years 5 and 6, who are selected from a standardised placement test” (Laughlin, 2010).

At the end of 2006, 359 students left schools in The System to attend Government secondary schools. Of the 359 students, 27% had gained entry to a selective
secondary school and approximately 11% enrolled in dedicated Sport or Performing Arts schools (Laughlin, 2010).

The Regional Director, in association with the leadership team, discern how the resources of the Region are best distributed and allocated. The Central Office writes policy and the three Regional offices provide services to the schools. It is the Regional Adviser's role to deliver and support professional learning, and guidance to the schools. Each Region has the autonomy, to some degree, to provide these services.

Principals and their leadership teams generally require direction and advice from The System for an efficient approach to gifted identification. This process should be one that is common to all schools within The System and which can be aligned to the school's Annual Improvement Plan and The System's Strategic Plan. The curriculum delivered should be challenging and rigorous so students want to stay at schools within The System. If The System meets the needs of these students, parents will make the decision to leave their academically gifted child at a systemic Catholic school.

It is the practice within The System that parents and the school work together to meet the needs of their sons and daughters. In reality, as far as meeting the needs of giftedness, some parents question the ability of The System to do so. Parents of primary age children have a strong presence in the school, while parents of secondary age students generally don't have the same physical presence, but they are not afraid to ask tough questions either.

1.3.2 Academically gifted students who have left The System

When contemplating the research issue for this study the researcher had in mind examples of two students who after being in a Catholic systemic school left to attend a government school. Furthermore, it is an academically selective school. Students complete a comprehensive application form that is to be signed by the student’s
current principal, and a series of entrance tests in English, mathematics and general ability.

One of these students, previously attended a coeducational Catholic secondary school within The System from Year 7 to Year 10. When she was in Year 5 she underwent psychometric testing (99.0). Her parents instigated this testing to better understand her and her learning needs. She is self-motivated, she has always set goals, “pushes herself” and is self-critical. She learns from her mistakes and then pushes herself even further. She has definite ideas about what she wants to achieve and about planning personal future experiences, such as completing some of her university qualification overseas. Her Catholic school experience was very favourable, and she was offered many rich and varying opportunities. She was in the challenge class from Year 7 to Year 10. When she was in Year 9, she completed Year 10 mathematics, so for her the four-year mathematics course was compacted into three. She excelled at the Catholic school. She won academic awards and appreciated the religious dimension of the College. During her final year at the Catholic school (Year 10), she seriously investigated options for senior secondary schooling. She applied for and was accepted to the local government selective secondary school. She had a difficult decision to make. She attended the information sessions and was interviewed by the principal at the selective school. She deemed that she would have a better chance of achieving a higher university entrance score at the selective school. She believes that being in classes of students who all want to achieve high scores and mixing with like-minded people is an advantage. The selective secondary school has suited her. She enjoys being in a school where all students are of like mind and where she is constantly challenged. She enjoyed her time at the Catholic school and the school could not have done any more for her in accommodating her learning needs. The selective school will give her every chance of achieving the best she can, she believes.

The second student attended a coeducational Catholic primary school and now attends a government selective secondary school. He is stubborn, argumentative, believes he is always right, is very literal in his actions and thinking, and he does not show empathy to others. His primary school experience was quite favourable. When
he was in Year 2 the process of considering acceleration started. After consultation with him, his parents, and classroom teachers, he was assessed (>99.9) and it was decided that he would be accelerated from Year 2 to Year 3. The primary school provided opportunities both at the school and regional level. Most of these opportunities involved him being withdrawn from class. He did not like being taken out of class because he always felt he was missing out on something. As his older brother’s experience at the selective school was positive, he was convinced that this was the school for him. He enjoys being in a school where all students are of like mind and believes it has not bothered anyone that he is a year younger. In Year 10 he completed the Higher School Certificate for Information Processes and Technology. Even though he has an intense curiosity for technology, he is not interested in social media and neither are his friends. His mother would have preferred for all her children to attend a Catholic school but the Catholic options didn’t meet the needs of three of her five children.

1.4 Defining the Research Problem

Research conducted by The System (Laughlin, 2010) shows significant numbers of students are leaving The System’s primary schools at the end of Years 4 and 6. Many of these students are leaving to attend schools that provide for gifted and talented students, such as state selective schools, and independent schools that offer gifted and talented education programs. The System schools are having difficulty maintaining their enrolment and retention of academically gifted students, particularly in Years 4, 6, and 10 (Laughlin, 2010, 2011). The two examples highlighted in section 1.3.2 support the necessity to further explore and investigate why academically gifted students are choosing to leave The System.

1.5 The Research Purpose

The purpose of this research is to explore the experiences of academically gifted students (restricted to the top 1% of the population) and their families within a Catholic education system of schools, and the impact this has on the choice of future schooling.
1.6 The Research Question

The main research question and sub-questions are as follows:

Why are parents of academically gifted children choosing to stay or leave a Catholic schooling system?

1. What personal and contextual factors do parents consider in making a decision about the schooling of their academically gifted child?

2. To what extent does the child’s experience at their current school link to the choice of future schooling?

3. What is the alignment between the parent’s perception of their child’s school experience and what the school believes they are offering?

1.7 The Significance of the Research

Providing meaningful and authentic educational experiences for students is the core business for educational systems, schools and educators. Educational researchers and authors are advocating that these experiences reflect the knowledge and skills students require (Fullan & Quinn, 2016; Hattie, 2012; Timperley, 2011). Furthermore, the professional learning for classroom teachers should specifically match the knowledge and skills required to meet the needs of these students so there is a positive impact on student learning and engagement (DuFour, DuFour, Eaker, & Many, 2010; Timperley, 2008). However, The System is concerned about the number of academically gifted students choosing to leave The System. The case studies of students, parents and educators are significant, as they add to the body of knowledge for system and school leaders in understanding why these students leave and what would entice them to stay. This study also aims to appreciate why some of these academically gifted students choose to stay with schools within The System. The purpose of the research is to contribute to the literature about school choice, but more specifically, for academically gifted students who start their schooling in a school within The System, and then at traditional transition times (at the end of Year 4 or 6 or 10) make a decision to stay or leave the school.
1.8  Overview of this Thesis

This thesis is presented in nine chapters. The first chapter has detailed the context, purpose and research questions. Chapter 2 reviews the literature and is divided into seven sections. The research method is described in Chapter 3. Chapter 4 is the connection between the research method explored in Chapter 3 and the findings later unpacked in Chapters 5, 6, and 7, and as such Chapter 4 is a ‘narrative chapter’ prior to the explicit data findings chapters. The findings of this thesis are presented in three chapters in order to highlight aspects of Gagné’s model of giftedness and talent: individual, influence and ideology. Chapter 5 discusses the data gathered from the 55 semi-structured interviews, with the title of this chapter being ‘Individuals’. Chapter 6 concentrates on quantitative data obtained from the semi-structured interviews. The findings in Chapter 6 are about the ‘influences’ that contribute to the inherent understanding of gifted education; hence, Chapter 6 is titled ‘Influences’. Chapter 7 discusses The System and school documents relevant to gifted education, and teaching and learning pedagogies. The central point of analysis is the ‘ideology’ of these documents and the actual and/or perceived delivery of gifted education programs, provisions, and structures. Therefore, the title of Chapter 7 is ‘Ideologies’. The purpose of Chapter 8 is to synthesise and analyse the findings presented from the three data chapters, with consideration to the experience of families and their school decision-making. Chapter 9 will respond to the research question, outline, discuss and present the areas of strength, areas of challenge, recommendations, and methodological limitations of this research. The directions for further research and final thoughts will conclude this research.
Chapter 2: Literature Review

Albert Einstein: Everybody is a genius. But if you judge a fish by its ability to climb a tree, it will live its whole life believing that it is stupid. (Kelly, 2004, p. 80)

The purpose of this thesis is to explore the factors that influence the decision-making process of school choice for academically gifted students within a Catholic education system of schools. The parents within this case study have chosen a Catholic school and therefore, the research investigates the factors that influence their decision to stay or leave systemic Catholic schools.

The themes considered in this literature review are categorised into seven sections. Firstly, the characteristics of academically gifted students, then secondly, theories of human development with an emphasis on Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Theory model. Thirdly, beliefs about giftedness and gifted education from the perspective of the educator, the student and the parent are examined. Fourthly, is an investigation of the research into Catholic school ethos. Defining the word ‘ethos’ is problematic as ethos is a nebulous notion, and as such many theorists have written about this term. Fifthly is a section about school leadership and therefore, reviews the research concerning the leadership of gifted education. Sixthly, this section focuses on pedagogical practices and explores the following five areas: ability grouping, acceleration, curriculum approaches, personalised learning, and virtual and/or physical spaces. Seventhly and finally, this section examines the research about school choice, especially in Australia. The research on school choice for parents who have children who are academically gifted, is limited. There is a large body of research and literature about decision-making, but it is generally not based in an educational context.

2.1 Characteristics of Academically Gifted Students

Characteristics of the academically gifted can be confused with other social and emotional behaviours. At times, these characteristics can be misdiagnosed as a
disability. For one child it can be obvious they have exceptional gifts or talents, but at the same time another child can be equally gifted but may mask or hide their talents. A number of reasons could explain this, such as anxiety, poor self-esteem, or frustration at not being stimulated or challenged (Hannell, 2006). Gifted students cannot be categorised together as one group. Consequently educational provisions must respond to the individual’s needs, that is, not only that the student is academically gifted but also consider the level of giftedness (Education and Training Committee, 2012; Gross, 2001; Ruf, 2009).

Experts in identifying giftedness (Colangelo, Assouline, & Gross, 2004a; Gross, Macleod, & Pretorius, 2001; Vialle & Rogers, 2009) have written checklists to assist parents, educators, and psychologists to understand and recognise the highly complex needs of these children. A comprehensive list (Gross et al., 2001) was used in this study when conducting the interviews, to consider the particular traits of the students in this study. This list described characteristics with a positive or negative behavioural perspective, and the interviewees were able to cite evidence for each characteristic (see Appendix B for a comprehensive characteristic checklist). For example:

- Positive: long attention span; Negative: dislikes interruptions and disruptive routines
- Positive: independent; Negative: avoids discussions and group work, dislikes working with others, and is uncooperative
- Positive: alert and subtle sense of humour; Negative: may use humour at others’ expense

2.1.1 Levels of giftedness and specific characteristics

It is common practice to refer to levels of giftedness (Gross, 2005; Ruf, 2009; Smith & Nguyen-Hoan, 2010). These levels are based on an intelligence quotient (IQ), as determined by psychometric testing. This study focuses on the levels of giftedness that are described by Gross as “highly”, “exceptionally” and “profoundly gifted” (2005, p. 36), by Ruf as “level four gifted” and “level five gifted” (2009, p. 51), and by
Smith and Nguyen-Hoan as “highly gifted ability” and “exceptionally gifted ability” (2010) (see Appendix A).

In the early years of a child’s development it is generally the parents who identify different behavioural characteristics as compared to other children. Parents who are unfamiliar with giftedness can be confused and concerned about this behaviour. Extraordinarily gifted children tend to display an early development of speech, reading, basic numeracy concepts, physical balance and movement, and questioning fantasy ideas such as Santa Claus (Gross, 2006; Ruf, 2009). The Senate inquiry into the education of gifted and talented children (Senate Employment Workplace Relations Small Business and Education References Committee, 2001) listed 23 characteristics that gifted children may exhibit (see Appendix C). However, it is important to note that “not all children display all characteristics and there will be a range among children in respect to each characteristic” (p. 11).

2.1.2 Educational responses for students who identified in the top 1% of the population

There is a range of education responses for academically gifted students and the suitable approach will differ greatly between the moderately gifted and the profoundly gifted (Senate Employment Workplace Relations Small Business and Education References Committee, 2001). Further, “identification procedures and interventions which are designed for use with moderately gifted students are often inappropriate for use with extremely gifted students” (Gross, 2001, p. 16). Gross (2005) makes some suggestions of academic interventions for students who are identified in the top 1% of the population, which are: fast paced learning, ability grouping, acceleration options (either single grade or specific subject) and challenging academic enriching subjects, for example, Latin. Gross continues by having suggestions for students who are identified in the top 0.1% of the population, which are: highly individualised programs, ability grouping, radical acceleration (two or more grade skips), early admission to school, early admission to university, special programs, and special counselling services.
When an education system truly understands the needs of academically gifted students, the greater evidence there is of grouping students determined by their ability and the implementation and acceptance of acceleration (VanTassel-Baska, 1992). Gross (2009), when specifically referring to highly academically gifted children and adolescents, discusses three research based advantages of grouping by ability. Firstly, the academic achievement of students who are placed in an ability grouped class is consistently and significantly higher than that of peers who are of the same academic ability and are educated in a mixed ability class (Kulik & Kulik, 1992). Secondly, the quality of academic achievement is related to the intensity and ‘full-time’ access to the academic ability group as opposed to ‘part-time’ access. Students who were placed permanently in an ability group class performed significantly better, compared to students of the same academic ability who participated in gifted programs spasmodically (Delcourt, 2003). Thirdly, students who are placed in an academically grouped class have a more positive attitude about learning and have more realistic expectations about their own ability compared to students of the same ability in a mixed ability class. Students who are in an academic ability group are more willing and confident to share their learning and work collaboratively (Delcourt, 2003; Gross, 2006).

Gross (2009) continued by discussing research based advantages of acceleration. “Acceleration is, quite simply, the most effective curriculum intervention for gifted children and adolescents” (p. 130). There are 18 types of acceleration (Colangelo, Assouline, & Gross, 2004b), (see Appendix D for the list of 18 types) so a deep understanding of the various ways to accelerate is required by educators. Following the specific guidelines in the Iowa Acceleration Scale (Assouline, Colangelo, Lupkowski-Shoplik, Lipscombe, & Forstadt, 2009) is highly recommended.

In summary, identified academically gifted students are not a homogeneous group. Characteristics these students display vary depending on their level of giftedness, therefore the educational experience and intervention that these students require also differs. Managing the implementation of a suitable curriculum for students who have high academic potential can be categorised into three categories,
individualisation, grouping by ability, and acceleration, and a combination of these practices (Rogers, 2002b).

2.2 Theories of Human Development

Over many years, psychologists have developed theories and models to explain and describe the stages of human development. Giftedness is integrally connected to human development because it is an example of atypical (advanced) development. As the focus of this study is about understanding the complexities of school choice that parents have in meeting the specific needs of their academically gifted children, human development theories and models were examined. There are a number of different ways in which psychological and physical development is approached and studied in order to make sense of everyday lives of people (Rogoff, 2003). Developmental theories cover a range of fields such as, educational and cognitive psychology, ecological and cultural psychology, and child development. Erikson (1964), Havighurst (1953), Piaget (1976), Bronfenbrenner (1977), Vygotsky (1978) and others have made valuable contributions to this area of study about the stages of human development (Gallahue, Omun, & Goodway, 2012).

2.2.1 Importance of human development theories

Originally the scientific study of human development was only concerned with the developmental stages of infants and children but has now expanded to include the human development over the entire lifespan, incorporating adolescent and adult development, and aging. This branch of psychology studies the interactions of heredity or nature influences, and environmental or nurture influences (Thomas, 1999). An individual’s exposure to cultural influences and their surroundings will affect how that person develops. Thomas (1999) adds that theorists take into account an individual’s personality type and physical stature which affects their motivation, capacities and abilities. Other influences such as religion, and chance or fate can be significant.
Three goals of developmental psychology are to define, then justify and ultimately to maximise human development. Even though there are normal or usual human developmental stages most people will follow, no two people will be exactly the same (Baltes, Reese, & Lipsitt, 1980). It is easier to define or describe behaviour than to justify or explain it. This concept is the basis of the formation of models and theories that assist in the understanding of human behaviour, so as to apply a theory in a practical situation to improve or enhance an individual’s development (McLeod, 2017). Thus, a human development perspective is critically connected to issues of school practice, and school choice.

2.2.2 Human development theories used in this research

The two human development theories used in this research are Bronfenbrenner’s Ecological System Theory (Bronfenbrenner, 1979) and Gagné’s Differentiated Model of Giftedness and Talent (Gagné, 2013). Bronfenbrenner’s theory provides context to understanding the complexity of school choice in meeting the specific needs of academically gifted children. The representation of the choice as an ecological system illustrates those potential influences on decisions or happenings that can arise from many different sources. The ecological theory “emphasises the nurturing of a child’s development” (Özdoğan, 2011, p. 301) and the interaction with significant people in the child’s life such as parents, siblings, teachers and peers. A variety of environmental factors are considered, in particular, the home, school, church, and the cultural neighbourhood. Gagné (1995) specifically focuses on the human development of a gifted person. Defining and understanding, and therefore assisting, as parents, educators and psychologists, the developmental stages and the recognition of the transference of natural abilities to measurable gifts, is the emphasis of Gagné’s model (1995).

*Urie Bronfenbrenner: Ecological Systems Theory*

Bronfenbrenner first proposed an ecological theory in the 1970s, with modifications being made until his death (Rosa & Tudge, 2013). He expanded his theory which became a biological theory based on a person-process-context-time model (Bronfenbrenner, 2005). With the individual at the centre, Bronfenbrenner’s theory
emphasises the complex relations between several “settings in which children and their families are directly and indirectly involved” (Rogoff, 2003, p. 48) all of which influence the development of a person. Bronfenbrenner studied human development as a function of the individual’s interpretation of environmental settings and the interaction with social, cultural, and historical situations (Gallahue et al., 2012).

Bronfenbrenner compared his ecological system to a Russian nesting doll, that is each system fits inside the next system (Rogoff, 2003). The systems are categorised into the following layers (Bronfenbrenner, 1979):

1. **Microsystem**: direct environment surrounding the individual (for example, home, school)
2. **Mesosystem**: how relationships connect to the microsystem (for example, siblings, peers)
3. **Exosystem**: the larger social system, where the individual plays no role (for example, church, interest clubs)
4. ** Macrosystem**: cultural values, customs and laws (for example, religion, educational systems)
5. **Chronosystem**: chronological nature of life events (for example, loss of a parent)

**Francoys Gagné: Differentiated Model of Giftedness and Talent (DMGT) 2.0**

The field of gifted education has developed its own language (Gagné, 1995). As with human development theories, many theorists such as Tannenbaum (1986), Feldhusen (1986) and Renzulli (1984), have formulated models to understand giftedness. As discussed in Chapter 1, this study will use the language from Gagné’s Differentiated Model of Giftedness and Talent (2008) (see Figure 1.1). Gagné first developed his model in 1985 and has continued to evolve the model to the current 2008 version (Gagné, 2013). Gagné explicitly includes the factor of ‘chance’ and recognises the heredity, environmental, and person influences as ‘catalysts’. It is a combination of the chance factor and the catalysts that transform natural abilities or gifts, to the development of measurable exceptional competencies or talent (2008).
Gagné (2013) has further expanded on his model to include “biological underpinnings of natural abilities and personal characteristics” (p. 5). The purpose is to explain further the significant impact of personal characteristics on talent development. The proposed model is called Developmental Model for Natural Abilities (DMNA) and leads into the Natural Abilities. The new version, Gagné’s Expanded Model of Talent Development (EMTD) (2013), is shown in Figure 2.1.

![Figure 2.1. Gagné’s expanded model of talent development (EMTD) (2013).](image)

### 2.3 Beliefs About Giftedness and Gifted Education

It is essential to consider what determines educators’ beliefs about giftedness and gifted education. VanTassel-Baska (2007) states that a definition must be explored because theorists do not seem to be able to agree on a definition. Educators’ beliefs determine how they approach the teaching of gifted students, which in turn has an impact on the experiences of gifted students (Reis, 2006). The students’ beliefs about giftedness and gifted education are also significant and have been shown to affect their engagement in learning and their experiences of learning (Gross, 2004). Predictably, parents’ beliefs about giftedness and gifted education have also been shown to influence students’ educational experiences (Rogers, 2002b). Hence, the beliefs of key stakeholders may be an important consideration impacting on the implementation of gifted education strategies in schools.
2.3.1 Educators’ beliefs about giftedness and gifted education

“The beliefs teachers hold influence their perceptions and judgments, which in turn, affect their behavior in the classroom” (Megay-Nespoli, 2001, p. 178). A number of factors have been shown to influence educators’ beliefs about giftedness and gifted education. These include pre-service training in gifted education (Bangel, Moon, & Capobianco, 2010; Carrington & Bailey, 2000; Megay-Nespoli, 2001); ongoing professional learning (Adams & Pierce, 2004; Chan & Smith, 1998; Ely, 2010; Geake & Gross, 2008; Hansen & Feldhusen, 1994; Lassig, 2009; McCoach & Siegle, 2007; Sisk, 2009); understanding the definition of giftedness (Chan & Smith, 1998; Geake & Gross, 2008; Grubb, 2008; Lassig, 2009; Tirri, Tallent-Runnels, Adams, Yuen, & Lau, 2002); perceptions of self as gifted (McCoach & Siegle, 2007; McHatten, Boyer, Shaunessy, Terry, & Farmer, 2010); availability of resourcing requirements for implementing gifted education, which includes instructional resources, time and funds (Jolly & Kettler, 2008); and school culture (Lassig, 2009; Robinson & Moon, 2003). Each of these factors will be discussed in detail.

Pre-service training in gifted education

At the time of investigation there appears to be little consistency across tertiary institutions in the delivery of education to teachers. There is not a set of essential criteria and experiences supported by research which should be mandated in the training of teachers (Hattie, 2009). However, there is research that supports the inclusion of instruction about gifted education in pre-service training as having an effect on classroom teacher beliefs about the understanding of gifted students and meeting their needs. An Australian survey of 1,470 undergraduates concluded that gifted education should be embedded in the pre-service program to challenge the preconceptions and attitudes which teachers bring from their own schooling experience (Carrington & Bailey, 2000). In support of this, a study by Bangel et al. (2010) involving 12 undergraduate students where an intervention model was developed and implemented, showed they had an increased awareness of the needs and characteristics of gifted students. This is consistent with a 15-week study that involved 64 pre-service teachers being divided into two groups and participating in two different workshops (Megay-Nespoli, 2001). The first group was introduced to the idea of the nature and needs of academically gifted learners and was provided
with strategies, including differentiating the curriculum and materials known to be helpful in educating these learners. The control (second) group addressed other topics such as parent-teacher interviews and classroom management techniques, but did not discuss differentiating instruction or the needs of academically gifted learners. Results of pre-tests and post-tests, surveys, and interviews revealed several significant differences between the two groups. The control group spent more time with the remedial learners, while the first group spent more time with the advanced learners. It was noted, however, that the control group was aware of student differences but did not know what to do about it. Prior to the intervention both groups held a moderately positive attitude toward academically gifted learners. Interestingly, there was a positive change in attitude toward advanced learners and differentiation strategies for the first group, which improved their confidence in providing the necessary learning experience for the gifted students. This suggests the importance of pre-service training, including targeted instruction about the nature and needs of gifted students.

**Ongoing professional learning**

An inadequately educated classroom teacher has the potential to contribute to negative associations with giftedness through their actions and inactions with gifted students (Ely, 2010). There is growing evidence of the correlation between the classroom teachers’ perceptions of gifted students and their level of teacher training regarding giftedness or diversity (Berlin, 2009). An Australian study of 126 primary school teachers (Lassig, 2009) explored the attitudes of classroom teachers towards academically gifted students, so that effective training to improve education for gifted students could be implemented. The study showed that many classroom teachers were supportive of the need for professional learning regarding gifted education. More notably though, is the evidence that teachers who had received professional learning in gifted education demonstrated more favourable attitudes towards gifted students and gifted education. Similarly, a study of 377 primary and secondary teachers from England, Scotland and Australia showed that classroom teachers’ unconscious negative attitudes can be reduced through professional learning whereby teachers increase their awareness of the characteristics of gifted students and their learning needs (Geake & Gross, 2008). A further three studies
(Adams & Pierce, 2004; Chan & Smith, 1998; Hansen & Feldhusen, 1994) agree strongly with these findings that professional learning modifies or changes classroom teacher attitudes towards gifted students, which translates into positive actions in the classroom. Hence, research into educators’ attitudes towards gifted students strongly suggests the importance of teacher education about the needs of gifted learners.

**Understanding the definitions of giftedness**

Many of the studies which linked professional training to positive attitudes towards giftedness and gifted education, also linked as a significant factor the understanding and awareness of the characteristics and needs of these students. Classroom teachers have relatively less knowledge of gifted students’ personality and social characteristics than they do of the general population (Chan & Smith, 1998; Lassig, 2009). Negative attitudes can be reduced as classroom teachers become more familiar with the characteristics of gifted students and their learning needs (Geake & Gross, 2008). An Australian case study of five children and their families concluded that the most limiting factor on the provision and development of services was the existence of misunderstandings about giftedness. Teacher knowledge as well as teacher beliefs, influenced the quality and provision of appropriate strategies and practices when catering for these students (Grubb, 2008).

**Perceptions of self as gifted**

While research provides conclusive evidence of the positive impact of professional learning on classroom teachers’ approaches to gifted students, teachers’ understandings of gifted students, developed through their own experiences of being gifted, were less conclusive. McCoach and Siegle (2007) investigated attitudes of teachers who perceive themselves as gifted, finding that they were not any more empathetic to the needs of gifted students than those who do not. As well as this, classroom teachers who had received training in gifted education held higher perceptions of themselves as gifted, which was unrelated to their attitudes towards gifted education. McCoach and Siegle acknowledge that this is disturbing evidence and suggest further study is required to ‘explore the reasons’. A later study of 61
principals in the United States of America (USA), found there was a discrepancy between what the participants perceive they know and what they actually know (McHatten et al., 2010). Again, this is a concern as it may affect the appropriateness of the formation of beliefs, which in turn may impact on the provisions for gifted students.

The resourcing of gifted education
Jolly and Kettler (2008) conducted a meta-analysis of 725 articles from three American journals over a ten-year period. These articles were widely contributed to by researchers in the area of gifted education. This meta-analysis was to determine the growth of the knowledge base in gifted education following the USA Department of Education’s report, *National Excellence: A Case for Developing America’s Talent* (Ross, 1993). One of the findings was that there is little funding for research in gifted education. The impact of this limited funding extends to resourcing for specialised teachers, ongoing professional learning, and providing specific opportunities for gifted students. Often, requirements for gifted education can be a low priority when schools are allocating resources within budgets, especially if provision for gifted education is not mandated or part of compliance at a system or district level (Enersen, 2003; Matthews & Kitchen, 2007; McHatten et al., 2010; Sisk, 2009; Wiskow, Fowler, & Christopher, 2011). Enersen (2003) explored an American state’s ‘4 phase blueprint’ in mandating gifted education. The case study clearly states the necessity of resourcing to embed, and therefore maintain the continuity in providing for, and educating, gifted students.

The impact of school climate on gifted education
The school culture or climate is an integral component in establishing and developing beliefs about pedagogical issues. Sisk (2009) talks about a belief system being needed within the school culture as, without it, the classroom teacher cannot ‘go it alone’. This school climate has been shown to be an influence on teachers’ attitudes and beliefs, which in turn affects teachers’ performance and their adoption and implementation of strategies (Lassig, 2009; Matthews & Kitchen, 2007). Lassig’s survey showed that by creating a school culture that prioritises gifted education, the recognition and ability to provide for gifted students is improved. Similarly, a
national study in the USA covering 34 states focused on the issue of advocacy (Robinson & Moon, 2003). Advocacy for gifted education is a continual process that contributes to policy-making and, therefore, the implementation of programs. This leads to building a school climate that supports the diverse needs of students. Furthermore, an international study (Campbell & Verna, 2007) that investigated parental practices related to student achievement, indicated that when an academic home climate is aligned with the school’s academic climate it generates positive behaviours, attitudes and beliefs which lead to students having higher levels of achievement.

2.3.2 Students’ beliefs about giftedness and gifted education

A number of factors have been shown to influence students’ beliefs about giftedness and gifted education. These include factors about the student’s personal life, such as provisions and opportunities made available to the student (Douglas, 2004; Grubb, 2008; Peterson, 2009; Peterson, Duncan, & Canady, 2009). They also include factors about understanding self, self-efficacy, work ethic and motivation (Douglas, 2004; Garrett & Moltzen, 2011; Moon, Swift, & Shallenberger, 2002; Preckel, Götz, & Frenzel, 2010; Sisk, 2009; Vialle, Heaven, & Ciarrochi, 2007). Finally, factors relating to their educational experience, including relationships with teachers and peers, will be discussed (Adams-Byers, Whitsell, & Moon, 2004; Berlin, 2009; Douglas, 2004; Ely, 2010; Gentry & Springer, 2002; Grubb, 2008; Hertberg-Davis & Callahan, 2008; Matthews & Kitchen, 2007; Plunkett, 2009; Preckel et al., 2010; Shields, 2002; Vialle et al., 2007; Yoo & Moon, 2006). The following sections will provide an in-depth examination of the research about these different factors.

Students’ personal life

The Differentiated Model of Giftedness and Talent (DMGT) 2.0 developed by Françoys Gagné (2008) has the factor of ‘chance’ as an influence for gifts being developed into talents. The ‘roll of the dice’, as described by Atkinson (1978) in which the family and social environment a person is raised, impacts on the opportunities and provisions that are made available. In her Australian case study of young children, Grubb (2008) identified a difference in the responsibility of a range of parents when
seeking information and/or assistance for their child. The level of knowledge, expertise and understanding of giftedness of those responsible for the child’s development, that is, parent and preschool teacher, significantly impacted on the ‘lived experiences’ for the gifted child. A survey that Douglas (2004) implemented in America for 23 students from 7th grade who had been accelerated, initiated discussion between parents and their children. As the students took the survey home for their parents to complete, it stimulated conversations which previously had not taken place. This increased the understanding of and empathy towards giftedness for both the parents and children. On the other hand, an American 11-year longitudinal study of 59 identified gifted students indicated that even though students may experience negative events almost without exception, they maintained high achievement (Peterson et al., 2009).

*Students’ perception of themselves, self efficacy, work ethic, and motivation*

Even though there are a number of differences in these studies (Douglas, 2004; Garrett & Moltzen, 2011; Gross, 2006; Moon et al., 2002; Sisk, 2009; Vialle et al., 2007), it is interesting to note that beliefs about giftedness are linked to opportunity and chance, as well as knowledge. Gross’ (2006) in-depth Australian longitudinal study of 15 children, supports this idea. Given different opportunities, the ‘subjects’ had varying degrees of success with their lives, both personally and academically. Sisk (2009) suggests “helping gifted students understand and accept their intensities, their perfectionism, and their need to seek balance in their lives” (p. 270) needs to be addressed. She implores classroom teachers to meet the gifted student’s academic needs and importantly, to meet their emotional needs as well. There are studies that support Sisk’s view. Firstly, a descriptive case study of 24 students from 4th and 5th grade concluded that individual and group counselling should be offered, as well as educational programming to facilitate social and emotional development (Moon et al., 2002). Secondly, a qualitative New Zealand study of 32 adolescent gifted writers acknowledged that “their primary motivation to write, came from within” (Garrett & Moltzen, 2011, p. 177). These students felt emotionally confident to self-nominate for a writing program. Thirdly, an Australian study concluded that gifted students may be at risk of developing psychosocial issues and should undergo training in social skills to assist them with strategies to cope better with stress, and
nurturing friendships. The gifted students in this study reported feeling sadder and more alone compared to their peers (Vialle et al., 2007). Fourthly, Douglas (2004) surveyed students pre- and post-interventions that were implemented over a school year to a group of 23 accelerated students from 7th grade. He concluded that after the interventions, students increased their understanding of themselves as a learner. All four studies suggest the relevance of students having an understanding of themselves, both academically and personally, as being critical to their achievement.

2.3.3 Parent’s beliefs about giftedness and gifted education

There is limited research regarding parents’ beliefs about giftedness and gifted education. In terms of beliefs about gifted education, one study of 16 mothers identified that these parents believed it was important for educators to be trained in gifted education, as well as be able to apply this knowledge to classroom practice. This study also showed that parent beliefs about gifted education included the belief that parents and teachers need to work together to support gifted students in their learning. These mothers indicate that they would appreciate the opportunity to belong to a support group which provides information and workshops in order to work in partnership with the school to meet the needs of their children (Duquette, Orders, Fullarton, & Robertson-Grewal, 2011).

A longitudinal study conducted in New Zealand surveyed 88 adults who had been placed in an advanced class in secondary school (Perrone, Wright, Ksiazak, Crane, & Vannatter, 2010). The participants were followed up after 20 years and were asked about their views concerning gifted education at a time when many had become parents. The majority described their academic and interpersonal experiences in advanced classes as positive, and indicated they would support their children being placed in advanced classes. This suggests that parents who have a positive gifted education experience in school themselves, tend to hold positive beliefs about the value of gifted educational provisions for their children. This study also found that this cohort of parents had a good understanding of the meaning of giftedness and held positive beliefs about identifying their own children as gifted.
In contrast to the findings of Perrone et al. (2010), an older study conducted in Tasmania with 71 parents of gifted children (Taplin & White, 1998), found that the majority of parents believed their children would be better served by staying in regular mixed ability classrooms. This was due to a belief that it might be detrimental to the gifted children’s social development if they were grouped together in an advanced class. The discrepancy in parent beliefs across these two studies is likely to be due to the fact that the parents in the Perrone et al. (2010) study had experienced placement in an advanced class, whereas the parents in the Taplin and White (1998) study had not necessarily had this direct experience.

In summary, the literature supports the view that educators, parents, and students who actively advocate for gifted students and provisions, need to maintain the momentum to bring about change (Wiskow et al., 2011). A streamlined and strategic professional learning program for classroom teachers appears to be important. Structured professional learning would allow educators to have an understanding of giftedness and gifted education, and provide the necessary support and guidance to make the required adjustments to curriculum delivery (Geake & Gross, 2008). The literature provides evidence for making gifted education a mandatory unit in teacher training degrees (Megay-Nespoli, 2001). The review of the literature also suggests that a belief system that is embedded into school culture and works in partnership with parents and the community can ensure gifted students receive the support, educational programs, and opportunities they deserve. Therefore, this belief system may be a particularly important influence in catering to the needs of academically gifted students in a Catholic system of schools.

2.4 Catholic School Ethos

In recent decades since the Second Vatican Council\(^3\), school ethos, in particular, Catholic School ethos, has been a topic for discussion focusing on the nature and changes in Catholic schools. Specifically, this discussion has focused on a move

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\(^3\) The Second Vatican Council, an assembly of all the bishops of the Roman Catholic Church held from 1962 to 1965, resulting in large-scale liberalisation and modernisation of practices in the Catholic Church.
towards employing lay teachers (both Catholic and non-Catholic), increasing enrolments of non-Catholic students, and the importance of an ethos that supports the moral obligation of inclusivity of all students. However, when considering the ethos of an organisation or group, it is necessary to analyse the meaning of the term ‘ethos’ as it can be a difficult concept to define. Words that have been used to describe ‘ethos’ are ambience, atmosphere, climate, culture, ethical environment, and spirit (Freund, 2001; McLaughlin, 2005; Solvason, 2005). Such words suggest that the construct has an implicit and subjective nature, and this essential quality appears to make it difficult to isolate explicitly, measure and thus, study (Donnelly, 2000). The following sections review the literature regarding the definition of the construct of ethos, the theoretical perspectives of Catholic ethos, and the empirical research concerning Catholic school ethos.

2.4.1 Defining the construct of ethos

Theorists such as Green (2009) and Donnelly (2000), who write about and research school ethos tend to use the terms ‘culture’, ‘climate’ and ‘ethos’ interchangeably. Further to this, Solvason (2005) concluded that “ethos is a product of the culture of the school” (p. 85), which implies that culture, in fact, enables ethos. Confusion around the definition of ethos, and the relationship of this construct to ‘climate’ and ‘culture’, is evident throughout the literature. However, the tendency is to use ‘climate’ when objective or tangible data are under consideration (such as, system maintenance and system change; and aspects of environment, rules and procedures), ‘ethos’ when more subjective or less measurable aspects are involved (such as, tolerance and empathy; trust and respect), and ‘culture’ when the two are brought together (such as, professional relationships, and organisational arrangements and procedures) (Glover & Coleman, 2005). Adding to the complication, Smith (2003), in his discussion paper titled ‘Ethos, Habitus and Situation for Learning: An ecology’, recognises that “what works in one school may not work in another, and may not even work at the same school in a different time” (p. 469). This statement suggests that ethos, as a critical component of culture, can be very different in different settings and can change across time, even in the same setting.
Although it is commonly accepted that ethos is subjective, defining or determining ethos in a school, without a model or framework, would be difficult. Using an existing model or creating a framework to gauge school ethos has been considered in some studies. A 16-week ethnographic study in a Christian (but not Catholic) College in England (Green, 2009), identified seven core values as part of their mission statement (a requirement for all schools in England). The ethos of the school was based on these values. The researcher was surprised there was “nothing notably religious or specifically Christian about the core values” (p. 201). However, the values were linked to a Christian philosophy, which is based on the Bible. Not having a specific Christian language within the core values was deliberate, so as to have an impact on both students who identify as Christian and those who do not. Even so, the students believed that the core values of the College ethos were based on the Bible because they are ‘common’ or as they phrase it ‘normal’. This is the desired effect the College was hoping for. The students responded to the high expectations and accountability due to the status and reputation of the College, even if some of the students thought the rules were too strict. This would suggest the core values have had an affirmative effect and underpinned the intentional ethos of the College. This model of creating school ethos is reliant on the phrasing of the mission statement and core values, and at the same time generates an environment that the staff and students accept.

An alternative approach to Green’s (2009) research was Donnelly’s (2000) method, where she concluded her Northern Ireland case study by presenting a structured approach to assist in understanding ethos. Her research focused on two primary schools, one Catholic and the other Integrated (mixture of Catholic and Protestant), with the purpose of examining the connection between the intended school ethos and actuality of the ethos emerging from social interaction. In both case studies, the ethos set out by the schools was far removed from the reality, and furthermore, in some areas was undermined and distorted by social interactions, namely actions and attitudes of staff. It was evident when comparing and contrasting the collected data from the two schools, that ethos is changeable. It would appear the school’s ethos is more dependent on the attitudes and values of people at the school and their
interactions, rather than on the mission statements or values expressed in school documents.

This research project led Donnelly (2000) to reconsider the construct of ethos and to devise a model to assist with the definition of this construct. Her model presents the construct as having three dimensions: ‘aspirational ethos’, such as documents from school and church authorities; ‘ethos of outward attachment’, for example, school organisational structures, physical environment of the school, and behaviour of individuals; and ‘ethos of inward attachment’, that is, an individual’s deep-seated thoughts, feelings and perceptions. In this multi-dimensional model, one dimension is not more essential than another in influencing a school’s ethos. Donnelly argues that to say a school has a unique ethos is overly simplistic, as the variables change over time due to the human element. For instance, a change in leadership may cause a change in ethos. The first two dimensions can be evaluated relatively easily, because they are usually written down in school documents, observable in the school environment, or can be discussed with school personnel. However, Donnelly claims that analysing the third dimension of ‘inward attachment’ is problematic due to the personal nature of the dimension.

Donnelly’s model of ethos as three-dimensional can be applied to other studies in the area. For instance, research by Walbank (2012) aimed to uncover what makes a school Catholic, by interviewing primary school head teachers. This research could be seen as a study of the third dimension of Donnelly’s model, ‘ethos of inward attachment’. Donnelly’s model may also be applied to the research study that is the focus of this thesis. It could be used to assist in defining and measuring ethos in schools, particularly in relation to gifted education. It may assist in uncovering the factors that may influence receptiveness to understanding giftedness and implementing gifted education provisions.

2.4.2 Theoretical perspectives of Catholic school ethos

Catholic education documents contribute to an understanding of ethos in Catholic schools and how it can impact on student experience (Sydney Archdiocesan Catholic
Gospel and Vatican documents clearly state that Catholic schools should work from an ethos that supports the inclusion of all children (Fisher, 2010). Statements from the Bishops of NSW and ACT (2007), and England and Wales (2008), support this. It has been reinforced by Pope Paul VI, who stated, “all students regardless of race, age or gender, by virtue of their dignity as human persons, have a right to an education that is suited to their particular needs and adapted to their ability” (Catholic Education Office Melbourne, 2011, p. 1). Importantly, Pope Paul VI identifies ability as a critical factor in terms of meeting the educational needs of students, and he states that all students have the right to educational experiences that are designed to meet their particular needs. This implies schools should design differentiated learning experiences for students who have learning difficulties, but also gives weight to the need for schools to deliver programs designed for students who are academically gifted.

The System’s previous iterations of the Vision Statement (Sydney Archdiocesan Catholic Schools Board, 2006) and Strategic Improvement Plan (Sydney Archdiocesan Catholic Schools Board & Catholic Education Office, 2010) support an ethos of inclusivity. These documents clearly express a commitment to the development of the whole person, to the recognition of individuality and dignity of each student, and to the pursuit of excellence. There is clear support for inclusivity, but also recognition of the importance of pursuing excellence in teaching and learning. It can be argued that this pursuit requires all students be given opportunities to develop their strengths and to realise their true potential, including gifted students who may exhibit true excellence in their areas of talent if provided with appropriate educational support.

Many academics and researchers support the premise that Catholic schools must be inclusive of all students by providing opportunities and curricula that match each student’s needs (Canavan, 2007a; Durow, 2007; Fisher, 2010; Scanlan, 2009). Barton (2000) states: “To be truly Catholic, education must be inclusive” (p. 340). However, there is a concern that other aspects of the Catholic ethos and culture may be eroding within Catholic schools. Canavan (2007a), in his monograph titled The Development of the Catholic Education Office and a System of Schools in Sydney Since
1965, discusses reasons why Australian Catholic schools have changed over the past few decades since Vatican II, with particular focus on changes in culture and ethos. He laments the loss of culture through the complex interplay of a number of social factors. He identifies the following factors as critical change agents: the transition from religious to lay leaders and teachers (Catholic and non-Catholic); the increase of government financial assistance, which in part became necessary so the lay teachers could be paid; the growth of a strong infrastructure of Catholic school offices; and increasing community confidence in Catholic schools, with a concomitant increase in student enrolment of both Catholic and non-Catholic students. Canavan (2007a) points out those changes have acted to challenge important elements of Catholic culture and ethos, and have possibly weakened some aspects, such as learning through theology. However, he argues that changes have also encouraged a reconsideration of how Catholic culture and ethos can be strengthened in schools. Examples of this strengthening include actions that engage lay teachers and administrators to include non-Catholic students and their families, and which work within new paradigms of community engagement, leadership and financial provision.

Similar to Canavan’s (2007a) consideration of changes in Catholic education in Australia, Denig and Dosen (2009) investigated and wrote about the impact of the Post-Vatican II Era in North American schools. They identified very similar factors causing challenges and changes in the nature of Catholic schooling, but unlike Australia, enrolments in Catholic schools in North America have declined over the past few decades and many Catholic schools have experienced financial concerns. However, like Canavan, Denig and Dosen acknowledge that a weakening of Catholic culture in schools is due, in part, to an increased intake of non-Catholic students and employment of non-Catholic teachers. They entreat educators and leaders to ensure Catholic schools remain places of Catholic witness and practice.

The challenges troubling Catholic education and the changes such challenges have brought for culture in Catholic schools, are noted by Cook and Simonds (2011) who attempted to construct a framework to embody Catholic identity. They focused on opportunities these challenges and changes provide for reconsidering Catholic
ethos, and support the concept of ‘charism’ as a way to realise aspects of ethos in Catholic schools. Charism reflects the distinctive educational vision and qualities of a school, based on the founding religious congregation. For example, Catholic schools that identify as Franciscan live out the charism of St Francis, whereas Dominican Catholic schools draw their inspiration from the lives of St Dominic and St Thomas Aquinas. This framework deals specifically with a student’s relationship with self, God, others, local and world communities, and creation. It is designed to “enable their graduates to change the world by building relationships instead of fences” (Cook & Simonds, 2011, p. 330). Cook and Simonds suggest this is one way Catholic schools rework and strengthen Catholic culture. Their vision for realising Catholic ethos in schools can be said to encompass the critical Catholic elements of inclusivity and community engagement. However, it goes further by involving students in decisions about their lives, including their spiritual formation. In this way, it supports the education of gifted students, because academically gifted students respond positively to working on authentic and real problems, reflecting on their learning, and considering their emotional and spiritual lives (Douglas, 2004).

2.4.3 Empirical research concerning Catholic school ethos

Empirical research concerned with Catholic school ethos provides a more focused understanding of the way in which ethos is experienced in Catholic schools. An understanding of this is important because this thesis aims to study school ethos as it relates to the education of gifted students in a selection of Sydney Catholic schools.

Research over the past decade (Belmonte & Cranston, 2009) has established the integral part members of the school community play in establishing and maintaining a Catholic ethos within the school. An Australian case study of six experienced principals from rural Catholic schools, determined that the Catholic culture of the school was highly dependent upon the cultural and spiritual dimension of the principal (Belmonte & Cranston, 2009). Belmonte and Cranston argue that the influence of the school principal needs to be taken into account when considering ways to preserve the Catholic identity in a school. However, they also identify the
integration of religious and academic purposes in all dimensions of the school, as well as having an effective relationship with the local Parish Priest, as ways to support a Catholic ethos or culture within a school.

The personal values and beliefs of educators have also been found to influence school ethos according to Donnelly’s (2004) study in Northern Ireland. The study was conducted in an integrated school for Catholic and Protestant teachers and students. The classroom teachers’ own personal values were found to have a critical influence on school ethos. This could possibly be exaggerated due to this particular study being set in Northern Ireland, where religious and cultural tensions may lead to more passionate values. The author suggested classroom teachers should be allowed time to develop an understanding of their own values and beliefs. Donnelly suggests that the absence of funding to support such an initiative indicates the education authority’s failure to recognise the influence of the classroom teacher in shaping the ethos of a school, especially in developing a cohesive integrated school. Additionally, a two-year study of undergraduate student teachers in Northern Ireland (Nelson, 2008), explored the value and impact of introducing these students to schools of different ethos as part of their teacher education. The results indicate that these encounters with diverse schools gave the undergraduate teachers an understanding of the differences in ethos and culture between schools. Furthermore, the experience assisted the student teachers to create their own vision of education, as well as correct misunderstandings and challenge stereotypes. Nelson argued that, as a result of experiencing varied examples of ethos, these teachers might understand the intricacies of schools with a well-informed viewpoint.

The relationship between ethos and practices related to gifted education was explored in a North American study of 19 Catholic dioceses (districts) (Durow, 2007). Leaders were surveyed about the educational practices used to serve students with special needs in Catholic schools in their area. Durow was aiming to determine if mission, educational practice or financial means influenced approaches. As well as the special needs identified by IDEA (Individuals with Disabilities Education Act), the categories of ‘gifted’ and ‘eating disorder’ were
included. Of the 19 leaders surveyed, 16 reported that their dioceses provided services to students identified as gifted. The details of these provisions were not specified, however having provisions suggests that an ethos existed within the school to support gifted education. Importantly, the study recognised that the financial burden of lay staff salaries impacted on the provisions for gifted students. This is due to the need for lay teachers to be paid whereas, historically, teachers from Religious Orders were not directly paid a salary. This added financial burden was found to have an effect on resourcing teaching and learning, and thus impacted on how the schools provided for gifted students. So, even when schools appeared to have an ethos that supported gifted education, financial constraints meant this ethos could not always be translated into practice.

Finally, Rebhorn (2004) also studied the provision of gifted education in Catholic schools. He noted a lack of programs for gifted and talented students in Catholic schools, and a lack of empirical research to evaluate the success or otherwise, of the few programs that existed. One of the studies referred to was an Australian study conducted by Whitton (1997), which surveyed 400 third and fourth grade teachers with the conclusion that the classroom teachers only made minor modifications in the regular curriculum to meet the needs of gifted students. The lack of programs for gifted students in Catholic schools may suggest that school ethos did not support, or at least did not prioritise, gifted education.

In conclusion, while ‘ethos’ is difficult to define precisely and evaluate accurately, it is nevertheless, an integral ingredient in the Catholic tradition (Canavan, 2007a; Glover & Coleman, 2005). Ethos is thought of as a phenomenon rather than a tangible product (Glover & Coleman, 2005), yet the findings suggest that it has tangible effects on the provision of gifted education. Having a model such as the one proposed by Donnelly (2000), would be a valuable tool in giving some direction to understanding ethos and the impact on a Catholic school culture. This, combined with the concept of ‘charism’ and building a culture of relationships (Cook & Simonds, 2011), may provide a useful framework to define and appreciate the Catholic school ethos and the impact on gifted education in The System’s schools.
Therefore, the concepts of Catholic ethos and charism may be a vital influence on the provisions for academically gifted students in a Catholic system of schools.

2.5 School Leadership

School leadership has a significant impact on the delivery of education services. As such, it is necessary to review the literature on the impact of leadership on gifted education. The literature associated with educational leadership is dominated by frameworks to capture features for successful leadership, as well as evaluative scaffolds (Bezzina, Burford, & Duignan, 2007). The literature on leadership, with a particular emphasis on gifted education, is limited. The following two sections will examine school leadership practices and their impact on gifted education.

2.5.1 Leadership practices

There have been numerous models developed, papers written and research (Fullan & Quinn, 2016) conducted on the factors that influence effective and efficient leadership. For the purpose of this thesis, only a brief discussion on educational leadership will be considered, in particular leadership related to learning and student outcomes. In a meta-analysis of the research on Australian leadership, Mulford (2007) divided the findings into six different themes. The relevant theme to this thesis is ‘school organisation and student outcomes’. The meta-analysis found there are significant differences in student achievement between the Australian states, which can be attributed to school organisational arrangements, especially in student grouping practices. The research confirmed that the practice of streaming has a substantially positive effect on the achievement of those students in the highest-level classes, while those in the lowest level classes were better supported in mixed ability classes. Student grouping practices is an important consideration for gifted education provisions hence, suggesting a dichotomy dilemma for the organisational leadership of schools.

Leadership that includes “teachers and leaders at every level, from the classroom to the boardroom” (Reeves, 2008, p. 3), is optimal. In his discussion paper, Reeves puts
forward three arguments. Firstly, leadership is important, and when leaders engage in specific strategies, good things happen. Secondly, leadership is inclusive, and when given opportunities to engage in action research in a collaborative environment, classroom teachers have a direct and measurable impact on student achievement and behaviour, as well as the professional practices of their colleagues. Reeves’ final argument is that leadership practices can be taught and learnt with time and professional learning. Regarding this third argument, results from a program *Leaders for the Future*, which was an initiative to encourage leadership aspirations for young teachers in Sydney Catholic Schools, showed that after this professional development, more than 20% of young teachers considered future leadership possibilities (Canavan, 2007b).

While Reeves (2008) has identified that leadership is important, is inclusive, and can be learnt, Fullan (2011) identifies successful attributes of leadership. He discusses the concept of the four ‘wrong drivers’ compared to the four ‘right drivers’. These are (Fullan, 2011, p. 5):

1. Accountability: using test results and teacher appraisal to reward or punish teachers and schools, versus capacity building
2. Individual teacher and leadership quality: promoting individual solutions versus group solutions
3. Technology: investing in technology and assuming that the wonders of the digital world will carry the day, versus instruction
4. Fragmented strategies versus integrated or systemic strategies.

Fullan argues that the right drivers work because they change the culture of the school system, whereas the wrong drivers focus on superficial structures and procedures.

Further to the notion of ‘drivers’, Fullan (2005) talks about leadership (not leaders) and sustainability. He emphasises the importance of thinking systemically and having a clear understanding of how to be active. The key to changing a system is to produce a greater number of ‘system thinkers’ without losing a sense of moral and emotional influence. Fullan’s ‘moral purpose’ concept is an important contributor to the formation of a sustainable system, he argues. He defines moral purpose as
having three aspects: raising the bar and closing the gap; treating people ethically, adults and students alike; and a commitment to improving the whole district, not just one’s own school. Schools (and the people within them) with this sense of ‘moral purpose’ believe that all students can learn given the right approach and amount of time. Students must be supported in working towards maximising their potential. Building on the fact that most teachers enter the profession because they want to make a difference to the lives of students (Watt & Richardson, 2008), moral purpose is powerful when it is embedded in all strategies and actions at all levels, that is, school, region and system.

The significance of Fullan’s concept of moral purpose has been supported through research and concerns a leadership program titled Leaders Transforming Learning and Learners (LTLL) (Bezzina et al., 2007). The program acknowledges Fullan’s shared moral purpose and was piloted in nine schools. One of the findings was that leadership that emphasises shared moral purpose rather than procedural or structural issues better facilitates improved learning outcomes. How this is related to leadership and gifted education will now be investigated.

2.5.2 Leadership and gifted education

The limited literature on leadership and gifted education can be divided into two groups: developing leadership skills in the gifted student population (Matthews, 2004; Sternberg, 2009); and leading gifted education in a school and/or system context (Brown, 2009; Seeley, 2009; VanTassel-Baska, 2007). The latter of these will be discussed in light of this study.

VanTassel-Baska’s (1986) Integrated Curriculum Model (ICM) identified three important areas that classroom teachers should consider when planning learning programs for gifted students. These are: advanced content, process/product modifications (such as using expert approaches to research, and generating real life products) and conceptual understanding (such as aesthetics-based approaches, including the Socratic method). Brown (2009) uses these same three areas as a framework to conceptualise and identify leadership characteristics that will support
gifted education. She suggests firstly, that advanced content can be realised in terms of a leader's knowledge of the critical literature concerning gifted education and their professional experiences in the field. Secondly, process and product can be realised in terms of a leader's leadership style and skills. Brown states that the third area of conceptual understanding can be realised in terms of a leader's values and beliefs. Brown also identifies the following unresolved issues for leaders in gifted education: the processes of identifying the gifted students, the difficulty and resistance encountered in being a leader for gifted education, and the misconception that being an advocate for a specialised group of learners automatically assumes a diminished interest for other groups of learners.

VanTassel-Baska (2007) presented a 10-step program that can be utilised by administrators and classroom teachers, to guide leadership strategies for the implementation of gifted education services and improve classroom instruction. She suggests that the three ‘steps’ that are critical for leaders of gifted education are: prepare educators to provide quality instruction, create and institutionalise systems for identifying and supporting gifted students from K-12, and collaborate with other stakeholders within and outside the field of gifted education to promote student learning communities. VanTassel-Baska stresses the need for processes that address gifted education to be embedded into school systems, so as not to rely on personnel.

In summary, while limited in nature, the literature and research associated with leadership in gifted education identifies some critical factors. These factors include sustainability through institutional and systems changes, and personal characteristics of leaders that support such changes, such as extensive knowledge and experience in the field. VanTassel-Baska’s (2007) 10-step proposal to lead gifted education, may be useful to System leadership in sustaining provisions for academically gifted students in a Catholic system of schools.
2.6 Pedagogical Practices for Academically Gifted Students

The pedagogical approaches for academically gifted students that schools adopt are influenced by the way the school community defines and conceptualises giftedness (Orton, 2009). For instance, if the staff at a school considers that giftedness is defined mainly in terms of scores on ability and achievement tests, they may favour pedagogical approaches that are directly aimed at developing cognitive ability, such as subject or grade acceleration. In contrast, a school community that conceptualises giftedness in terms of high ability in domains such as creative, social, perceptual, muscular and motor control (Gagné, 2008), as well as intellectual talent, is more likely to adopt pedagogical approaches that are directed at developing sporting, artistic, and other areas of talent, alongside academic talent (Gross, 2010). It is, therefore, important to consider the ways in which schools define and conceptualise giftedness, as this will influence the pedagogical strategies they use. Gagné (2004) articulates the importance of matching the pedagogical approaches a school adopts to the characteristics of the gifted student:

As in other fields of special education, the nature of the intervention program that a school develops for gifted or talented students should be influenced by the level of the student’s giftedness or talent as well as the domains or fields in which it is sited. (p. 3)

VanTassel-Baska (2005) outlined appropriate approaches to accommodate the needs of gifted and talented students. However, it is difficult for a school to achieve these adjustments alone; rather a partnership with the family, school, and educational system are required to ensure the student receives the appropriate opportunity at the right time. Her list aligns with the recommendations posited in The System’s Gifted Education K – 12 Position Paper (Catholic Education Office, 2007b). A strong recommendation from the Position Paper is that schools adopt Gagné’s model of giftedness (2008), which supports a holistic approach to developing natural abilities by acknowledging the effects of family, schools, teachers and educational systems. The use of the following pedagogical practices is also advocated in the Position Paper: ability grouping, acceleration, a variety of curriculum approaches to enable differentiation, and the integration of learning technologies. These practices are well supported in the research literature, as
illustrated in a meta-analysis by Rogers (2007), that draws together results of individual studies focusing on each of the practices to show the overall benefit of each practice. Together with the above mentioned practices, the literature regarding personalised learning was investigated, as there is research to support the use of personalised learning with gifted students (OECD, 2006).

2.6.1 Ability grouping

Academic advantages associated with ability and flexible grouping are well researched and documented (Neihart, 2007). However, the literature regarding the socio-affective impact of ability grouping is not nearly as extensive. The studies Neihart examined about the impact of ability grouping on self-concept were mixed. Some researchers view the decline in self-concept as a concern (Seaton, Marsh, & Craven, 2008), while others perceive the decline as an adjustment to a more realistic perception of one’s ability (Plucker et al., 2004). Rogers (2002a) concludes that there is no trend of improvement or decline of socialisation and psychological effects when grouping by ability. She suggests this is possibly due to there being many other variables such as personal, environmental, and family that affect self-concept and socialisation more than the grouping itself. Neihart (2007) acknowledges that the debate about ability grouping is confused due to the issues concerning the definition of this terminology. For example, definitions in the literature include: peer grouping, any arrangement that attempts to place students with similar levels of ability in instructional groups such as, within class ability grouping for reading or numeracy; cluster grouping, which is a variation on peer grouping, whereby a small group of students with similar instructional needs are clustered within a heterogeneous classroom, for example, a group of identified gifted students from across the grade are grouped together; and tracking (American term) or streaming (European and Australian term) or setting (UK term), whereby students are assigned to a class on the basis of ability, that is, full-scale permanent grouping of students based on ability, as measured by test scores.

The assumption that “gifted students will make it on their own; grouping them by ability does not result in improved learning or achievement for them” (Fiedler,
Lange, & Winebrenner, 2002, p. 6) was challenged in a meta-analytic paper. Several studies concluded that gifted students benefit cognitively and affectively from working with other gifted students (Kulik & Kulik, 1992). Furthermore, research (Feldhusen, 1989; Feldhusen & Sayler, 1990) established that for gifted students, ability grouping, as well as fast paced instruction with highly competent classroom teachers, is advantageous. However, some studies indicate no increase in achievement scores for high-ability students who have been grouped together. Fiedler et al. (2002) suggest this may be due to the type of testing used to measure academic gain. When grade level achievement tests are used, ‘ceiling effects’ make it extremely difficult to determine whether homogeneous grouping enhanced a gifted student’s learning. To measure the real achievement gains for gifted students, tests designed for older students can be administered. Annotated work samples, ability testing, checklists, and observation may supplement this approach (Gross et al., 2005; Gross et al., 2001). Furthermore, other assessment criteria may be considered such as socialisation, leadership, problem solving, and creativity skills (Sternberg, Jarvin, & Grigorenko, 2011).

Reis and Renzulli’s (2010) review strongly supports the findings of Fiedler et al., (2002), suggesting that various forms of grouping not only benefit the gifted students, but students of other achievement levels as well. Ability grouping, when combined with differentiated instruction, has been shown to be an effective strategy for challenging all learners (Brulles, Saunders, & Cohn, 2010; Tieso, 2005). The notion of equity is examined by Fiedler et al., (2002) and concluded that “equity in education does not require that all students have exactly the same experiences. Rather, education in a democracy promises that everyone will have an equal opportunity to actualize their potential, to learn as much as they can” (p. 8).

Finally, an Australian study analysed the emotional and academic effects on gifted and talented primary students in relation to ability grouping (Chessor & Whitton, 2008). Students in the research were identified as academically gifted and came from Opportunity Classes (academically selective class), schools in a mixed ability setting, and from schools in a streamed setting. The results indicated academic achievement was enhanced by selective class placement, whereas academic self-
concept was diminished for all students. Chessor and Whitton implied that grouping gifted students together has potential for positive outcomes, especially for academic achievement; however, the issue of self-concept should continue to be monitored. They suggested teacher training should address curriculum and socio-affective needs, and that school counsellors should have an understanding of giftedness to assist these students.

In conclusion, the research is mixed about the impact ability grouping for all students has on academic achievement and socio-affective implications (Rogers, 2002a). The mixed findings are due to the number of variables that impact on student achievement and teacher attitudes. Some of these factors are: definition of terms (Neihart, 2007); school environment in regard to the type of class groupings adopted (Hallam & Ireson, 2006); whether the testing provides an opportunity for the student to demonstrate a learning gain (Fiedler et al., 2002); the different curriculum areas (Ireson, Hallam, & Plewis, 2001); gender (Ireson et al., 2001); and other influences such as personal and socioeconomic background (Neihart, 2007). However, for academically gifted students, ability grouping combined with a differentiated curriculum which adds complexity and abstractness to the instruction, has been shown to be an effective strategy (Feldhusen & Sayler, 1990; Kulik & Kulik, 1992; McClure, 2007; Tieso, 2005).

2.6.2 Acceleration

There is a large body of research that supports acceleration in various forms (Reis & Renzulli, 2010). The comprehensive two-volume report titled *A Nation Deceived*, was compiled by American and Australian academics to describe several types of acceleration and to provide evidence-based support to using this approach with gifted students (Colangelo et al., 2004a, 2004b). Eighteen types of acceleration were defined (Colangelo et al., 2004b) and a broad definition suggests that “acceleration is an educational intervention that moves students through an educational program at a faster than usual rate or younger than typical age” (Colangelo et al., 2004a, p. 5). The *Iowa Acceleration Scale* (Assouline et al., 2009) is a tool which enables a team to discern the appropriate time and level of acceleration. This scale recommends that
a student would be accelerated only if they were ready to learn and socialise at the accelerated level. The three most common forms of acceleration studied are: early entrance to school, early entrance to college, and grade skipping (Neihart, 2007). This review will focus on the broad beliefs and concerns of accelerating gifted students.

Negative effects of acceleration include social and/or emotional damage to gifted students, such as a decline in academic self-concept and higher anxiety (Neihart, 2007). Neihart found that the negative outcomes of acceleration were relatively rare and limited in impact when compared to the potential positive consequences. Her findings show that there may be a range of socio-affective benefits of acceleration.

In contrast to the negative concerns, several longitudinal studies have identified long-lasting social and emotional benefits of acceleration. In fact, failure to accelerate has been associated with significant adjustment problems (Gross & van Vliet, 2005). As part of Gross and van Vliet’s meta-analysis, Early Entrance Programs (EEP) to university were analysed. Students who were radically accelerated via the EEP experienced a number of benefits (Noble & Smyth, 1995). These included: maintaining high levels of achievement (Olszewski-Kubilius, 1995); finding like-minded friends (Noble & Drummond, 1992); and gaining maturity and social skills (Noble, Arndt, Nicholson, Sletten, & Zamora, 1998). Indeed, other meta-analytic studies support the positive outcomes for high-ability learners overwhelmingly. A total of 38 studies were examined by Steenbergen-Hu and Moon (2011), with common findings from these studies emerging. Firstly, acceleration benefits students not only in the short-term, but in the long-term as well. Secondly, accelerated students tend to outperform academically gifted students who are not accelerated. Thirdly, acceleration can be effective both in the K-12 schooling years, as well as university. Finally, parents are encouraged to consider acceleration, when appropriate, and educators are encouraged to make acceleration options available.

Despite true benefits of acceleration, Australian schools have generally been hesitant in their use of this approach. Gross (2004) undertook a 20-year longitudinal study of 60 Australians with IQs of 160 and above, that is, exceptionally to
academically gifted. The considerable majority of young people who have been radically accelerated, that is, “graduating from high school three or more years younger than is usual” (Gross, 2010, p. 248), or who accelerated by two years, reported high levels of life satisfaction, professionally and socially (Gross, 2006). Young people of equal ability who accelerated by only one year or who did not accelerate at all, tended to enter less academically rigorous university courses and reported lower levels of life satisfaction, and in many cases, experience socialisation difficulties. In her concluding remarks, Gross (2010) commented that all 60 young people in the study could well have benefitted from radical acceleration, but many were, unfortunately, not offered this opportunity and spent their schooling in mixed-ability classrooms with same-age peers. This could reflect a general hesitation across education systems in Australia to embrace acceleration, especially radical acceleration, as a pedagogical approach for gifted students. This is a curious thought in light of the positive effects that acceleration can have for these students and the importance of providing this option in programs for gifted students. VanTassel-Baska (1992) goes as far to say that acceleration and grouping practices can be used as the marker of acceptance of gifted programs within a school system.

Finally, a New Zealand study (Wardman, 2009) with 455 participants, including classroom teachers and trainee teachers, used a survey to measure attitudes towards acceleration. The findings confirm the previous studies, that is, that acceleration is a strategy not used enough even though there was a high level of willingness on the part of classroom teachers to utilise it in the future, albeit with caution. It seems then that classroom teachers support acceleration but the reluctance may be at a system or leadership level.

2.6.3 Curriculum approaches

Educators and academics have developed a number of curriculum approaches aimed at catering for gifted students. Effective curriculum and instruction for gifted students (and indeed all students) should respond to their individual learning needs, cognitive ability, modes of learning, and interests (Tomlinson, 2005). This type of curriculum can be described as differentiated for those students. The
challenge is that no single curriculum approach will suitably serve all gifted students. Research shows that curriculum approaches aimed at differentiating the curriculum for gifted students require a highly dedicated resource in terms of time and effort on the part of the teacher (Brighton, Hertberg, Moon, Tomlinson, & Callahan, 2005). Classroom teachers require long-term professional development and support if the curriculum approaches are to be successfully implemented (VanTassel-Baska et al., 2008).

Rogers (2009) identifies a number of general approaches to curriculum modification for gifted students that are supported by empirical research. These are: abstraction (providing opportunities for divergent thinking), complexity (higher-order thinking), multidisciplinary study (cross-curricula or thematic style), organisation (changing the sequence of the content presented), study of people (linking to the real world), methods of enquiry (parallel those used by experts in the field), and subject acceleration (providing content that is beyond grade or age expectations). These modifications enable classroom teachers to formulate curricula that can provide the sufficient rigour necessary to challenge gifted students, and to ensure their learning needs and interests are met. VanTassel-Baska (2005) identifies the following general criteria of curriculum differentiated for the gifted: sufficiently advanced for the best learners in the group, complex enough for the best learners, sufficiently in-depth to allow the study of important issues or problems, and sufficiently creative to stimulate open-ended responses and provide high-level choices. When the needs and interests of gifted students are met, they tend to be more engaged and motivated in their learning, which in turn, helps them to develop skills for lifelong learning (Hoekman, McCormick, & Gross, 1999; Rogers, 2007).

The curriculum approaches identified above have been incorporated into a number of models that have been used with gifted students. These models include Kaplan’s Process-Product Model (Gross et al., 2001), Sternberg’s Triarchic Componential Model (Sternberg & Clinkenbeard, 1995), the Maker Matrix (Vialle & Rogers, 2009), the Renzulli Schoolwide Enrichment Triad Model (SEM) (Renzulli, 1984), VanTassel-Baska’s Integrated Curriculum Model (ICM) (VanTassel-Baska, 1986),
and the Williams’ Cognitive-Affective Interaction Model (Vialle & Rogers, 2009). While these models have been shown to address the needs of gifted students, they tend to differ in the emphasis put on different curriculum approaches. For instance, the ICM focuses particularly on advanced content, high-level process and product, and interdisciplinary study. This model could therefore be said to be most suited to gifted students with strengths in the academic domain (VanTassel-Baska, 1986). In contrast, Williams’ model stresses the importance of cognitive and affective development through creative processes, and identifies four cognitive creative processes (including originality) and four affective creative processes (including curiosity and imagination) (Vialle & Rogers, 2009). This model could therefore be said to suit gifted students with strengths in the creative and social domains, as defined by Gagné (2008).

It is unrealistic to expect that all classroom teachers are appropriately trained in writing and implementing a variety of curriculum approaches, especially curricula that challenges the needs of gifted students. A lack of sustained teacher training, combined with the difficulty of differentiating instruction without a great depth of knowledge, makes it hard to adapt programs (Hertberg-Davis, 2009). The research findings of Timperley (2008) strongly support the concept of classroom teachers requiring multiple opportunities to absorb new information and translate it into practice. Sustained professional learning, including practical support and evaluation, is needed for change to take place. Likewise, a study where an experimental group of teachers attended regular professional development activities specifically related to implementing differentiated approaches into classroom practice, showed a statistically significant improvement in educational effectiveness over three years, compared to the control group of teachers (VanTassel-Baska et al., 2008). This supports the research literature that it takes an extended time of at least two years of professional development to effectively change practice, especially for diverse learners (Brighton et al., 2005; Timperley, 2008).
2.6.4 Personalised learning

Personalised learning will draw upon child, parent and community resources to develop a learning experience created through collaboration and cooperation (Prime Minister’s Science Engineering and Innovation Council, 2009). Definitions of personalised learning can be ambiguous (Courcier, 2007), in fact, personalised learning is not individualised learning (Sullivan, 2011a), as is the common misconception (Campbell, Robinson, Neelands, Hewston, & Mazzoli, 2007). Some terms frequently used to cover the personalised learning concept are: ‘individualised project’, ‘learning contract’, ‘problem-based learning’, and ‘individual action plan’ (Tsolakis & Cornford, 2010). It will be necessary for education departments to define clearly what is meant by personalised learning, so a common approach and shared language can be implemented (Underwood & Banyard, 2008). To facilitate this, the OECD (2006) has named five components of personalised learning which have been adopted by Australia and the United Kingdom. The components are: firstly, assessment for learning, the use of data and dialogue to diagnose every students’ needs; secondly, teaching and learning strategies that build on individual needs, which requires strategies that actively engage and stretch all students, that creatively deploy classroom teachers, that provide support staff and new technologies to extend learning opportunities, and that accommodate different paces and styles of learning; thirdly, curriculum choice engages and respects students, so every student enjoys curriculum choice, a breadth of study and personal relevance, with clear pathways through the system; fourthly, a radical approach to school organisation, student focused and student centred combined with flexibility; and fifthly, community, local institutions and social services supporting schools, to drive forward progress in the classroom.

The OECD clearly states that personalised learning is not a ‘child-centred theory,’ nor is it about separating students to learn on their own, or at their own pace. Personalised learning is designed to raise standards by focusing teaching and learning on the aptitudes and interests of students. This notion was built on by Courcier (2007) in her research aimed at providing clarity and understanding of personalised learning for United Kingdom educators. After interviewing educators in England, she created a map showing the links between personalised learning,
individualised learning and different approaches. Both personalised learning and individualised learning have the same aims, that is, to meet each student’s needs, interests and potential, and to develop lifelong learning skills. However, the main difference between personalised learning and individualised learning, according to Courcier’s map, is that for personalised learning, classroom teachers and students share the responsibility for student outcomes being achieved whereas individualised learning is teacher led.

Reports and papers written in Australia appear to be following a similar definition and direction as the United Kingdom (Council for the Australian Federation, 2007; Office for Education Policy and Innovation, 2007; Prime Minister’s Science Engineering and Innovation Council, 2009; Sullivan, 2011a, 2011b; Tsolakis & Cornford, 2010). There is a common theme of using technology as a means to mould the system around the student, promote learning beyond the classroom, develop metacognitive skills, combine independent and collaborative learning, and promote a philosophy of anytime/anywhere learning. Research conducted in NSW (Tsolakis & Cornford, 2010) found that personal learning plans (PLP) are being used appropriately for students with special needs and disabilities, but generally are not being used widely to stimulate learning for gifted and talented students. Tsolakis and Cornford suggest this is linked to a lack of funding (schools receive a government subsidy for special needs students) and a low rate of confidence in classroom teachers’ ability to use PLPs effectively, both in the classroom and administratively, as well as gifted students not being correctly identified.

Several groups (Bickmore-Brand, 2007; Campbell et al., 2007; Department for Children Schools and Families, 2008; Hargreaves, 2006; Pollard & James, 2004; Stoeger & Ziegler, 2010) have designed structures for the implementation of personalised learning with the underlying thinking for these models being based on the OECD (2006) rationale. One study (Stoeger & Ziegler, 2010) conducted in Germany and based on a cycle of self-regulated learning (Zimmerman, Bonner, & Kovach, 1996), is particularly noteworthy. Stoeger and Ziegler used the model and theory of Zimmerman et al., to explore the impact of self-regulatory competencies with 4th grade students and the effect this type of learning has on different ability
groups. Eight classes had a 5-week training program, while the control group of eight classes did not. Pre-testing and post-testing of both groups proved the model to be effective for improvement in self-efficacy, motivation, and performance. None of the ability groups suffered any disadvantage. The model allows for students to learn in line with their ability and at their own speed.

2.6.5 Virtual and/or physical space

Technology as part of a digital world, has reshaped how people learn, as well as improved the accessibility of knowledge (Prime Minister’s Science Engineering and Innovation Council, 2009). Consequently, this impacts on teaching and learning strategies, as it allows the learner to adapt the pace of instruction to their capability, and can provide an ‘anytime/anyplace’ mindset towards learning and teaching (Sullivan, 2011b). The importance of this paradigm shift influences the way the needs of gifted and talented students may be accommodated. Learning spaces, both physical and virtual, should connect school, home and the community, that should have increased flexibility and support learning outside the school building and beyond the school day (Johnson, Smith, Willis, Levine, & Haywood, 2011; MCEETYA, 2008). This is supported by a case study of ten gifted 14-year-olds who were engaged in an online extended-learning project (Ng & Nicholas, 2010). The students were physically located in Australia, Malaysia and the United Kingdom. Motivation to participate in online learning, as well as the interactions between the students, was explored in the study. Seven of the ten students completed the final task. This research determined that online learning for academically gifted students was an accessible and convenient mode of learning. However, implementing this initiative did require pre-planning. The concept of online learning was further explored through the change from structured, whole group online participation to a more individual, open approach to learning. Ng and Nicholas (2010) suggested the following: first, plan carefully; second, remain closely involved in the initial stages of engagement; third, only gradually remove the scaffolding as students demonstrate capacity to sustain independent interactions; and fourth, have a public purpose for the activity. The implication for gifted and talented students is that, even though their learning may be personalised and they are using digital technologies
support, scaffolding, collaboration, and the open opportunity to learn are still necessary.

Using a combination of virtual and physical environments is the basis for the *Western NSW Regional Virtual Selective Class Provision* (NSW Public Schools, 2010). For the majority of their teaching and learning experiences, students involved in the program will be connected via the internet and will physically meet as a group once per term (every ten weeks). At the time of writing there was not comprehensive evidence regarding the success or otherwise of the program. However, the rationale and purpose for the model are based on research, which supports the concept of students developing lifelong learning skills and embracing 21st century learning tools.

Data have been gathered in Queensland with the research Dillon (2010) completed. She gave 14 gifted adolescents the opportunity to participate in a program of ‘digital journaling’. The feedback from the students was very encouraging, largely because this opportunity was not bound by a school setting. It afforded participants the chance to act autonomously and in any way that appealed to them. Additionally, the process allowed the gifted students to develop language of self-representation. Overall, the study demonstrated the value of using digital journaling as part of a flexible approach to gifted education. Similarly, another Australian study (Hartnell-Young & Vetere, 2008) found that using technology, students can contribute to their curriculum. The level of communication and collaboration increased, as well as the development of multimedia skills. Hartnell-Young and Vetere suggest the positive attitude of classroom teachers to new technologies was essential when integrating these new literacies into teaching and learning practices.

In conclusion, the literature supports a variety of pedagogical practices to meet the needs of gifted students, especially acceleration (Colangelo et al., 2004a, 2004b; Gross, 2006) and curriculum differentiation (VanTassel-Baska et al., 2008; Vialle & Rogers, 2009). In contrast, the literature is mixed regarding the advantages or otherwise of ability grouping (Neihart, 2007; Reis & Renzulli, 2010). The social and emotional development of gifted students is as important as their cognitive
development (Eddles-Hirsch, Vialle, Rogers, & McCormick, 2010). ‘Personalised learning’ as opposed to ‘individualised learning,’ for gifted students is an area which needs more exploration, as ‘Personal Learning Plans’ (PLP) are widely used successfully for students with special needs or disabilities (Prunty, 2011), but not for gifted students. With the availability of technology, increasingly personalised learning may be a realistic option to meet the needs of gifted students (Sullivan, 2011a, 2011b). Virtual learning has substantial implications for the education of gifted students and technology must be harnessed to facilitate personalised learning (OECD, 2006). Changing the mindset from learning being confined to the classroom, to one of learning as an ‘anytime/anywhere’ paradigm, coupled with flexible learning spaces, may be challenging, but is at the same time exciting, and it benefits gifted and talented students (Johnson et al., 2011; MCEETYA, 2008). The literature clearly suggests two ideas regarding pedagogical practices. Firstly, there is no single practice that will work in every school, and with every gifted student. Discernment is necessary to select those practices that will work best within the school’s current context, staff, and community (Rogers, 2007). Secondly, action must be taken to guide educators to enable the academic development of K-12 gifted students (Gagné, 2007). Therefore, pedagogical practices may be a particularly important influence on the experiences for academically gifted students in a Catholic system of schools.

2.7 School Choice

Prior to the 1970s, school choice was generally discouraged by the government in Australia (Campbell, Proctor, & Sherington, 2009). Further to this, if a family had a tradition of attending a Catholic or other non-government school, this was not perceived as a ‘choice’ but an expectation. The increase of specialist government schools (including academically selective schools), and the accessibility and quality of education within the Catholic and other non-government schools, improved due to government funding (Campbell et al., 2009; Canavan, 2007a). As a result, Australian parents have become more proactive in deciding which school their children will attend. A report on a longitudinal study of Australian children (Warren, 2016) included a chapter that specifically dealt with parents’ choices of primary school. In 2016, 65.4% of children attended a government school (a slight increase
from 2015), and 20.2% attended a Catholic school (a slight decrease from 2015), while the figures for children attending independent schools remained steady at 14.4% (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2016).

The decision regarding the school a child will attend may cause anxiety for some parents. Some highly sought after independent schools have long waiting lists for enrolment, therefore, the decision may be made well before the child actually starts school (Warren, 2016). The Australian Institute of Family Studies (Warren, 2016) report made the following points of interest:

- The report acknowledges there is more research in Australia about how parents choose their child’s high school compared with the research about how parents make the decision for their child’s first school.
- Warren (2016) suggests the only parents who have a choice about their child’s schooling are those who have the capacity to pay schools fees and/or the money to live in the ‘right suburb’.
- The report cites a survey (Independent School Councils of Australia, 2008) which had as one of the key findings from the parent perspective in choosing a school, that importantly, the school will “provide the foundation to grow into a mature, well-rounded person” (p. 3).
- Finally, Warren (2016) suggests the main reason a child moved from one Catholic school to another Catholic school was due to a change in address, but for a child to move from a government or independent school to any other school, was to access better learning opportunities.

The literature on school choice is limited, particularly that with an emphasis on gifted education. The following three sections will examine school choice in a general context, and for academically gifted students, with the third section focusing on the decision-making process.

2.7.1 School choice in a general context

School choice literature suggests that there are various factors taken into consideration by parents when making a decision about school placement. Some of
the main factors include: choice being more about culture and community than about class (Kelley & Evans, 2004; Maddaus, 1990); contrary to this, is the study that shows race and class strongly affect choice (Holme, 2002; Schneider & Buckley, 2002); religious identity as an influence for choosing a Catholic school (Kelley & Evans, 2004); education/academic quality (Bast & Walberg, 2004; Burgess, Greaves, Vignoles, & Wilson, 2009; Denessen, Driessena, & Slegers, 2005; Kleitz, Matland, Tedin, & Weiher, 2000; Schneider & Buckley, 2002; West, David, Hailes, & Ribbens, 1995); proximity to home (Burgess et al., 2009; Maddaus, 1990; West et al., 1995); and the child’s happiness (Coldron & Boulton, 1991), coupled with a well-rounded education, including the learning of life skills (Warren, 2016); and teacher quality (Jacob & Lefgren, 2007; Kennedy, Mulholland, & Dorman, 2011). Additionally, Gillespie’s (2014) research stated the factors that influenced the choice parents make were student numbers in a class, the presence of composite or multi-age classes, and the building facilities.

Even though the research supports the concept that the performance gap between government and non-government schools has decreased over the past two decades, parents are attracted to non-government schools for their discipline, religious affiliation, and the variety of extracurricular activities offered. Government schools are the most inclusive schools as they are required to accept any student who lives in the area, regardless of ability, behaviour or creed. In contrast, non-government schools have the option to be selective with their enrolment. This can be based on the child’s specific learning needs, anti-social behaviour, or religious faith (Maddox, 2011; Moran, Neri, & Rodgers, 2015).

The Gonski Report (Gonski et al., 2011) was an extensive and comprehensive report commissioned by the Australian Federal Government to “provide recommendations to the Minister with responsibility for school education on the future funding arrangements” (p. 225). The report established a clear understanding and definition of equity. Students are to have access to “an acceptable international standard of education” regardless of differences in family wealth or income, their place of residence, or ethnic background. The report highlights that this equity approach does not equate to the belief that all students are the same or will have the same
educational outcomes. This same notion of equity is supported by the *Grattan Institute Report* (Jensen, Weidmann, & Farmer, 2013). The report argues that to improve school performance parents should be free to choose schools, as this increases competition between schools. This is supported by Subotnik and Rayhack (2007).

Australian parents now have access to a website that is designed to detail information about the educational performance of all schools in Australia, *My School* (www.myschool.edu.au). This website was produced to aid parents in making a school choice that best suited the needs of their child (Parding, McGrath-Champ, & Stacey, 2017). Even though this gives parents some information about schools that may be an option for their child, there is a case that this site is “based on and promotes a debatable system of values, and not a form of transparency that is in the public interest” (Redden & Low, 2012, p. 44). The strength of the site can be further questioned in the systemic Catholic schools context, as due to the enrolment policy of Catholic schools (Sydney Catholic Schools, 2016c) the choice of a particular Catholic school is not necessarily an option. The initial choice of a school is determined based on the location of the parish where the family worships. The secondary school choice is determined by the primary school the child attended. Primary schools are allocated to a secondary school.

### 2.7.2 School choice for academically gifted students

There is little research about whether the considerations outlined in the previous section apply to academically gifted students, and if so, how they are prioritised. In her editorial, Johnsen (2017) proposed eight questions about school choice for academically gifted students. These questions dealt with how school options can be established and assessed for these students. Also, there were questions about ensuring there were accountability processes, the development of an applicable curriculum, the selection of the teachers, and the performance of the students, coupled with behavioural standards. These questions were posed so that these students would not be forgotten in the school choice route.
Two examples of rigorous curriculum models that meet the needs of highly motivated and academically gifted students, are the International Baccalaureate (IB) (International Baccalaureate, 2017) and Advanced Placement (AP) (Advanced Placement College Board, 2017) programs. These programs have a positive academic effect with a focus on higher order thinking, creative and divergent problem solving and conceptual reasoning. Reports (Rogers, 2002b; VanTassel-Baska, 2013) state that both the IB and AP examinations are delivered to a high academic standard. The growth of schools offering these alternate curriculum options is attributed to the lack of rigour and challenge in the current standard school curriculum (Johnsen, 2017; Rogers, 2002b; Sayler, 2006; Subotnik & Rayhack, 2007; Vialle & Rogers, 2009). The IB program is offered in more Australia schools than the AP program. There are 16 secondary schools in Sydney that offer the IB at senior level (IB Schools Australasia, 2017). All 16 schools are independent, with not one Catholic systemic or government school offering these alternative curriculum programs. There appears to be only two schools in Australia that offer the AP as an alternate option. Again both these schools are independent, with the school in Western Australian being an international school (International School of Western Australia, 2017) and the other being an independent Catholic school in the state of Victoria (Parade College, 2016). The availability and accessibility for parents to choose one of these schools that offer an authentic, rigorous, and demanding curriculum is limited.

The *forced choice dilemma* (Gross, 1989) refers to the choice an academically gifted student may have to make. The choice between the acceptance of peers and wanting to be seen as ‘normal’, and pursuing an educational pathway that leads to high academic achievement, can be challenging. This dilemma “is more likely to be an issue for students at the higher, rather than lower, levels of intellectual giftedness” (Jung, Barnett, Gross, & McCormick, 2011, p. 194), and may lead to underachievement and/or behavioural issues. Gagné (2008) would argue that this dilemma falls into the ‘catalyst’ section of his model, and is an example of the ‘chance factor’ that contributes to the transference of a gift to a measurable talent. This is a consideration when a school choice is being made. Additionally, the Big Fish Little Pond Effect and the academic self-concept, which were both discussed in detail in
the first section of this chapter, are situations where a child may influence his or her parent’s school choice.

There is mixed research about the positive and negative effects of ability grouping, however, research (Makel, Lee, Olszewki-Kubilius, & Putallaz, 2012) found the participants’ academic self-concept did not decline significantly when associated with ability grouping. Educational grouping does not always remain in the same environmental context as opposed to “fish don’t change ponds” (p. 778). This is significant research for parents and educators to consider when making decisions about educational environments for academically gifted students, and removes the argument about providing specific opportunities and programs for gifted students (Plucker, 2012).

In an Australian study that focused on working conditions and school choice (Parding et al., 2017), secondary teachers from across Sydney were interviewed. The comparison between working in a disadvantaged school and an advantaged school was one aspect of the study. In advantaged schools, students want to learn and they complete allocated tasks, however this increases the workload of classroom teachers. There are high expectations from parents and students. The environment in elite high fee paying schools is a competitive one. Even though gifted education was not specifically mentioned in this study, the cultural environment, classroom teacher approaches to teaching, and expectations, are considerations. The assumption that academically gifted students will be successful regardless of the educational environment they are placed within, is contrary to the psychological science that advocates for all students to be challenged (Subotnik, Olszewski-Kubilius, & Worrell, 2011). This monograph advocates the rethinking of how gifted education is delivered and implemented in schools, rather than being excluded based on the psychological science research.

2.7.3 Decision-making process

There are various models and theories that consider the process of decision-making within a corporate or business context rather than an educational setting. Some of
these include, Rational Choice Theory (RCT) (Hechter & Kanazawa, 1997), Hossler and Gallagher Model (Hossler & Gallagher, 1987), Analytic Hierarchy Process (AHP) (Saaty, 2008), Neuroeconomics (Rangel, Camerer, & Montague, 2008), Adaptive Strategy Selection in Decision Making (Payne & Bettman, 1988) and Two-Stage Dynamic Signal Detection Theory (2DSD) (Pleskac & Busemeyer, 2010). There is an ethical element within the Hunt-Vitell Theory of Ethical Decision Making, which suggests there is a correlation between religiosity and human behaviour (Vitell, Paolillo, & Singh, 2005; Wilkes, Burnett, & Howell, 1986). Religiosity, as defined by McDaniel and Burnett (1990) is a “person’s relationship with a supreme being and how an individual expresses that relationship in society” (p. 101).

The Hunt-Vitell Theory of Ethical Decision-Making (Hunt & Vitell, 1986) “attempts to explain the decision-making process for problem situations having ethical content” (p. 5). The theory has been the focus of empirical testing in a variety of situations (Brady & Gougoumanova, 2011; Hunt & Laverie, 2004; Hunt & Vasquez-Parraga, 1993; Marks & Mayo, 1991; Mengüç, 1998; Thong & Yap, 1998; Vitell, Singhapakdi, & Thomas, 2001). In identifying the difference between an extrinsically and intrinsically motivated person, Allport and Ross believe, “the extrinsically motivated person uses religion, whereas the intrinsically motivated lives his religion” (1967, p. 434). Results indicate that intrinsic religiosity is a significant factor, whereas extrinsic religiosity is not related to ethical beliefs (Vitell et al., 2005). Religiosity has been measured by intrinsic/extrinsic religiousness scales (Allport & Ross, 1967; Gorsuch & McPherson, 1989; Wilkes et al., 1986), which this researcher will use in this study.

The research presented in The Longitudinal Study of Australian Children (Warren, 2016) showed there was a correlation between the parents’ religion, education, occupation, and educational expectations, and the decision they made for the choice of school for their children. This study revealed the mother’s religion has a greater impact than the father, stating “the percentage of children attending a Catholic school is highest when the mother was Catholic” (p. 157). Again, it is the level of education of the mother that has a greater effect than the father’s, on the school attended. Children whose mother had a tertiary qualification were more likely to
attend a non-government school, that is a Catholic or independent school. The academic reputation of a school is more important to parents who have a professional occupation. Additionally, the school choice decision is related to the parents’ hopes for their child’s post-school education. The decision process is based on the individual merits of the school and what is believed to be best for their child. Warren’s study found that the most commonly cited reasons for the parent’s decision were convenience, siblings, academic reasons, and religious reasons.

In summary, even though the literature and research associated with school choice for academically gifted students is limited, there are numerous research studies about school choice in a general context. There are several factors that guide this choice, however, in New South Wales choice is generally restricted by educational sector enrolment policies. The attendance and enrolment is predetermined by the family’s residential address. The exceptions are acceptance into an academically selective school based on test results and the ability to pay fees at an independent school. Even though fees are required to attend systemic Catholic schools, the acceptance is based on the family’s worshipping parish for primary school and then the Catholic primary school attended for acceptance into a Catholic secondary school (Sydney Catholic Schools, 2016c, 2016d).

2.8 Summary

This chapter was structured into seven sections: characteristics of academically gifted students, theories of human development, beliefs about giftedness and gifted education, Catholic school ethos, leadership, pedagogical practices, and school choice. Munro (2016) challenges leaders to examine what their school is doing well and how they can improve in terms of gifted education pedagogy. He based this paper on the premise that Australia’s “brightest students are coasting to failure” (Ferrari, 2014, p. 3) Collins in her foreword (Senate Employment Workplace Relations Small Business and Education References Committee, 2001) expressed concern that the particular needs of gifted children are not satisfactorily being met by the education system. Unfortunately, at the time the Senate report was written there was still a negative community attitude towards giftedness.
This literature review has highlighted numerous strategies that could be utilised by The System to improve the educational learning experiences of its gifted students. Strategies that have been shown to have positive outcomes include ongoing professional learning in giftedness and gifted education for teachers and leaders, implementation of a variety of pedagogical practices, and the potential introduction of alternative curriculum models promoting higher-order thinking, such as the International Baccalaureate. It is hoped that this study will broaden thinking within The System, and lead to more innovative approaches being used with academically gifted students, especially those students who have identified in the top 1% of the population.

Chapter 3 will explain and justify the research method adopted in this study. It focuses on the experiences of academically gifted students (in this study this is restricted to the top 1% of the population) and their families, within a Catholic education system of schools, and the impact this has on the choice of future schooling.
Chapter 3: Research Method

Dr Bruce Thompson and Dr Rena Subotnik: Despite our society’s fascination with gifted children, research on giftedness has been underfunded when compared with other areas of education and suffers from a number of methodological challenges. (Thompson & Subotnik, 2010)

The purpose of this chapter is to explain and document the research method adopted for this study. It focuses on the experiences of academically gifted students and their families within a Catholic education system of schools, and the impact this has on the choice of future schooling.

The research question and three sub-questions that focus the research are:

Why are parents of academically gifted children choosing to stay or leave a Catholic schooling system?

1. What factors do parents consider in the decision-making process for the schooling of their academically gifted child?
2. To what extent does the child’s experience at their current school link to the choice of future schooling?
3. What is the alignment between the parent’s perception of their child’s school experience and what the school believes they are offering?

Given the purpose of this study as detailed in Chapter 1, and the research Laughlin (2010) completed on academically gifted students choosing not to continue their schooling in The System, an interpretive design was adopted to explore how families reach a decision about which school is appropriate for the future of their academically gifted child. An interpretive approach acknowledges the paradigm of individualistic decision-making (Thomas, 2009) and will allow the researcher to “understand how others understand their world” (O’Donoghue, 2007, p. 10). The main purpose of the research is to understand how parents arrive at a decision about future schooling. From this understanding it would be anticipated that
Catholic schools could better identify the specific needs of academically gifted students and plan to meet them.

### 3.1 Theoretical Framework

The purpose of having a theoretical framework is to guide the research. Thomas (2009, p. 71) describes the social world as “hugely varied and complex” and he goes on to explain that within the social sciences and educational research, a broad range of individual and group behaviour needs to be understood and “disentangled”. A framework can assist in thinking about these issues. Even though qualitative research is designed to “inductively build rather than to test” (Merriam, 2009, p. 64), there is still a need to have a framework to scaffold and interpret the qualitative data.

Using the interpretive design framework, the researcher will outline in this chapter the epistemology, theoretical perspective, methodology, and the methods used. For this study, Crotty’s (1998) research model and definitions have been chosen. The model has the following elements:

- **Epistemology:** "providing a philosophical grounding for deciding what kinds of knowledge are possible and how we can ensure they are both adequate and legitimate" (Crotty, 1998, p. 8). Or as Thomas (2009) states: “the study of our knowledge” (p. 87), that is, how we see the world.
- **Theoretical Perspective:** is an explanation “of the assumptions brought to the research task and reflected in the methodology” (Crotty, 1998, p. 7).
- **Methodology:** the accepted approach to data collection and data analysis within a particular field of research, that is, the “strategy or plan of action” (Crotty, 1998, p. 7).
- **Methods:** the “techniques or procedures used to gather and analyse data related to some research question or hypothesis” (Crotty, 1998, p. 3).
- In addition, the **Data Analysis Approach:** the accepted structure used to examine the information that was collected. This analytical procedure must align with the theoretical framework (Grbich, 2013).
Table 3.1 shows the relationship between the epistemology, theoretical perspective, methodology, methods, and data analysis approach, which was undertaken in this study. Further explanation of this theoretical framework follows.

Table 3.1

*A Model of the Theoretical Framework*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Research Model</th>
<th>Approach in this Study</th>
<th>Evidenced in this Study</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Epistemology</strong></td>
<td>Constructionism</td>
<td>Connections</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(Understanding the culture)</td>
<td>Forma...</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Theoretical perspective</strong></td>
<td>Interpretivism – Symbolic Interaction</td>
<td>Interactions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(Analysis, interpretation and explanation)</td>
<td>Influences</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Methodology</strong></td>
<td>Case Study</td>
<td>Construction of meaning</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Methodological approach</strong></td>
<td>Collective Case Studies</td>
<td>In-depth, bounded</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Methods</strong></td>
<td>1. Semi-Structured Interviews – qualitative</td>
<td>55 individual interviews</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2. Tabulated data – quantitative</td>
<td>4 influences</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>3. Document analysis – qualitative and quantitative</td>
<td>19 system documents</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>5 school documents, websites</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Data Analysis approach</strong></td>
<td>Thematic Analysis</td>
<td>Themes and sub-themes</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### 3.2 Epistemology of Constructionism

The epistemological framework the researcher employed was constructionism (Crotty, 1998), also known as social constructivism (Guba & Lincoln, 1994). This framework enables meaning to be constructed about the same issues from different people’s perspectives. The researcher in this study is interested in how people connect, how they form ideas about the world and therefore, how they make decisions. To do this, gifted education was investigated within the Catholic system in Sydney and relevant people (research participants) were engaged in deep
conversations. To gain an understanding of how these people understand their world was critical (Thomas, 2009). A collaborative link between the researcher and the participants was established, with each influencing the other (Mertens, 2010). Therefore, the appropriate epistemology for this study is constructionism. In other words, “meaning is not discovered but constructed” (Crotty, 1998, p. 9).

This study used Crotty’s (1998) definition of constructionism, not to be confused with constructivism. These terms are defined as:

- **Constructionism**: “the collective generation [and transmission] of meaning” (p. 58) that is, meaning constructed and interpreted as engagement happens with the world, emphasising “the hold our culture has on us: it shapes the way we see things” (p. 58).

- **Constructivism**: “the meaning-making activity of the individual mind” (p. 58), that is, meaning is constructed by an individual regardless of what others construct.

In addition to this definition, a constructionist viewpoint cannot be described as objective or subjective, as constructionism brings both objectivity and subjectivity intricately together. It is possible to make sense of the same reality in different ways, conditional on the world where meaning is constructed. Depending on the culture, very different understandings can be made about the same matter or experience. As a result, within a construction epistemology there are no true or valid interpretations, but only useful interpretations (Crotty, 1998). Consequently, knowledge and meaning are collectively generated depending on the individual’s culture (constructionism), as opposed to knowledge being constructed by the individual’s mind (constructivism) (Otto, 2005).

The distinction between constructionism and constructivism is important for shaping the epistemology of this study. To appreciate the decision-making processes within a family, the cultural understandings of both the family and school are required. Firstly, constructionism allows the practices of the family’s religiosity, and the school’s culture and Catholic school ethos to be investigated. Secondly, the values and attitudes the family places on education, and in particular gifted
education, can be compared to that of the values and attitudes of the Catholic school. Finally, the researcher's previous experience of working within the area of gifted education in the Catholic schooling system will allow a deep understanding. This position, however, is recognised in terms of the researcher's background, gender, ethnicity, and educational experience. Awareness that this previous position may affect the interpretations must be acknowledged. In the context of this research the constructionist epistemology recognises there may be several meanings for the same phenomenon due to differing contexts and a wide variety of individual experiences. This is acknowledged by Guba and Lincoln (1994) as “multiple knowledges” (p. 113). Subsequently, this multidimensional approach of constructionism is beneficial in understanding parents’ construction of a decision where their personal values and beliefs, their child, and the school community have influenced their choice.

### 3.3 Theoretical Perspective of Interpretivism

Following this epistemology, an interpretivist design was adopted as the theoretical perspective, in particular, symbolic interactionism. A theoretical perspective is an explanation “of the assumptions brought to the research task and reflected in the methodology” (Crotty, 1998, p. 7). It provides a philosophical context to deal with the complex assumptions which the methodology expects. The researcher used an interpretivist approach to “look for culturally derived and historically situated interpretations of the social life-world” (Crotty, 1998, p. 67). Traditionally, there have been distinct streams within the interpretivist approach. The stream or lens adopted for this study is symbolic interactionism, which is a direct examination of “issues such as language, communication, interrelationships and community” (Crotty, 1998, p. 8).

Many academics (Charon, 2010; Crotty, 1998; O'Donoghue, 2007; Schwandt, 1998; Thomas, 2009) attribute the thinking used in symbolic interactionism to the work of George Mead, closely followed by Herbert Blumer (SAGE Publications). Blumer further developed Mead’s ideas and formulated three principles (Crotty, 1998; O'Donoghue, 2007; Schwandt, 1998). The first principle states that humans act
toward situations on the basis of the meanings the situation has for them. That is, individuals attach their own meaning to circumstances, hence, meanings influence actions (O’Donoghue, 2007). Secondly, these meanings derive from and arise out of the social interaction, that is, communication and/or observation between individuals. This is symbolic because we communicate through languages and other symbols which then further generate more symbols (Schwandt, 1998). The implication then is that an individual’s understanding of a situation may be adjusted by the actions of other people. The third of Blumer’s principles is that the meanings are established and modified through an interpretive process used by the person in dealing with the situations they encounter. In other words, this is the means by which an individual aligns their actions with others. O’Donoghue (2007) strongly states that this process is a vital component of social life. Furthermore, this principle rejects the notion of “human actions deriving from such internal forces as instincts, drives and needs, and also to reject the concept of ‘attitude’ as an internal tendency” (O’Donoghue, 2007, p. 19).

Since Blumer’s work in the 1950s and 1960s, many researchers and social thinkers have understood symbolic interactionism to be important. This has been evident in the study of emotions, qualitative research methodology and the integration of the perspective into sociology (Charon, 2010). In addition, Charon states that to fully understand how symbolic interactionists view human beings, five central ideas in symbolic interactionism are essential. Firstly, to understand human action and comprehend cause we must focus on social interaction. Secondly, human action is not only interaction with others but also interaction with self in the form of the process of thinking. Thirdly, Charon’s idea is that as a result of interaction and thinking humans define the environment or situation they are in. Fourthly, the occurrences in a given situation can drive human action. Finally, humans are active beings and therefore control their actions.

Both O’Donoghue (2007) and Charon (2010) identify the need for clarity and consistency with the definition of important terms and have shown agreement in their definitions. Words such as ‘understandings’, ‘meanings’, ‘beliefs’, ‘attitudes’, and ‘perspectives’ are used interchangeably in the literature, which can be
confusing. An example of this is when Charon says, “perspectives are different from attitudes...when we use the term perspectives to describe a human being, we enter the world of definition; when we use the term attitude, we enter the world of response” (p. 38). Symbolic interactionism is an investigation of perspectives that arise out of a shared situation, as opposed to focusing on attitude, which is part of the individual. Consequently, the researcher needs to be consistent and aware when using these terms, as they are clearly defined within this theoretical perspective.

The implication for this study are the interactions that impact on how the parents make their decision. An individual will not make the decision in isolation. This is particularly relevant in gaining a deeper understanding of how those involved interact, and the effect the cultural environment and family’s religiosity have in constructing meaning. Through dialogue, the researcher became aware of the feelings and perceptions of the participants in the research and interpreted their meanings and intent to define the situation.

The use of symbolic interactionism was particularly appropriate as an approach for this study, as a case study methodology was going to be employed. Charon (2010) sums up the spirit of symbolic interactionism succinctly: “to understand human action, we must focus on social interaction, human thinking, definition of the situation, the present, and the active nature of the human being” (Charon, 2010, p. 29). Based on that reference, the researcher’s aim was to get an inside understanding and perspective of how parents make a decision about the future schooling for their academically gifted child.

3.4 Research Methodology of a Case Study

Methodology, or as Creswell (2008, 2013) calls it, ‘research design,’ provides a framework to plan, conduct and evaluate the research. For this study the researcher applied a case study methodology. A case study is an “in-depth exploration of a bounded system based on extensive data collection. Bounded means that the case is separated out for research in terms of time, place, or some physical boundaries” (Creswell, 2008, p. 476). This study focuses on the process of making a decision
within a cultural perspective of Catholic schooling. The research is bounded as there are clear parameters for the data collection. A collective case study is appropriate, as it specifically adopts the study of several cases to provide an insight into the issue of school choice for academically gifted students.

Case study methodology is often used in qualitative research, and in particular in the field of education. In his article, *Three Approaches to Case Study Methods in Education*, Yazan (2015) explores the perspectives of three foundational methodologists, Yin, Stake, and Merriam. Yazan compares the three methodological interpretations of case studies for areas of similarities and differences. Yin’s epistemological commitment is positivism whereas the other two, Stake and Merriam’s epistemological commitment is constructivism (Yazan, 2015). Constructivism aligns with this researcher’s theoretical framework. The definition used is based on Crotty’s (1998) definition of constructionism, also know as social constructivism (Guba & Lincoln, 1994).

Stake’s (1995) design process allows for flexibility in structuring the research method and questions. Merriam (2009) explicitly describes the process of the theoretical framework emerging from the literature review. Both Stake and Merriam advocate the use of qualitative data sources exclusively, while Yin (2009) states quantitative and qualitative sources should be combined. The data gathered for this research is from semi-structured interviews, and the analysis of documents with some of the data obtained from the interviews represented in a quantitative manner.

To gain an in-depth understanding of the decision-making process, that is, the social behaviour and interactions, the researcher explored specific cases to illustrate and explain the contributory factors. Stake identifies the idea of using case studies as a methodology when there is a “special interest” (1995, p. xi). This is particularly illuminating for this researcher as a ‘special interest’ in this study has clearly been defined. Stake highlights the benefit of case study in identifying the “particularity and complexity of a single case, coming to understand its activity within important circumstances” (p. xi). In addition, this study utilised collectiveness and grouping of
individual case studies to provide insight into a particular issue (Creswell, 2008; Stake, 1995). Some other academics use the term “multi-case study” (Merriam, 2009; Tellis, 1997; Yin, 2009). A collective case study allows the researcher to examine several cases where the students are at different stages in their schooling, as well as families within different contexts. This will allow for the analysis of similarities and differences.

As with all methodological approaches, the case study design does have limitations and challenges. Following are four challenges which impacted on this study. One of the concerns with case study methodology is the lack of opportunity to be able to determine a general conclusion based on one case study (Flyvbjerg, 2006; Merriam, 2009; Tellis, 1997). Even using a collective case study approach does not dispel this concern (Tellis, 1997). Another concern is lack of rigour (Yin, 2009). The researcher must be resolute in ensuring all data and evidence collected are reported and analysed fairly and accurately. A third criticism about case studies is that they take too long. Yin (2009) argues that this used to be a problem but there is a more streamlined approach now. Yin even states “a valid and high-quality case study (can be completed) without leaving the telephone or internet” (p. 15). This was a consideration for this study, nevertheless, and the researcher had a definitive timeline in which to gather the data. Finally, deciding the ‘boundaries’ for the collective case study in terms of the number of cases and subsequent interviews, time, events, and processes (Creswell, 2013), was a potential concern. As well as the timeline, the researcher created a data collection matrix to clearly define the ‘boundaries’.

Finally, the researcher chose the methodology of case study that most closely aligns to Merriam’s philosophy (Merriam, 1998, 2009; Yazan, 2015). However, there are components of Stake’s methodology (Stake, 1995; Yazan, 2015) that complement Merriam’s philosophy, such as the triangulation of data. The case study methodology allows for an understanding of a real-life phenomenon in depth, and at the same time include the essential contextual circumstances.
3.5 Participants and Context of the Study

The main research question that directs this study is to investigate why parents of academically gifted children choose to have their children stay or leave the Catholic school system. Consequently, the boundaries of this case study are clearly defined as: firstly, students who are already attending Catholic systemic schools; secondly, students who have been formally identified as at least highly academically gifted using a psychometric test; and thirdly, students whose parents have a decision to make regarding the options for future schooling.

Sampling can either be probability or non-probability sampling. Probability sampling is a random selection of participants and is mainly used in quantitative research where it is hoped that generalisations can be formed. Non-probability sampling on the other hand is used in qualitative research, where to answer a research question participants are chosen based on specific criteria (Merriam, 1998). Non-probability sampling can be divided into two types: ‘accidental’ or ‘purposive’ (Trochim, 2006a) / ‘purposeful’ (Creswell, 2008; Merriam, 1998). Purposeful sampling is the term for this specific research, as opposed to the random selection of participants. Furthermore, within purposeful sampling there are different sub-types, which writers have described. For this study the researcher used homogeneous sampling. This enabled the researcher to select the students based on specific criteria and characteristics (Creswell, 2008). Merriam (1998) described this as a unique sample. The researcher is interested in this group because of their unique characteristics.

The cases for this study were chosen from a Catholic system in Sydney, Australia. Students for this research must have had a psychometric test, which confirms the student is highly to exceptionally academically gifted, that is, in the top 1% of the population. The parent for this research is the parent of the identified students. One parent for each student is included in the research. The principal, gifted education coordinator and classroom teacher of each school where the identified student attended were included in the data gathering process, as they generally establish a different relationship with the student and his/her parents. This allowed for the contribution of different points of view. All the interviewees from the school had the opportunity to become familiar with the context and issues of the research problem.
The case selection criteria were focused on the students as opposed to the school. Table 3.2 provides a numerical breakdown of the participants in this study. A detailed description of the participants will follow in Chapter 4.

Table 3.2
Participants for the Case Studies

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participants</th>
<th>Data collected from the participants</th>
<th>Individual Interviews</th>
<th>Quantitative Data</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Student</td>
<td></td>
<td>4</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parent</td>
<td></td>
<td>4</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Principal</td>
<td></td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gifted Education Coordinator</td>
<td></td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Classroom Teacher</td>
<td></td>
<td>4</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number of participants</td>
<td></td>
<td>19</td>
<td>36</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 3.2 shows an overview of the data collected from the participants involved in this research. The 14 identified students attended nine different schools, five primary and four secondary. Three gifted education coordinators from the nine System schools were on leave at the time when the data were gathered, so six were interviewed. Thirteen classroom teachers were interviewed, as one student’s classroom teacher was also the gifted education coordinator at the school. It is also important to note that there was a brother and sister included in this study and as such, the parent count (13) is one less than the student count (14) despite there being one parent interviewed for each student. All the study participants were interviewed individually, making a total of 55 interviews. Due to the nature of the questions, the quantitative data collected from the semi-structured interviews were gathered from the parents and educators, not the students. The parents and educators were all asked about their school experience and pedagogical practices.
Only the parents completed the religiosity survey and only the educators were asked about gifted education professional learning.

3.6 Data Gathering Strategies

For this case study a variety of data collection strategies were used to gain an understanding of the factors that influence the decision-making process. Initially, 28 primary and 19 secondary principals were contacted to identify possible student participants that met the criteria of the case study boundaries (a copy of the initial letter is in Appendix E). Once potential students were identified, the researcher gave a parent information package to the principal to pass on to the parent. It was the parent’s choice to contact the researcher directly and agree to participate in the study. An information package that included participant information letters and consent forms for the principal, gifted education coordinator, and classroom teacher was sent to each school (Appendix F). After the researcher received the consent agreement forms, times were negotiated for the semi-structured interviews to be conducted. System documents were reviewed to gain a deeper insight into the current policy of The System with regard to gifted education. Finally, school documents that had a bearing on gifted education were examined to provide background information and the context of the school community. A summary of the participant identification and consent process is shown in Figure 3.1.

Figure 3.1. Summary of the participant identification and consent process.
3.6.1 Semi-structured interview

As a significant part of this study was the case study interviews, attention to establishing effective interviewing techniques and protocols (Partington, 2001) was crucial. There are three forms of interviews that researchers can use. Firstly, a structured interview where all the questions are prepared that is, this form of interview is, in essence, an oral questionnaire. Secondly, an interview can be completely unstructured, that is, a conversation between the interviewer and the interviewee. Thirdly, a semi-structured interview is halfway between the first two. The interviewer has a prepared set of questions, but allows for considerable flexibility about how these questions are answered. There is the opportunity for other issues, still related to the particular topic, to be discussed in a conversational way (Hannan, 2007). For this study, the researcher used the semi-structured interview technique. This allowed for consistency across the interviews to enhance the capacity of the collective case study potential, and maximised the amount of information that could be gathered from the interviews.

Establishing a rapport with the interviewees is an essential component of the interview process. The interviewee must feel comfortable and confident about the purpose of the interview. The interviewer must not be judgemental and needs to be an empathetic and respectful listener (Hannan, 2007; Partington, 2001). Additionally, the interviewer must be aware of the impact of non-verbal communication such as gestures, facial expressions and body positions. An understanding of these communication modalities is important from both points of view, firstly as the interviewer, and secondly as observing the non-verbal actions of the interviewee. These observations add depth to the richness of the data and are a crucial part of the interview (Burns, 2000), which contributed to the desire for all interviews to be conducted face-to-face. The interviews were digitally recorded, with notes being taken as well to capture the nuances an oral recording missed. The recorded interviews were subsequently transcribed. These transcriptions plus the notes were coded and analysed.

As the researcher conducted a semi-structured interview, questions were thoughtfully prepared with particular regard to the sequencing and wording of
questions (Patton, 2002). Appendix G details the complete semi-structured interview guide used during this research. Merriam (2009) gives a highly detailed description of good questions and questions to avoid. Some of the types of questions she recommends are hypothetical, ‘devil’s advocate’, ideal position, and interpretive questions. However, it is believed that the integrity of an interview question lies in the extent to which it can elicit descriptive and detailed information about a given situation or context (Merriam, 2009). Figure 3.2 outlines the concepts that will form the semi-structured interview questions and the relevance for each group of participants, the principal, gifted education coordinator, classroom teacher, parent, and student.
Table of Concepts of the interview questions:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Concepts of the interview questions</th>
<th>Principal</th>
<th>Gifted Education Coordinator</th>
<th>Classroom Teacher</th>
<th>Parent</th>
<th>Student</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. The school’s Catholic ethos – use the elements from the Catholic Ethos framework (see Figure 3.3)</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Gifted education pre-service education/training</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Gifted education qualifications/professional learning</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. The school culture pertaining to gifted education</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Gifted education profile within the school – policy, leadership/teacher allocation, school website</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. System issues such as support and guidance with professional leaning and resources both human and financial</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. Enrolment policy issues</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. Pedagogical practices checklist</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9. Other provisions</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10. Awareness of system documents – checklist of system documents (see Figure 3.5)</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11. Identification of academically gifted students</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12. An understanding of the characteristics of giftedness (see Appendix B) (including overexcitabilities - see Appendix J)</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13. Beliefs about giftedness and gifted education</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14. School experience of the educators</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15. School experience of the parent</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16. Current school experiences of the student</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17. Options for future schooling</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18. Religiosity survey (see Figure 3.4)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>✓</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Figure 3.2. Semi-structured interview question concepts.*

As is clear in Figure 3.2, not all concepts were relevant to all the interviewees. Questions specifically about teaching and gifted education qualifications, professional learning in the area of gifted education, their understanding about identification of giftedness, and their knowledge of The System documents, were only asked of the educators, that is, the principal, gifted education coordinator, and classroom teacher. Questions that were particularly about leadership and school organisation were asked only of the principal. The parent and student were
questioned about their experiences at the current school and potential options for future schooling. Only the parent completed the religiosity survey, as the researcher wanted to establish if there was a link between religiosity and the choice of school for their child. All interviewees had the opportunity to discuss and answer questions about the school’s Catholic ethos and culture pertaining to giftedness and gifted education, pedagogical options embedded into classroom practices, the gifted education provisions offered, and an appreciation about the characteristics of giftedness.

As discussed in Chapter 2, Catholic school ethos is hard to define. The researcher developed a framework (Figure 3.3), based on the components of Catholic school ethos referred to by Donnelly (2000), Cook and Simonds (2011), and Canavan (2007a). A copy of this framework was given to each of the interviewees except the students, to assist the discussion of ‘Concept 1’ (Figure 3.2), about Catholic school ethos. For the students, less complex ideas were discussed.

![Catholic school ethos framework](image)

*Figure 3.3. Catholic school ethos framework.*
Catholic school ethos is thought of as a phenomenon rather than a tangible product (Glover & Coleman, 2005), yet the research suggests that it has tangible effects on the provision of gifted education (Rebhorn, 2004). Having a model such as the one proposed in Figure 3.3, was a valuable tool in giving some direction to understanding ethos and the impact on a Catholic school culture. This, combined with the concept of ‘charism’ and building a culture of relationships (Cook & Simonds, 2011) provided a useful framework to define and appreciate the Catholic school ethos and the impact on gifted education in The System’s schools.

3.6.2 Specific data gathered

The specific data for this research were acquired during the interviews, represented in a quantitative manner, and contributed to the inherent understanding of gifted education. Firstly, the personal school experience of the principal, gifted education coordinator, classroom teacher and parent was collected. The researcher was interested in exploring if the parent’s own school experience impacted on the choice for their child. Likewise, whether the school experience of the educators impacted on their beliefs about the opportunities provided in their school for academically gifted students. Secondly, a religiosity survey of 14 statements was provided to the parents. This survey was based on research led by Allport (Allport & Ross, 1967). “The extrinsically motivated person uses religion, whereas the intrinsically motivated lives his religion” (p. 434). The researcher conducted the following survey with the 13 parents’ statements to measure their religiosity and determine if there is a link between religiosity and the preferred school for their child. This survey is discussed in more detail in Chapter 6. The statements are in Figure 3.4.
Figure 3.4. Parent religiosity survey.

The third component of the quantitative data gathered from the interviews were the professional learning experiences in gifted education for the principal, gifted education coordinator and classroom teacher. A streamlined and strategic professional learning program for educators appears to be important (Geake & Gross, 2008). Structured professional learning allows educators to have an understanding of giftedness and gifted education, and provides the necessary support and guidance needed to make the required adjustments to curriculum delivery (Geake & Gross, 2008). Finally, the existence of specific gifted education pedagogical practices being provided at the school was explored. The literature identified five pedagogical practices that may be used to address the needs of academically gifted students. They are ability grouping, acceleration, differentiated curriculum, personalised learning, and learning technologies. The research about
acceleration, if done carefully and appropriately, is positive (Colangelo et al., 2004a, 2004b; Gross, 2006), as is the affirming influence of curriculum differentiation (VanTassel-Baska et al., 2008; Vialle & Rogers, 2009). For academically gifted students, ability grouping combined with a differentiated curriculum which adds complexity and abstractness to the instruction, has been shown to be an effective strategy (Feldhusen & Sayler, 1990; Kulik & Kulik, 1992; McClure, 2007; Tieso, 2005). Data were collected in two ways: using a Likert Scale and gathering evidence of the pedagogical practice with examples. The researcher compared the parents’ and educators’ perspectives about these practices.

3.6.3 Document analysis

Documents from The System as well as from each of the students’ schools, were analysed. For this study 19 documents from The System’s public website and intranet were examined. These documents were selected based on the interconnection with gifted education, either implicitly or explicitly. The documents represent a cross-section for the purpose of this study. Figure 3.5 outlines the category grouping of the 19 documents.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Document Grouping</th>
<th>The System Documents</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Vision and Mission</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. System strategic planning documents</td>
<td>Building on Strength – Strategic Improvement Plan 2011-2015</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>How Effective is our Catholic School (2011)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>New Horizons – Strategic Improvement Plan 2016-2018</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Pedagogical documents</td>
<td>Statement on Authentic Learning</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Authentic Assessment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>The Learning Framework</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>eLearning with the iLe@rn Model</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Enrolment and parent documents</td>
<td>Enrolment Policy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Enrolment Policy - Parent Brochure</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Application to enrol at Sydney Catholic Schools</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Questions frequently asked by parents about Catholic education in Sydney</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Parent Charter for Sydney Catholic Schools</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Gifted education documents</td>
<td>Gifted Education Policy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Gifted Education K-12 Position Paper</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Gifted Education Glossary</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Gifted Education Framework</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Newman Gifted Program</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Website and intranet</td>
<td>System Website and Intranet</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

_Figure 3.5. The System documents of relevance to gifted education._

For methodical purposes, the documents were categorised in order to analyse how they are interconnected with gifted education, and the interaction between these documents and the actual and/or perceived delivery of gifted education programs, provisions, and structures. It should be noted that this research study spanned two Strategic Plans developed and implemented by The System. The first plan, _Building on Strength – Strategic Improvement Plan 2011-2015_ (Sydney Archdiocesan Catholic Schools Board & Catholic Education Office, 2010) and the second strategic plan that

Schools have a number of documents that detail policy, process and procedure. For this study five documents and the school website were examined. Figure 3.6 lists the school documents reviewed.

![Figure 3.6.](image)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>School Documents</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>School 5 Year Strategic Plan</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Annual Improvement Plan</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pedagogical Policy (Teaching and Learning)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gifted Education Policy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Newman documents (if applicable)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School Website</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Figure 3.6. School documents collected of relevance to gifted education.*

Documents give an insight into the culture and expectations of The System and the school (Merriam, 2009). Within research methodology, the term *document* refers to a variety of resources, including written, visual, digital and physical material which would be relevant evidence in answering the research questions (Merriam, 2009). Merriam refers to "limitations and strengths of documents" (2009, p. 153) as a source of evidence. The limitations Merriam cites as problems: documents may be incomplete, they may not fit the research design, or it may be difficult to confirm the authenticity of the document. Some strengths include: as the document exists independent of the research agenda the document does not represent a bias, documents are authentic and, there is no cost to attaining documents. For this research the limitations Merriam refers to are not applicable as the documents stated in the above list are mandatory for each school and The System documents are in existence. Therefore, an added advantage of using documents as a source of evidence is that they are easily accessible. Furthermore, determining the authenticity and accuracy of The System and school documents is not an issue.
A summary of the stages of data collection and analysis are reflected in Figure 3.7. The stages are set out sequentially.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Data Collection Techniques</th>
<th>Stages for Data Collection</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Stage 1</strong> Selection of participants</td>
<td>Step 1 Contact 28 primary and 19 secondary school principals</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Step 2 Analyse responses from Step 1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Step 3 Select possible students</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Step 4 Seek agreement from the parents, students and schools to participate in this study</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Stage 2</strong> Semi-structured interviews</td>
<td>Step 5 Negotiate an appropriate place and time for the interviews</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Step 6 Conduct the semi-structured interviews with parents, students, principal, gifted education coordinator, and classroom teacher</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Stage 3</strong> Specific data gathered</td>
<td>Step 7 Ask specific questions in the interview about: school experience, parent religiosity survey, gifted education professional learning, and pedagogical practices</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Stage 4</strong> Document analysis</td>
<td>Step 8 Analyse The System documents</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Step 9 Analyse the school documents</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Stage 5</strong> Final analysis</td>
<td>Step 10 Final analysis</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Figure 3.7. Stages for data collection and analysis.*

The researcher kept a journal throughout the entire time of the data collection. This journal is an additional piece of data that is separate from the interview transcripts and other notes. Keeping a journal is a recommended research tool (Liamp屁股ong, 2013) and assisted in the thinking about the analysis, and recorded thoughts and ideas.
3.7 Analysis and Management of Data

Data analysis involves making sense of the information that has been collected and synthesising it so as to answer the research questions (Creswell, 2008; Merriam, 2009). It requires “taking the data apart” in order to analyse each bit and then “putting it back together” so conclusions can be determined (Creswell, 2008). The analysis requires being able to use a framework or schema to manage the process and organise the data collection. As this researcher collected a large amount of data, it was imperative from the start to have a streamlined, ordered approach to sort, organise, conceptualise, refine, and make sense of the data. The researcher did this methodically by having a dated naming convention for all documents and electronically filing in an ordered manner. This is a complex task (Merriam, 1998). This leads to the common concept of the whole process being interrelated. Creswell (2013), Lichtman (2013) and Dey (1993) describe the process as being better represented by a spiral or circular model rather than a straight line. Figure 3.8, which is based on a combination of Creswell’s (2008) and Dey’s descriptions (1993), shows the interrelated and continuous nature of this process.

*Figure 3.8. Process of the data analysis.*
Simultaneous and iterative analysis with data collection and report writing (Creswell, 2008) occurred in this study. The collection, analysis and even the report writing happened at the same time. This allowed the researcher to classify the data into relatable themes. The process is also iterative which means it is a cyclic process rather than a sequential one. The process is one of “sifting and sorting” (Lichtman, 2013). This allows for the gathering of more data as required, or even expanding on the number of participants involved. In this study the researcher was able to consider the data as they were collected. For example, during the semi-structured interview, further questioning and the exploration of ideas were developed when appropriate.

The data analysis approach is an accepted structure to examine the information that has been collected. The analytical procedures must align with the theoretical framework underpinnings (Grbich, 2013). For this study, the researcher used thematic analysis as the main method for the qualitative analysis. Some elements of the theories of discourse analysis and ecological systems were used in the analytical process. By using a thematic analysis approach, the data were categorised into themes and subthemes using a coding process. Ecological systems theory (Onwuegbuzie, Collins, & Frels, 2013) gave a framework that linked the contexts of school and family. The analytical process aligned against the concepts that emerged from the literature review.

Thematic analysis is a way of looking at the collected data set by applying a systematic process to identify meaningful themes and using these themes to look for patterns (Braun & Clarke, 2012; Grbich, 2013). Thematic analysis is more than counting words or phrases and focuses on implicit and explicit ideas within the data, that is, themes. This approach is commonly used when the main methods for qualitative research are interviews, focus groups or field observations (Guest, 2012). Thematic analysis is a unique method, as it only provides a framework for the analytical process and is not a theory on which data collection, research design or epistemology can be based (Braun & Clarke, 2013).
There is a set structure to this approach that has been written about and represented by several academics (Boyatzis, 1998; Braun & Clarke, 2013; Creswell, 2013; Fereday & Muir-Cochrane, 2006; Grbich, 2013; Guest, 2012; Matthews & Ross, 2010; Merriam, 2009). Nevertheless, this process of analysing data is flexible (Braun & Clarke, 2013) and cyclic, therefore, also known as the ‘data analysis spiral’ (Creswell, 2013).

There are two ways of identifying the themes, either inductive or deductive. Guest (2012) describes these themes as exploratory, content-driven (inductive) or confirmatory, and hypothesis-driven (deductive). An inductive way means that the themes are strongly linked to the data. The process of coding forms the categories and the assumptions made are data-driven, whereas the deductive way is theory-driven and the analysis is limited to a preconceived framework (Braun & Clarke, 2006). The deductive approach is less common (Guest, 2012). What actually happens, though, is that the researcher uses a combination of both inductive and deductive approaches (Braun & Clarke, 2012). In this study, the researcher used the inductive approach to code and form the themes, but at all times had an understated consideration of the research method and the themes from the literature review.

Another decision the researcher made was in relation to the level at which themes were identified. The two levels that have been identified are a semantic/explicit level and a latent/interpretative level (Boyatzis, 1998). With the semantic method, the researcher is not looking beyond what the participant has said. However, with the latent level the researcher gauges noteworthy assumptions and ideas. The constructionist, interpretative research method of this study leads to the latent level approach.

There is a clear and obvious distinction between a theme and a code. A code is a label and these labels form themes. A theme is the outcome of coding (Saldana, 2009). Coding is a cyclic undertaking. As the data are re-read so too can the codes be adjusted, combined and split. Figure 3.9 is the outline that this researcher followed, adapted from Braun (2006), Fereday (2006), and Grbich (2013).
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Management of Data</th>
<th>Evidenced in this Study</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Became very familiar with the data</td>
<td>Read and re-read data</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kept in mind the theoretical framework and literature review</td>
<td>Semi-structured interview concepts supported by the literature</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Started generating inductively, codes</td>
<td>Sorted and categorised the data</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kept in mind the research questions</td>
<td>Semi-structured interview concepts aligned with the research questions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Combined or split codes to form themes and sub themes</td>
<td>Sort and re-sort, numerous drafts of the theoretical framework developed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kept reflective memos of the thinking for this process</td>
<td>Several tables and journal notes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Reviewed these themes, if the analysis is incomplete, go back and find what is missing</td>
<td>In the writing of Chapters 5, 6, and 7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Answered to the research questions need to be supported by the data</td>
<td>Chapters 5, 6, and 7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Clearly described the themes</td>
<td>Chapters 5, 6, 7, and 8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ensured the themes align and link with the literature and theory</td>
<td>Completed a table with themes and associated literature references</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Did sample checks of the accuracy of the results</td>
<td>Proof read this thesis and checked the data a number of times</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wrote a thick description of the findings</td>
<td>Participant narratives (Chapter 4), data finding (Chapters 5, 6, and 7)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Figure 3.9. The data analysis and representation summary.*

A Computer Assisted Qualitative Data Analysis tool (CAQDAS) can be helpful with the processes of generating codes, identifying themes and looking for patterns. This researcher used NVivo 11 for Windows as a tool to assist in coding the interviews and the management of data. The software does not perform the analysis, but it greatly supported the organisation of the data. By entering the textual data and defining sets of codes, NVivo is able to locate data, match codes, count incidences of occurrences and find combinations. The software aids in identifying meaningful patterns, and data can then be presented in a number of ways. The analysis is the interpretation and explanation of the data rather than the software's output. However, coding is critical to the whole analysis process. Lichtman (2013) describes
the processes as “the three Cs of analysis: from Coding to Categorizing to Concepts (themes)” (p. 167). This research will refer to themes as opposed to concepts.

In addition to using NVivo, this researcher used a visual process to further analyse the rich and extensive data. A template (Figure 3.10) was used for each of the 13 cases which were then transposed, and each case represented on a separate poster (Figure 3.11). Colour coding the interviewee category, that is, the principal, gifted education coordinator, classroom teacher, parent, and student, enabled the researcher to gain a clear understanding of common and unique concepts. The analytical framework is discussed further in Chapter 5.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Student Name: School:</th>
<th>Year group: SB5:</th>
<th>Future school choice:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Intrapersonal Factors</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>System</td>
<td>School</td>
<td>Classroom</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Educators</strong></td>
<td>Student</td>
<td>Parent</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Choice</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Environmental Factors</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Figure 3.10.* The template used to record and categorise the data.
Figure 3.11. Four examples of the analytical posters.

The researcher looked at linguistic implications. The interpretation of how words and phrases are used in the context of the research questions added another dimension to the analytical process. This was particularly relevant for the parent interviews. The following references guided this analysis: Bucholtz (2001), Fairclough (1989), Flowerdew (1999), Hammersley (1997), and Rogers, Malancharuvil-Berkes, Mosley, Hui, and Joseph (2005).

Following is a 9-step analysis process undertaken for this study using one of the 13 cases, Year 4 student James, as an example:

1. A separate poster displaying the data gathered for each student was created, and included a summary of the student’s profile (Figure 3.12).
Figure 3.12. An example of a student profile summary.
2. Based on the literature review the data were sorted into two broad categories, that is intrapersonal factors, and environmental factors. Also, information was recorded under the heading of school choice.

3. All interviews were transcribed and entered into NVivo.

4. The interviews from the principal, gifted education coordinator, classroom teacher, parent and student were highlighted. This was done referring to the question guideline document (see Appendix G) and searching the transcript in NVivo.

5. Key concepts from each of the five interview transcripts within a case were captured onto coloured sticky notes. Excerpts from the five interviews that form this case and the corresponding sticky note summary are illustrated in Figures 3.13 to 3.17.
Q: Terrific, so what do you perceive to be the school’s culture around academic success?

A: We’re certainly building that, the parents here in regards to the school setting are happy if the children are happy, so we’re moving beyond that now where there’s the challenges that we face in regards to making sure that we support the diverse learner and we use data to do that. And in saying that I wouldn’t say it’s gifted or special needs, we actual name the students not as the diverse learner so that every student has the opportunities that they need to have to be successful in whatever that might be, whether they’re gifted, whether they’re talented and that question did you ask _ question?

Q: Yes, that’s right and yeah, school culture around academically gifted students.

A: I think definitely it’s celebrated, it’s certainly part of the culture top or bottom that wherever the child is we celebrate it not that they’re at the top but they’re reaching their potential and that would be something, that’s a question that I ask when I met once a term with the teachers in a learning support team meeting and we look at the whole range of the students in the class and one of the questions that I asked this team was are the children that you think, are they actually reaching the potential that they think they should be reaching and we weren’t even talking about the bottom of the barrel which is usually where our starting point but what concerns me is that there are children sitting there that aren’t actually reaching their full potential.

Q: So this is something which you?

A: That would be something that I could refer too to do that.

Q: Yeah, as a discussion, yeah and I’ve got a nice little pro formar that actually is _ more general, I’ll pass that to you, if that would be useful for you, I’m not sure that it would or for you to adapt. Now, just chat about your policy around gifted education and the leadership within the school around gifted education and your allocation, your gifted education.

A: I would consider myself to be the leader in this school being a small school. I work very very closely with who is the coordinator of gifted education and that the policy in regards it looks different every year and we’re following the KPI model for the primary school and we look at the triangle and obviously what the students need and it looks different for different classes each year depending on the students and what their needs are and also whether or not part of our role is to help support the teachers to develop them in their understanding around giftedness and enrichment, we’ve got enrichment not just the gifted so there’s a distinct difference between that...
Q: Terrific. What do you perceive to be the school culture around academic success?

A: I think over the years that's - has come to the point that it is understood as much as sporting prowess is, because for a while the - you know if the children achieved at sport that was acknowledged and children put a value on that but now I think that over the years they can - they're recognising academic success in competitions such as ICAS, the Maths Olympiads, any external competitions that they participate in and it's highly valued and actually they're proud to say that they did well and achieved more rather than hiding it.

Q: Great.

A: Hiding the fact.

Q: Now what do you perceive is the school culture around academically gifted students?

A: That it is up to the school to meet their needs and extend them as much as possible and enrich - so we can't rest on our laurels, if they're performing well we have to make sure that we can keep that development going so it doesn't plateau and that they're not disengaged so we really need to differentiate what we're doing K-6.

Q: Terrific and then what do you perceive is the school culture around gifted education?

A: That it is very much an evolving - it is evolving; it's not stagnant we - that it, really it depends on the students we have at a particular point in time how we meet those needs best so we can't have in place stagnant structures that may have met the needs several years ago but they're not meeting the needs now because we're learning so much more about how children think and how the brain works that we've really got to use all that current research to adapt to the needs of our students and really - and also work on our skills of identifying students.

Q: Great thanks - now your role in the school is Gifted Education Reference Teacher?

A: Yep.

Q: Or Gifted Reference Teacher you call it here? ... right? Gifted Reference Teacher; now could you just outline the Gifted Education Policy; the role of leadership in delivering the gifted education, your role, teacher's allocation - just in general about gifted education within this school from a logistical perspective?

A: Well first of all would oversee the -

A: The Principal.

Q: Yep.

A: Would oversee the - oversees the gifted education at the school because I'm not on the executive so she would oversee that and I report to her; I'm allocated half a day a week and at that time I have one hour of maths enrichment and the school - it actually, it's half a day a week but each year it is changed depending on the needs of the students at the time so this year for one hour a week I have a maths enrichment.
c. Classroom teacher

*Figure 3.15. An excerpt from a classroom teacher’s transcript and corresponding sticky note.*
the sort of kid that I think if I’m looking at values, you know the way they do it in the, here anyway, from what I understand the... whatever it’s called, there’s two reasons why you weren’t looking at that path or haven’t looked at that. And part of the first one is what they’re offering here and the fact that we just moved schools. And apart from that, the commitment they have to him in making this work, but not just in primary school. I made it very clear, and also the other side of it is the Catholic side of it. I’ve been practicing Anglican, I go to church with the kids, we do all our, we do the sacraments, we don’t go every weekend but we go pretty regularly. I go with the 3 boys on my own, never expected to do that and that’s worked for us. I had a very good family friend who was a priest as we grew up, young guy, similar, he married us, he baptized all the kids and the kids have a really strong sense of that faith. And the pastoral care component is really important to me, that I think they get in a Catholic school that you don’t elsewhere.

Q: ...

A: Yeah.

Q: So for the future?

A: For the future, so I even said to them my intention is for him to go to... he wants to go there, do have a nagging worry that they will be able to go to, but I don’t feel worried right now is because we’ve moved and it underpins the whole school and already I had meeting about Matthew already. That to me gives me a really strong sense of that will be okay, but my worry is, if I was to be really honest...

Q: Yes please.

A: If it wasn’t here or if she left or, would that still get followed through, she has a passion for making sure these kids needs are met and you can see it in all of, everything she does and not just the bright ones, like the really bright ones, all of them. I feel that the holistic principle of these, the culture of this school is what it is because of her and I never felt this way when I came in here. I do worry that we’re not fighting for him. I don’t want him to be an outcast. That would be my worry, I think it’s still because I believe in, I do believe in the... system, I have not have any horrendous experiences, I think there’s lots of things that this school offers that the public system doesn’t... the other side of it is that he’s a little bit like a monkey jumping from limb to limb at the top of the tree, but he likes to feel like he’s kind of got his little niche as well, even though he doesn’t want to be different he kind of likes it at the same time. I don’t know how selective would work. I think at that level, I’m not sure, being is that case you know but he likes Flo Gro, it’s just that he puts a lot of pressure on himself for Flo Gro.

Q: So it’s an opportunity that he’s had?

A: Yeah.
Figure 3.17. An excerpt from a James’ (student) transcript and corresponding sticky note.
6. Information from the 13 posters was transferred to a table (see Appendix H).

7. The data in the table were then aligned to the researcher’s analytical framework (see Figure 5.3).

8. The researcher determined which data could be presented using a quantitative procedure (see Chapter 6).

9. Finally, the analysis was critically reviewed by the researcher’s university supervisors and two of the researcher’s colleagues.

This study, which uses case study as the methodology and collective cases as the method, developed themes for each case followed by a cross-case analysis. This identified common and different themes for all of the cases. Researchers refer to four types of themes: ordinary, unexpected, hard-to-classify, and major and minor themes. The notion of ‘layering’ and/or ‘interrelating’ themes became apparent as the process outlined in Figure 3.9 was followed (Creswell, 2008). Analysing and making sense of the collected data and drawing conclusions from the research, gave insights and answered the question: ‘why are parents of academically gifted children choosing to stay or leave a Catholic schooling system?’

3.8 Validation

The value of any research is reliant on the authenticity and reliability of the knowledge produced (Merriam, 2009). A wide variety of criteria for ensuring validity and reliability exist, and different researchers have developed measures from different perspectives and using different words. This is due to the fact that qualitative research is not “in the classical science sense replicable” (Anfara, Brown, & Mangione, 2002, p. 28). The criteria used in this research are based on the combined structure of academics. They are: credibility, transferability, dependability, confirmability (Anfara et al., 2002; Creswell & Miller, 2000; Trochim, 2006b), and transformative (Mertens, 2010). Creswell (2013) uses the word ‘validation’ rather than ‘verification’. He believes that verification has “quantitative overtones” (p. 250). Based on that, the researcher for this study used the term validation.
3.8.1 Credibility

The credibility criterion involves ensuring the results are believable from the perspective of the participants (Trochim, 2006b). This is particularly true for a case study. A number of strategies were used to ensure the credibility of this research.

The time-period from the beginning to the end of the data collection was approximately six months. This allowed the researcher to develop a deep understanding of the experiences and thinking that affect the decision-making process. Debriefing of the researcher with someone not directly involved in the research, but who is familiar with the issues within this study and the topic area, has been invaluable. The peer debriefer is someone who can play ‘devil’s advocate’, challenge the researcher’s assumptions and methodological practices, discuss possible conclusions, and in general, be a “critical friend” (Creswell & Miller, 2000). This strategy happened regularly during the data gathering and analysis phase. In addition, the researcher debriefed with a colleague who has a deep understanding of gifted education and who works in this field. The researcher also debriefed with colleagues who are also undertaking doctoral studies, to review the methodological strategies being utilised.


For this research, data were collected across different sources, and across different methods, including interviews, specific questions, document analysis, and a research journal including interview memos. However, as qualitative research is not an exact science and the epistemology of this research is constructionism (constructing reality), the use of triangulation can be limiting and potentially poses more questions than it answers (Stake, 1995). Nevertheless, from an interpretative
perspective, “triangulation remains a principle strategy to ensure validity and reliability” (Merriam, 2009, p. 216).

A recommended practice is seeking verification from the participants which Merriam refers to as “respondent validation” (2009, p. 217). This can be achieved in three ways, firstly, having the participants check the typed transcripts from the interview. Secondly, having an informal check at the end of the interview where the participants approve a summary provided by the interviewer (Mertens, 2010). Thirdly, having the participants read the analysis of descriptors and themes (Creswell, 2013). As the purpose of this study is to capture a decision-making process, the second approach of an informal check after the interview was used in this research. The researcher appreciated the requirement to validate the interview process and believes that in addition to the informal check by the participant, the research incorporated the participants’ comments into the final report adding “credibility to the qualitative study” (Creswell & Miller, 2000, p. 127).

The inclusion of all evidence, including disconfirming or negative evidence, contributes to the trustworthiness of the research (Creswell & Miller, 2000). This is consistent with case study methodology as it helps present the full picture within the context. However, “the disconfirming evidence should not outweigh the confirming evidence” (Creswell & Miller, 2000, p. 127). As this research investigated an answer to a question about school choice, presenting all evidence was critical for the credibility of the study.

3.8.2 Transferability

The transferability of this research to other settings and contexts is the responsibility of the reader who believes that all or part of the study can be applied to an alternate setting. It is the researcher’s responsibility to provide enough detail to allow the reader to make this judgement (Mertens, 2010). The two strategies that are used to facilitate transferability in this study are thick description and multiple cases that are purposefully selected.
The purpose of this study was not to develop a theory and/or statistical generalisations. Instead, the intention of this study was to provide an in-depth exploration of the experience within a Catholic context, of school choice for academically gifted students. One way of ensuring the transferability of the results is using the strategy of rich thick description. As the term alludes to, a thick description describes “deep, dense, detailed accounts ... thin descriptions, by contrast, lack detail, and simply report facts” (Creswell & Miller, 2000, p. 128). The use of multiple cases strengthens the validity of the study. As well as this, the participants chosen for the study have been selected based on set criteria. Therefore, the context and details of the cases are quite specific.

3.8.3 Dependability

Dependability is the degree to which the research can be depended upon for its accuracy and reliability. Throughout the research process of data collection, organisation, analysis, coding, and interpretation, links are made to the research questions. This process created a narrative which served as an ‘audit trail’ that tracked the process by keeping detailed and accurate records of each aspect of the research process. The findings could then be related back to the interpretations made from the analysis of specific data. The specificity of the data analysis approach, described in Chapters 5, 6, and 7, support dependability of the findings.

In the analysis process, codes are applied then reviewed and recoded. This was an ongoing process as more data were collected, and the researcher gained a deeper understanding of the categories and ultimately the themes that emerged. Documenting this process by creating data tables, and the changes that occurred added to the dependability of the research (Anfara et al., 2002).

3.8.4 Confirmability

Confirmability is a validation strategy to ensure the objectivity of the research, that is the “influence of the researcher's judgment minimised" (Mertens, 2010, p. 260). For this research, all interviews were recorded to ensure the data were reliably
transcribed. Strategies such as an audit trail and peer debriefing also improve this validation strategy.

3.8.5 Transformative

This criterion for validation is about the social justice and human rights issues which may be associated with the research (Mertens, 2010). Three types of justifications are used in this research: fairness, community, and recognition of the role of the researcher.

This validation ensures fairness and acknowledges underlying structures are valued and honoured in the research process. This is of particular relevance to the participants, the parent and student, as well as the current principal of the school where the student attends. The parent and student were asked questions about their current school experience. The diverse viewpoints were included with sensitivity. As this research was a case study, the research took place within and affected the school communities. The researcher linked the “research results to a positive action within the community” (Mertens, 2010, p. 261).

Finally, the role of the researcher was pivotal to the integrity of the research. It is important for researchers to acknowledge their own beliefs and biases, as well as describe their own context so readers can understand the position from which the study is being conducted (Creswell & Miller, 2000). Due to the researcher’s inherent interest in gifted education, this was a contributory factor in choosing this topic for investigation. Even though a range of data gathering methods over 13 cases were used to ensure reliability and truthfulness, the researcher was aware of her potential bias. The application of different strategies of validation was designed to counteract this bias. Further to this, the role of the researcher was made clear to the participants.
3.9 Ethical Issues

A fundamental component for the validity and reliability of a study depends upon the ethics of the researcher (Merriam, 2009). Ethical dilemmas are likely to occur with regard to the collection of data, the dissemination of findings, and in particular, the relationships between the participants and researcher. The researcher respected the rights, needs, and values of all the participants. In this study, special ethical consideration and sensitivity was required given that student participants were minors, and that these minors likely had their own particularly sensitive characteristics associated with their giftedness. Ethical principles include voluntary participation, confidentiality, anonymity, privacy, informed consent, protection from harm, deception, ownership of data, and care in reporting (Australian Government., 2007; Creswell, 2008; Thomas, 2009).

Ethics clearance from both the Australian Catholic University (ACU) Human Research Ethics Committee and from Sydney Catholic Schools (The System) was obtained before commencing this research (see Appendix I for ethics clearance letters). Measures were taken to keep collected information and data secure. Participant data were de-identified using pseudonyms and stored electronically on a password-protected device. Consent forms and transcripts were also stored securely. Any identifiable evidence on such documents was removed and names within the transcripts were changed to pseudonyms (Berg, 2004).

The following precautions were implemented in this study to protect the rights of all the participants:

1. Appropriate permission was obtained from both ACU and Sydney Catholic Schools (The System).
2. All participants were provided with a written description of the nature and purpose of the study, as well as the processes and expectations.
3. Participants were told that their involvement was voluntary.
4. Participants signed a form indicating they had received enough information.
5. Coding protocols, for example pseudonyms, were adopted to protect the privacy and location of participants and were outlined to the participants.
6. Storage and security of all data were as per the procedures outlined by ACU.
7. Data access were restricted to those authorised by the researcher.
8. Participants were consulted prior to the publication of data, results, and conclusions.
9. As digital sources and recorded interviews were used, the appropriate netiquette was employed.
10. Participants could withdraw at any time without explanation.

Great care was taken to minimise the risk of compromising the data collection, and at the same time preserving the ethical considerations of all participants.

3.10 Overview of Research Method

This study adopted the interpretive paradigm of research, incorporating social constructivism and symbolic interactionism, which informed the data collection and analysis. The decision-making process was an integral component of this research.

The methodology was a collective case study, utilising Merriam’s approach to case study. Cases were selected using strict guidelines. The student participants were from Catholic systemic primary and secondary schools and had been identified as academically gifted, in the top 1% of the population based on a psychometric test. Three methods were used to gather the data:

1. A semi-structured interview with the principal, gifted education coordinator, classroom teacher, parent, and student.
2. Data were acquired during the interviews that could be represented in a quantitative manner, that is, the personal school experience of the principal, gifted education coordinator, classroom teacher and parent. Secondly, a religiosity survey was provided to the parents, and next the details of professional learning experiences in gifted education and qualifications were asked of the principal, gifted education coordinator and classroom teacher. Finally, views regarding five pedagogical practices that may be used to address the needs of academically gifted students were asked of the
educators and parents. These included ability grouping, acceleration, differentiated curriculum, personalised learning, and learning technologies.

3. An analysis of 19 documents from the public website and intranet were performed, and five school documents that relate to gifted education were examined.

A thematic approach was used to analyse the data. The researcher used a visual process to further analyse the rich and extensive data. A systematic approach to analysis supported the integrity of theme generation using a nine-step process. A template was used for each of the 13 cases, which were then completed, and each case was represented on a separate poster and subsequent table summaries. The validation and ethical processes of the analysis was adhered to.

The rich stories from the 55 interviews formed the 13 cases for this study. Chapter 4 details these 13 cases and gives insights to the participants’ unique stories with the student as the protagonist in each case, and the parent as the focus of decision-making. This is followed by the three findings chapters, Chapters 5, 6, and 7.
Chapter 4: Participants’ Stories

Taylor Wilson: ‘I’ve always been curious about the way the world works, why the world worked the way it did, and why we didn’t do things differently. I’m sure that made me not the easiest kid to parent. (Bullen & Weule, 2017)

Chapter 4 is the connection between the research method explored in Chapter 3 and the findings unpacked in Chapters 5, 6, and 7, and as such is a ‘narrative chapter’ prior to the explicit data analysis chapters. The researcher conducted 55 interviews and the 13 participant stories are rich and give an insight into the complexities faced by parents and their academically gifted child, when choosing and critiquing schools. A detailed analysis of these stories is provided in the three chapters following Chapter 4. For example, as all people interviewed commented unanimously in a positive way about the presence of Catholic ethos and culture in the schools, this was not included in these stories but is discussed in detail in the analysis chapters of 5, 6, and 7.

Even though each student’s story is unique, the researcher grouped these stories by the school they attended. Data gathered from the educators for the school gives a contextual background prior to the student story. Where there was more than one student interviewed from the school, this contextual information is common to all the students who attend that school. The schools were clustered by Catholic secondary schools, followed by Catholic primary schools. At this point, it is important to remind the reader that the students and their parents form the cases, not the school.

Four of the nine schools in this research are implementing The System’s Newman Gifted Program (hereafter referred to as a Newman School). The description and criteria that follows are common to these four Newman Schools. As part of this program, The System allocates extra funding to support gifted education specifically. These funds are used for the employment of a gifted education
coordinator, provision of professional learning for the teaching staff, and the identification and tracking of academically gifted students. Newman Schools are required to explicitly cluster the identified gifted students into one class in each year group, adjust the curriculum and assessment, and ensure the reporting to parents reflects the students’ learning. This program ensures the school has a strategic approach to the implementation of gifted programs as there is a high level of accountability. The principal is strongly encouraged to use a portion of the school’s budget to match the funding received from The System.

Figure 4.1 shows the connections between the 55 participants and the total of each of the participant groups, that is, principals, gifted education coordinators, classroom teachers, parents and students, who were interviewed from the nine schools. Table 4.1 articulates specific information about each of the 14 students. The reader may find it useful to refer to Figure 4.1 and Table 4.1 as points of reference when reading this chapter and the three findings chapters.
Figure 4.1. The connections between the 55 participants.
Figure 4.1 shows the number of interviews that were completed for each group of educators, parents and students. From the nine schools, six gifted education coordinators were interviewed. Three gifted education coordinators were on extended leave at the time the researcher was gathering the data. There were 13 classroom teachers interviewed as one of the gifted education coordinators was Catherine’s classroom teacher and therefore, that data were only counted once. As Catherine and Cooper are siblings there were 13 parents interviewed not 14. This gives a total of 55 participants and interviews. More information about each individual student is shown in Table 4.1.

Table 4.1

*Individual Student Information*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>School</th>
<th>Pseudonym</th>
<th>School year</th>
<th>Psychometric percentile (SB5)**</th>
<th>Accelerated</th>
<th>Preferred secondary school choice</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A</td>
<td>Mark</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>&gt;99.9</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Systemic Catholic</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B</td>
<td>Marlena</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>99.0</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Systemic Catholic</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C</td>
<td>Steve</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>&gt;99.9</td>
<td>Year 2 to Year 4</td>
<td>Systemic Catholic</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>D</td>
<td>Patricia</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>99.8***</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Systemic Catholic</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>E</td>
<td>Audrey</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>99.0</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Undecided</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Austyn</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>99.0</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Government Selective</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Max</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>&gt;99.9</td>
<td>Year 1 to Year 2</td>
<td>Undecided</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>F</td>
<td>Catherine*</td>
<td>K</td>
<td>99.0</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Independent Non-Catholic</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Cooper*</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>99.9</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Independent Non-Catholic</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Jane</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>99.5</td>
<td>Started school 1 year early</td>
<td>Systemic Catholic</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>G</td>
<td>Daisy</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>99.5</td>
<td>Started school 1 year early</td>
<td>Independent Catholic</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>H</td>
<td>Jemima</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>99.0</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Undecided</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I</td>
<td>Lachlan</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>99.0</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Systemic Catholic</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>James</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>99.9</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Undecided</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* Brother and sister
** Stanford Binet 5 (SB5)
***The Wechsler Preschool and Primary Scale of Intelligence Third Edition (WPPSI – III)

At the time the data were gathered, the 14 students ranged from Kindergarten to Year 10. As stated previously, to be included in this research one of the selection criteria included the student’s psychometric result. The student had to have completed a psychometric test and be assessed in the top percentile, that is, 99.0 and greater. All but one student was assessed using the Stanford Binet 5 (SB5), with
Patricia being assessed using The Wechsler Preschool and Primary Scale of Intelligence Third Edition (WPPSI – III). See Table 4.2 for a description of the psychometric test scores. Five of the students have had some form of acceleration, with Steve being accelerated two year groups, and two students starting school a year ahead of their age cohort. At the time of the interviews, four students and their parents were still undecided as to the secondary school they would attend.

Table 4.2

*Stanford Binet 5 (SB5) Psychometric Test Scores*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Psychometric test score</th>
<th>Description</th>
<th>No. students</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>&gt;99.9</td>
<td>Exceptionally gifted ability (profoundly gifted) 4 to 5 standard deviations above the mean</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>&gt;99 but &lt; 99.9</td>
<td>Highly gifted ability (highly to exceptionally gifted) 3 to 4 standard deviations above the mean</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>99.0</td>
<td>Gifted ability (moderately gifted) 2 to 3 standard deviations above the mean</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

All 14 students were assessed with a psychometric test score of 99.0 or greater. Three students, Mark, Steve and Max, were assessed with the highest percentile rank that the SB5 can give. These three boys are exceptionally gifted. The 14 stories begin with Mark and follow the order as outlined in Figure 4.1 and Table 4.1.

### 4.1 Secondary Catholic School Students

#### 4.1.1 School A: Mark

Mark is in Year 7 at a large coeducational Catholic secondary school. The principal is hopeful of instilling a school culture of ‘high expectations’ for all students. The formation of the enrichment class in Year 7 that continues to Year 10, has been an attempt to attract students who may have elected to apply for the government selective school. When a student is placed in the enrichment class they stay in that class for all subjects except mathematics, which is graded separately. Mark consistently comes first in his mathematics class and his mathematics teacher is
ACADEMICALLY GIFTED STUDENTS

expecting him to accelerate in mathematics, allowing him extra time in Year 11 and 12 to complete Extension 2 mathematics (the most difficult mathematics course at school level). Neither the principal, gifted education coordinator, nor Mark's mathematics teacher had gifted education as part of their pre-service teacher education. The gifted education coordinator has undertaken significant professional learning since. However, neither the principal nor the mathematics teacher have undertaken any gifted education professional learning, or have an understanding of the definition of gifted, or the difference between giftedness and talent. They both have Masters degrees in Educational Leadership.

Mark - Choosing a Christian school was an important and deliberate decision

Mark presents as a relaxed teenager who is physically mature for his age. He has his own iPad and mobile phone. Mark is not interested in social media. He said “I used to have Instagram and Facebook and then I realised I was spending a lot of time on it and I was worrying about what everyone else was thinking and what everyone else was doing, and then I thought who cares, I’d rather spend my time doing other things. I have deleted both now”. Mark has a sophisticated sense of humour that some classroom teachers confuse with rudeness, especially when he was younger. He occasionally asks inappropriate questions and has abstract ideas, and is generally described as being 'quirky'. He has a keen sense of justice and advanced levels of moral judgement. He is an avid reader and retains knowledge. Mark is independent and a perfectionist, and can immerse himself in his learning if it interests him.

The mother is very satisfied with the secondary Catholic school. The school has been very supportive of all three children in the family. Mark was the only one of the three to be in a designated enrichment class from Year 7, and the only one identified as gifted. The mother believes the enrichment class model currently in place is a better provision for Mark than having to be withdrawn from class.

Mark's mother indicated that she feels there has been an acceptance of him at the school, for who he is. There is a culture amongst the staff to get to know each student. The mother reminisces about her own education to explain her feelings, "Choosing
a Catholic education was a big thing for me, I went to a (government) selective school and I actually decided when I was a young Mum I didn’t want my children to go to a selective school. I wanted a holistic education. So choosing a Christian school was important to me because I wanted them to have a culture of values, Christianity, and that it is not all about their academic achievements”, she said.

Mark had a mixed experience at primary school. In the first few years he presented with a behavioural problem. His mother found this difficult to understand as Mark was a ‘perfect gentleman’ at home, but at school he wasn’t. She reflected that at home she was treating 5-year old Mark the same as his older brother who was 12; there was the same set of rules for both of them. This had the effect that when Mark was at school he didn’t respond in a positive way to the school rules for a 5-year old. The mother admits that Mark lacks common sense, but believes now that he was bored in class. He would become engrossed in an obscure topic and want to know everything about it, and then two days later would come up with a new unrelated topic and research the new topic instead. This was a continual process and he didn’t revisit topics he had already researched. It was when Mark was in Year 2 that his mother reluctantly agreed to him having a psychometric test as a starting point to diagnose the cause of his behaviour. This testing was recommended by the primary school so the school had data that would assist in meeting Mark’s specific learning needs. The mother was hesitant as she said, “I do not want my son labelled or put in a box.” When the report indicated that he was exceptionally academically gifted and perhaps could be profoundly gifted, this explained his unusual behaviour. The psychologist explained that the changing of research topics occurred because he has exhausted what he wants to know about that one and he’s ready for a new one. This level of giftedness would also explain his boredom at school and how he could keep up socially with his brother who is seven years older than him. It took three years for the primary school to accept the report and change Mark’s learning experiences, so the years up to Year 5 were difficult for both Mark and his mother. During Year 4, his mother investigated alternative schools for Mark and he applied for the selective class at the local government primary school, but was not accepted.
When Mark was in Year 5, a new principal was appointed to the primary school and his mother noticed a significant difference immediately. The principal had a meeting with the mother within the first term. They investigated acceleration but decided against it. Mark had good friends and was popular in his year group, but more significantly Mark's parents separated at this time. The divorce was very unpleasant and difficult for all the family members, which meant Mark's homelife was very unsettled. It was felt it would be better to keep him as settled as possible at school. Mark had a lot of pastoral support from the school and developed a positive relationship and rapport with the counsellor. Mark's classroom teachers in both Years 5 and 6 had an understanding and acceptance of academically gifted children. These two classroom teachers had excellent communication with each other and with Mark. When Mark was in Year 5, even though he didn't officially accelerate, he spent blocks of time in the Year 6 class. He had the same classroom teacher when he was in Year 6. Both classroom teachers had a consistent approach with him and didn't make exceptions for him, though they did speak to him on a more adult level and a mutual respect developed. Mark felt he was more in control of his own learning. His mother said, “we have been lucky that he does have a real love of learning. Year 5 and 6 were wonderful years. It was nice to have a good ending to primary education for him”.

When a decision needed to be made about secondary schooling, the mother did consider enrolling Mark in the government selective secondary school. Even though she did not really want him to attend a selective school, as a single parent she was concerned about having to pay the school fees to the Catholic school for another six years. She also explored available scholarships at independent schools, but did not consider these seriously. There were three reasons why the mother chose the local Catholic secondary school. Mark's siblings had been happy at the school, he was accepted into the enrichment class, and in Year 6 he was involved in extension programs at the secondary school and felt familiar with the school. Furthermore, the mother was very mindful of the pastoral support Mark may continue to require, and felt confident he would get this support at the Catholic school. She decided that if in the future Mark's learning, social and pastoral needs were not being met, she would then pursue other options, either the selective school or an independent school.
4.1.2 School B: Marlena

At the time the data were gathered Marlena (Year 10) attended a large coeducational Catholic secondary school that implements the Newman Gifted Program. Since the principal has been at the school, she has implemented specific strategies to attract identified gifted students to the school. Firstly, the introduction of the ‘university unit’ is one of these strategies. The school has learnt valuable information about the specific learning needs of some students due to the application process, which they did not know previously. Marlena is an example of a student who has benefited from this initiative. This program explicitly encourages and allows for extension and enrichment in the student’s chosen area of passion. Secondly, the school applied for and was successful in being accepted into a gifted program created by The System. Finally, the principal wrote a letter to students in the feeder primary schools who had applied to go to a government selective school. She offered them automatic entry into the ‘university unit’. This had a positive effect with one of the feeder schools, but not the other. A number of primary students are still applying for, being accepted into, and attending the government selective school. Neither the principal, gifted education coordinator nor classroom teacher had gifted education as part of their pre-service teacher education, but they have all completed significant professional learning since. Both the gifted education coordinator and classroom teacher were identified as academically gifted when they themselves were at school. The principal wasn’t formally identified but was a high performing student who was very competitive at school and said, “I remember feeling the need to come first in the class”.

Marlena - Only Catholic schools will be considered

Prior to Year 5 Marlena had an unsettled and unhappy schooling experience, and so when she was in Year 5 her mother organised for her to complete a psychometric test. Marlena displays some characteristics that are common to children who are identified as academically gifted. She often makes up her own sarcastic but intelligent jokes, and she has a high level of personal responsibility and commitment. Even when she was in primary school she wouldn’t let her parents help her with homework, projects or assessments. She is a highly independent learner who has strong feelings and opinions, and debates all topics of discussion.
Marlena displays a strong sense of social justice and has empathy for those who are in the same position as her. Both of Marlena’s siblings are also academically gifted.

Marlena and her mother spoke negatively of her primary school experience. “She used to get into trouble for her impulsive behaviour and messy handwriting”, the mother stated. Even though Marlena was tested and determined as highly academically gifted in Year 5, and the report was presented and discussed with the assistant principal and classroom teacher, “nothing was really done with it”. The same happened in Year 6. “When I finished my work they’d give me an extra sheet to do,” Marlena said. This wasn’t extension work but more of the same work. Marlena prefers extension or harder work which is based on schoolwork. She did not like doing projects in primary school that were not related to schoolwork. The secondary school Marlena is currently attending has created a ‘university unit’ within the school. Students must apply by presenting a portfolio and then subsequently be interviewed for suitability. Marlena has been involved in three projects through the ‘university’. She likes to choose projects that are related to her studies.

Marlena’s family are very active in their local Catholic parish and attending a Catholic school is very important to both Marlena and her mother. Marlena’s mother stated that “the reason my children attend a Catholic school is to develop and deepen their faith.” When they were investigating options for secondary schools, only Catholic schools were considered. Marlena’s older brother was already at the secondary school they chose and the principal assured them that Marlena’s needs would be met. However, in Year 10, Marlena and her family had cause to reconsider their choice of school, as Marlena was not able to select the exact subjects she wanted to undertake in Year 11. Once again, only Catholic school options were considered. The principal of Marlena’s current school was very keen and accommodating, and made it possible for Marlena to remain enrolled at the school. When Marlena starts Year 11 she will complete one of her subjects at a neighbouring Catholic school.
Over the course of Marlena's 11 years of school, the highlights were when she was recognised for her academic studies, and represented the school in different areas, including sport. Marlena has represented the school in basketball and swimming. Marlena has friends but her friendship circle has changed over the years. While she enjoys exploring technology and has her own laptop, mobile phone and iPad, she does not use technology to socialise. She says a lot of students use social media both at school and outside of school, but she does not. When she is studying for exams she gives her mobile and iPad to her mother so she can remain focused. Marlena concedes that even though they have been issued with digital textbooks she prefers to use the paper version at home so the computer does not distract her.

Even after Marlena’s frustrating experience at the Catholic primary school, the family still only considered Catholic options for secondary school. Fortunately, Marlena has had a more positive experience at the secondary Catholic school. This would appear to be due to the principal’s initiatives and the extra funding the school received to be able to sustain these programs.

4.1.3 School C: Steve

School C is a large coeducational Catholic secondary school that implements the Newman Gifted Program. Neither the principal, gifted education coordinator, nor classroom teacher had gifted education as part of their pre-service qualification. They have all completed professional learning in this area since, as part of The System’s gifted education program, but no postgraduate study in gifted education has been done. None of the three perceived themselves as academically gifted, however they all commented that they were in the top class at school, did well at school and that they found this question difficult. The principal said, “I’m a hard worker and that applies to my leadership position of principal as well”.

Steve’s classroom teacher and the gifted education coordinator gave some thought-provoking insights into Steve’s secondary school journey. When he started in Year 7 he appeared to be a “lost little boy” who found it extremely difficult to organise himself. The multiple lessons and different equipment requirements were all
challenges for him. It took Steve much longer than the average Year 7 student to settle into secondary school life. Academically it was a challenge as well. The classroom teachers found it hard to get Steve to write more than one or two sentences. Classroom teachers who did not fully understand his academic potential questioned why he was in the ‘gifted class’. Some classroom teachers claimed he should have been taken out of the class, but this was not done. There has been a lot of time and energy spent, and guidance and advice given to Steve by several key people within the school. Detailed structures, good channels of communication, very close liaison with his parents and all his classroom teachers, and especially patience, have been vital in assisting Steve to assimilate into secondary school and to begin working to his potential. This appears to be finally coming to fruition; he has made real progress in developing a genuine connectedness to the school. Steve has friends, although he spends most of his break times in the library. The school is very conscious of skilling Steve for adult life by seeing that he develops an appreciation and acceptance of who he is and a sense of purpose. Steve’s father believes that this Catholic environment is capable of doing just that.

**Steve - Pastoral care and support is important**

Steve is an only child who lives with his father and has regular contact with his mother. In response to behavioural issues at school and following a recommendation by The System office personnel, Steve completed a psychometric test when he was eight years old. The psychometric test gave a result of 150 for the ‘full scale IQ’, that is >99.9th percentile. Steve has a keen sense of curiosity and is easily bored when not challenged. He can have a preoccupation with certain problems. He is obsessed with playing imaginative games like Minecraft, and will spend all of recess and lunch in the library exploring these games. He has had trouble socialising with his peers and building relationships. This was particularly an issue through primary school. Steve has always had a remarkable and close relationship with his psychologist. Initially the meetings were organised through The System, but as time went on Steve’s father continued the connection for both of them.

When Steve was in Year 1 he was accelerated two year groups to Year 3. In Kindergarten Steve was extremely disruptive and started demonstrating aggressive
behaviour. He became very outspoken and made cruel and derogatory remarks to the other children in the class. His classroom teacher was finding it difficult to engage him in any meaningful learning experiences. As part of trying to address Steve’s behavioural issues it was suggested he have a psychometric test. As much information as possible was gathered to understand him, and therefore, adjust his learning environment accordingly. When the test showed Steve to be exceptionally gifted and possibly profoundly gifted, it gave some explanation for his behaviour. After a significant consultation process with his parents, the school and experts, including the psychologist, the decision was made to initiate a two-year acceleration to best meet Steve’s needs. His father said, “we were very fortunate that the school was flexible. We felt we had a lot of support during the whole process and we have never regretted the move, it’s always been something that we’re glad we did.” The System support continued throughout his primary schooling. Steve was physically small and still had trouble establishing relationships with his class peers. Steve had regular contact with the psychologist and as the psychologist said, “Steve is never really going to fit into traditional schooling”. The acceleration was further complicated by the need to coordinate this with the choice of a secondary school and to support his early transition into a secondary school setting. Given the age difference to his peers, it was a massive change for Steve to be able to organise himself for a number of different classes within the day and get into the routine. His father’s perception was that “it took him a full year to really settle in to secondary school, but since then he has been really good and it confirms the wisdom of the acceleration”. Steve has physically grown and now has the appearance of a Year 9 teenager rather than of a Year 7 boy.

Steve’s father believes that it is important for Steve to attend a Catholic school where respect is nurtured. At both the primary and secondary schools that Steve has attended, the staff and students appear to be proud to be part of a Catholic school community. Steve’s secondary school has been identified by The System to receive extra funding to specifically support gifted education. These funds are to be used for the employment of a gifted education coordinator, professional learning for the teaching staff, and the identification and tracking of academically gifted students. A requirement of this program is to explicitly cluster the identified gifted students into
one class in each year group. The principal used a portion of the school’s budget to match the funding received from the system. Being part of this program has ensured the school has a strategic approach to the implementation of gifted programs, as there is a high level of accountability.

Steve has been in the gifted class since he started at the school. Being in that class has challenged him, and for Steve, secondary school in general was a huge adjustment from primary school. The secondary school structure, workload, and expectation that work be completed within a specific time frame was confronting to Steve initially. He fits in now and has a good group of friends, both male and female.

Steve is reasonably musical and this has been a “good outlet for him”, his father said. He plays the drums as part of the school band. He has completed his third grade piano exam and is very keen to continue with the piano lessons and subsequent exams. He also plays the guitar, which he has taught himself. In the mornings and at lunchtime he assists in the library at the ‘genius bar’ which is a help desk for students who are experiencing computer-related issues. Steve’s favourite subjects are mathematics and science, and in particular chemistry and physics.

When Steve was in primary school he was a participant in a fortnightly Regional program. This involved him meeting with other identified academically gifted children from other schools at the Regional Office for four hours. This group of approximately ten children have explicit instruction on a variety of topics from qualified experts, for example, robotics, skills in dealing with their social and emotional needs, and many other skills. The children have allocated time to work on an individual project where they pose a question, research the answer to this question and present their findings to the group. The children share a recess time where they mix socially. Steve spoke about this very positively and keeps in contact with a student who was also a participant via email.

Steve’s parents explored three secondary school options for him. The main consideration was the pastoral care, specific support and understanding that Steve would require. The three choices were two Systemic Catholic schools and a
government selective school. Steve applied for the selective school by attempting the entrance test. His parents were, however, concerned about this option as they had heard it was a competitive environment and students were often unsupported both pastorally and academically, which would have been difficult for Steve. This was not an option for Steve ultimately, as he was not accepted. His father suspects it was the style of testing that did not suit Steve. Steve was not tutored for this type of test and being only nine years old he may not have had the maturity to be able to adapt. As a family they attended the Open Days of the two Catholic secondary school options. The main reason they chose the school that Steve now attends is the explicit program for identified gifted students that operates there. It was important that he attend a coeducational school as his father had observed that Steve makes female friends easier than male. Throughout primary school it was the girls who seemed to protect him. Steve is into his third year at this school and the family is happy with his school experience. It is anticipated that he will finish his schooling at this school. Steve’s father indicated that they have always felt well supported in Catholic schools.

Both Steve’s parents attended a Catholic school and neither of them were formally identified as gifted when they went to school. However, the father believes that Steve’s mother is very clever and is most likely gifted. Steve does not see himself as being different from others, the only difference he mentions is that he can learn faster. His friends know that he is two years younger than they are and that does not bother them now. Steve feels confident at school. When other students come up to him and ask if he is that kid who is younger than everyone else it does not bother him, in fact he feels respected.

4.1.4 School D: Patricia

Patricia is in Year 8 and attends a large female-only Catholic secondary school that implements the Newman Gifted Program. Neither the principal nor gifted education coordinator had gifted education as part of their pre-service teaching qualification, but the classroom teacher completed a one-semester module in her teaching degree. Despite this, they have all completed substantial professional learning in gifted education since. At significant expense, the school provided for 45 of their classroom
teachers to complete a 16-hour university accredited course on gifted education. Both the gifted education coordinator and the classroom teacher perceive themselves as academically gifted, even though they were not formally identified. The principal does not perceive herself as gifted, but does accept she is a gifted leader.

*Patricia - “The Catholic System now seems to be promoting and nurturing academic giftedness and taking it seriously”*

Before Patricia started school she had a psychometric test, The Wechsler Preschool and Primary Scale of Intelligence Third Edition (WPPSI – III). The Test Composite Score was 143, that is, 99.8th percentile and in the ‘very superior’ range. Patricia’s parents instigated this testing on advice from Patricia’s preschool teacher as she exhibited different behaviour to that of her peers. Patricia has a long attention span, heightened level of curiosity and can comprehend abstract ideas. She has advanced reading ability, a subtle sense of humour and an excellent retention of knowledge. Patricia is extremely independent and has strong feelings and opinions.

Patricia’s mother wanted her to attend a Catholic secondary school, but also investigated other options. The options were two government selective schools but after going to the Open Days Patricia chose not to apply to either. The whole focus was “study, study, study, and no pastoral or religious programs”, her mother said. They also explored two System Catholic schools. The school that had The System gifted program was the one they chose and their application was accepted. Patricia’s mother said, “I think generally Catholic schools have been slower than state schools with acknowledging the need for gifted education programs. The System now seems to be promoting and nurturing academic giftedness and taking it seriously, so we were happy Patricia went into the gifted class within a Catholic school”. As Patricia is being academically challenged in this class, acceleration has not been considered. Her mother said, “I’m extremely happy with how she’s been taught because it is stimulating. Patricia has always been a child who has thrived on getting extra work and the more she gets the happier she is. I was concerned at one stage that she had too much work but she had no trouble embracing it”.
Patricia has a sophisticated understanding of the terms giftedness and talent, and the difference between the two. She enjoys the fact that the school celebrates academic success by publicly recognising excellence. She values being in the gifted class and says, “I like being in that class as the work is better paced for me, it is faster and we are also given more opportunity to do extension work and work hard on it”.
The classroom teachers encourage students to explore different ways of learning, finding out the information and presenting their work. All subjects use digital textbooks. Patricia declares that she loves school and would not consider moving schools.

Patricia’s mother admits to coming from an academically gifted family, but does not perceive herself as gifted. In her opinion her husband is definitely gifted. The mother went to a primary Catholic school that she loved, and then went to a state secondary school that she really did not like. The family anticipate that Patricia will stay at this school until she finishes her schooling. Even though the mother and children are Catholic they do not attend church regularly as the father is non-Catholic.

4.2 Primary Catholic School Students

4.2.1 School E: Audrey, Austyn, Max

This large Catholic coeducational primary school is a Newman School, and has a strong culture of recognising and supporting children who are identified as gifted. The principal is passionate about ensuring the students in her school are given the support and encouragement that matches their learning needs. The principal, gifted education coordinator, and classroom teachers have a good understanding of the definition of, and difference between, gifted and talented as defined by Gagné’s Model. The principal is completing her third Masters degree, which have been in Educational Leadership, Literacy and Language, and System Leadership. The gifted education coordinator has completed considerable professional learning in gifted education. With the exception of Max’s classroom teacher, who admitted to being academically gifted, the other classroom teachers and leaders do not perceive themselves as academically gifted, despite acknowledging that they were in the top class at school.
Audrey - Schooling is about educating the whole person

Audrey is in Year 5 and has twin brothers in Year 2 at the same school. Additionally, Audrey’s mother is a part-time classroom teacher at her school. Audrey often doubts herself and wonders why people say she is clever when she does not do as well as she would expect. Her classroom teacher described Audrey as having a long attention span and can handle abstract ideas. She has a good retention of knowledge and has a high reading ability. Audrey displays perfectionist behaviours with the presentation of her work, but she is cautious about giving an opinion as she does not like people to judge her, and because she lacks confidence and self-assurance. She is independent, responsible and has a strong sense of justice. The family is involved with their parish and attend church regularly, and Audrey is an Altar Server.

Audrey enjoys going to school because “you learn something new every day and you get to make friends”. She finds mathematics easy and attends the adjoining Catholic secondary school for extension mathematics. The school offers numerous enrichment and extension programs. Audrey participates in the enrichment drama group. She also attends ‘cluster days’ with the neighbouring primary schools. Her mother believes the school does the best they can with large mixed-ability classes. Audrey likes to explore on the laptop and she has her own laptop and iPad. She is excited about the prospect of getting a mobile phone before she goes to secondary school.

Several schools will be considered for Audrey’s secondary schooling. Her parents will apply for Audrey to attend the local adjoining Catholic school, as well as a systemic Catholic girls school and several private Catholic schools for girls. The mother herself went to a private Catholic school for girls. The parents have stipulated the school must be Catholic, and as such, Audrey did not apply for the selective government school. The parents believe schooling is about educating the ‘whole person’ and learning the skills to live a happy life and to treat others as you want to be treated. The family will attend all the appropriate Open Days, talk to people and as a family discern the most suitable secondary school for Audrey.
Neither parent perceives himself or herself as gifted; however, the mother is a classroom teacher and the father an engineer. The mother has two brothers who she believes are academically gifted. The mother could not clearly define the difference between gifted and talented or the difference between intelligent and gifted.

_Austyn - Considered all options and is moving to a selective non-Catholic secondary school_

Austyn is in Year 6 and her mother, who teaches at the same school, is a member of the Leadership Team, and Austyn’s younger sibling is in Year 2. When she was in Year 5 the school suggested Austyn have a psychometric test; this was so the classroom teachers could better understand her learning needs. Austyn displays some characteristics that are common to children who are identified as academically gifted. She demonstrates an emotional maturity beyond her years, from a young age she was always very aware of other people’s emotional needs, and she likes to delve into projects she is passionate about. For example, for a homework assignment the class were asked to draw a ‘family tree’. Austyn spent hours researching via the Internet and created a complex family tree that had over one hundred links to extended family members. Austyn can also become anxious, especially about her allergies. She has severe nut allergies and is anaphylactic. One thing that helped her overcome her anxiety was the creation of her own recipe book that she researched and compiled. She creates these recipes herself, and the entire concept and action was Austyn’s own initiative.

Austyn’s mother believes it is important for her two children to attend a Catholic primary school. She is Catholic but her husband is not. Nevertheless, he is very supportive of his children having a Catholic Christian education. Austyn’s mother attended a Catholic school for both primary and secondary schooling. Even though she was always in the highest academically graded class, she does not perceive herself to be academically gifted. She says “I work hard at things and I’m a bit of a perfectionist and I tend to put pressure on myself.”

Both parents have been very satisfied with the educational experience and vast range of learning opportunities offered to Austyn. It was her Year 1 classroom
teacher who first noticed traits associated with academically gifted children. Now in Year 6, she has the same classroom teacher for the third time and according to her mother, is “happy academically, as the teacher knows her very well”. There is a group of children of similar ability in this class. This grouping was created deliberately as an attempt to put like minds together.

Austyn enjoys attending school and has friends. She doesn’t perceive herself as academically gifted. When she was asked about her gifts, she answered “I like swimming and art.” She then proceeded to talk about all the variety of activities she participates in at school. Austyn enjoys being withdrawn from class for enrichment programs in mathematics and art. She attends a ‘drama master class’; the selection for this is by audition. There are also Cluster School enrichment workshops that Austyn attends. Austyn’s primary school is situated next to a Catholic secondary school, she is part of a group of 20 students (including Audrey) who attend that school for extension mathematics. Interesting to note is that while she finds the mathematics work challenging at the secondary school, she expressed a preference for that learning experience rather than her Year 6 mathematics class. Austyn remarked, “it gets your brain working”. She says the best thing about school is “getting accepted into these enrichment programs”.

Any subject where “we get to do a project on the computer” is her favourite. She likes homework “because it doesn’t tell you exactly what to do and you are not working with others, and you have to do it specifically on your own and in your own time and away from the noise.” The use of technology is vital to Austyn. She has her own computer as well as an iPad and hopes to have a mobile phone before she goes to secondary school. The passion Austyn has for learning and deep investigation of focus areas is well supported by her parents who allow her extensive use of the Internet at home, although under supervision. She relishes exploring different websites and “learning about different things that you do not learn at school, you can practically do anything”. Austyn also teaches herself technological skills, such as PowerPoint presentations and the design of her own interactive games. Her parents, however, are strict about limiting her engagement in ‘social media’.
Her parents are very happy with the primary school principal and believe she is innovative and supportive of children with diverse needs, including academic giftedness. Consideration of secondary school options has been a topic of discussion for the family. Austyn’s parents always imagined that she would follow a natural progression to the adjoining Catholic secondary school. Austyn’s Grandmother, who works in a government school, suggested that it might be a suitable option for Austyn to complete the ‘Selective High School Entrance Test’. After much discussion, it was decided that she apply to complete the testing, but without any extra tutoring which the family believed others received. At the same time, Austyn applied for a scholarship to an independent Catholic girls college, but was unsuccessful. She applied for the local Catholic systemic secondary school that adjoined her primary school and was offered a place in the ‘enrichment class’. However, she did get offered a position at the government selective secondary school, so Austyn and her parents had a considerable decision to make.

The family went about investigating the two options. They did this by attending the Open Days, looking at the respective alternative schools’ results, examining the curriculum and extracurricular options, as well as talking to many classroom teachers and friends. Austyn’s parents were very impressed with the Open Day at the selective government school. The principal’s passion about the learning philosophy of his school was extremely evident. He told parents “not to think of your child coming here as being special. All the kids who come here have been ‘tall poppies’ in their little primary school. It is not so much about where you are in this school because everyone is high, even the child who is the bottom of the rung is still higher than a kid down the road.” But he said, “It is more about really having a view of where you want to be at the end of your high school career and working towards that, and finding the best pathway to achieve that.” The mother really liked the focus of striving for ‘your personal best’ as that has been a philosophy she has used with Austyn for many years. The parents also liked that the selective school offered a vast array of different opportunities in addition to its academic focus. Austyn’s mother described her as ‘a bit of an all rounder’. She is good at swimming, music, has an exceptional understanding of technology, and has been in the enrichment group for art, and a master class for drama. Her parents believed that at the selective school
Austyn would be provided with the opportunity to nurture and pursue all these interests prior to having to choose elective subjects in Year 9. For example, there is the option to participate in theatre sports or have piano lessons, both of which are offered out of class time. This was a big ‘selling point’ in terms of making their final decision.

At the Catholic School’s Open Day, even though there were admirable things spoken about, there was not anything that ‘grabbed’ them. They spoke about pedagogies that were already in place at the primary school. For example, discovery approaches to learning, listening to ‘student voice’, and the use of technology by integrating iPads into teaching and learning practices. This was already Austyn’s primary school experience. The mother said, “I did not want her stepping into an environment where they were ‘missing the boat’ in terms of what has already happened before. There seemed to be a communication lag”.

Austyn has strong friendships at primary school and all her friends are going to the Catholic secondary school. However, her mother said she has always been flexible making friends. Austyn is keen to make a ‘fresh start’ and feels excited about making new friends like she did in Kindergarten. The parents are encouraging Austyn to be sure about the decision and not have the mindset that she can change back to the Catholic school if she is not happy. They appreciate that the first year may be difficult and that she may have some logistical challenges.

A further consideration for Austyn and her parents is her connection to and development of her faith. The family attend church and are associated with their local parish. Hence, they believe Austyn will have her Catholicity nurtured in this environment. Austyn commented that she likes going to church and listening to the homily where the Priest talks “deeper about the scriptures”. The mother was impressed with the selective school’s attention to social justice issues. In fact she said, “some of the things they were saying they do I have not heard being done in a Catholic school. For instance, one of the things they do at their sports carnival is celebrate the team that raises the most money for an elected charity.” Also, the principal told parents they should not expect their children to attend this selective
school and end up with a “high flying corporate job and be a millionaire”. He said, “most of our successful students actually are so passionate about putting back into the community, they go out and want to change the world. They are the kind of people who are very visionary.” Austyn’s mother was reflective about the non-Catholic environment. She felt there was a good balance between academic, sport, creative and performing arts, and social justice. She also suggested that there are probably other children coming from Catholic primary schools into that context, so anticipates the likelihood of a very big ‘mix of backgrounds’.

The parents took longer in deciding to accept the place at the selective school than did Austyn, who had apparently made up her mind fairly quickly. The final compelling reason for their choice was that by attending the selective school, Austyn would always be in classes of ‘like-minded learners’. At the Catholic school she was not guaranteed a position in the enrichment class for her entire schooling. The elective classes she would choose in Stage 5 would be mixed-ability classes, as would the classes in Stage 6.

The primary school supports Austyn’s decision to accept a place at the selective school and understands her reasons for doing so. The principal would like to see a more deliberate pathway, methods of sharing resources, and channels of communication initiated between the primary and secondary schools. The principal has noticed a trend of more children applying for the selective school, with there being 25 applications for the selective school from the year group below Austyn’s.

As Austyn’s mother teaches at the primary school, she acknowledges the advantage she has in being able to make the decision, and having an understanding from an ‘inside view’. She has also heard from other parents in the primary school, whose child has had positive experiences when they attended the selective school. Austyn presents herself as a well-adjusted girl who is articulate and knows her own mind. She wants to be a veterinarian or medical doctor who “finds a cure for something”. She said, “that would be amazing to be known for that” and agreed it was research she was interested in.
Max - Highly emotional, energetic, imaginative, and inquisitive, and finds it difficult to relate to his peer group

Max’s father is the primary caregiver and Max has a younger sister who shows characteristics of academic giftedness. His sister is scheduled to have a psychometric test. When Max was in Year 4, he displayed different behaviours to the family’s relatives and friends’ children, so his parents investigated behavioural and cognitive testing. Max is highly emotional, energetic, imaginative, and inquisitive. He finds it difficult to relate to his peer group and can be a loner. Max described a classroom teacher as one of his friends. Both his parents attended Catholic schools and whilst they belong to a parish, they do not attend church regularly. However, they are very keen for both their children to have a Catholic education because of the pastoral care and discipline policy they believe is part of Catholic schooling. They have indicated, however, that this does depend on the needs of their children being met.

The father believes there is a difference between giftedness and talent. He said, “you are born gifted and the higher the level of giftedness, the more abstract you seem to be. You can develop talent but you can’t develop giftedness”. The parents are very happy with the education and individualised plans that Max is now experiencing, but they were most concerned when Max was in Kindergarten. This changed after Max’s year in Kindergarten, when a new principal was appointed making a significant difference to the opportunities that were now being provided for Max. The original principal was resistant to the idea of giftedness. The new principal’s acknowledgment of gifted children and the help that has been given to them has been exceptional. The father believes the school does an amazing job in facilitating learning experiences for all children across the whole spectrum, from academic giftedness to the academically challenged. He spoke enthusiastically about the new principal.

Within the first term that the new principal was at the school, she interviewed Max and his parents. She also engaged the expertise from The System’s office and together they deliberated on a plan that would best meet Max’s specific learning and social requirements. This initial 3-step plan was enacted immediately.
Firstly, at end of the first term in Year 1 and after following the Iowa Scale of Acceleration guidelines, Max was accelerated to Year 2. This process was implemented gently and included valuable input, support and encouragement from both the Year 1 and Year 2 classroom teachers. Beyond these provisions in Year 2 Max required extension activities in mathematics.

Secondly, an online Regional program that the school offered had proven quite difficult for Max when he was in Kindergarten, due to his lack of computer and organisational skills. As a result, the original principal withdrew him from this program. The new principal insisted he be specifically skilled in these areas and be given the opportunity to participate in this program once again. After this intervention, Max successfully participated in this form of extension.

Thirdly, the school has allowed, and in fact strongly encouraged, Max to be a participant in a fortnightly Regional face-to-face program. This program, held at the Regional Office for a four-hour session per fortnight, involves Max meeting with other identified academically gifted students attending other schools. This group of approximately ten students have explicit instruction on a variety of topics (for example robotics) from qualified experts, with skills in dealing with their social and emotional needs, as well as other relevant skills being addressed. The children have allocated time to work on an individual project where they pose a question, research the answer to this question and then create a presentation that shows their findings. The children share a recess time where they can mix socially. When Max was asked about this program he said, “I just love it because I get to work with intelligent people like me. It’s like a selective class”.

Max’s father believes he has to strictly monitor Max’s use of his laptop and limit the use of electronic devices. Max has his own laptop and iPod. He plays the piano and was very proud of the fact he had almost completed three piano books in one year. His piano teacher said he was the only student who had achieved that. His mother is pleased that Max is finally maintaining friendships. He does not get invited to other people’s places but has at last been invited to a party recently. Max has a weekly appointment with the school counsellor and looks forward to this very much. He
said, “I like talking to her about various topics and playing card games with her. I love going to school”. His favourite subject is mathematics, especially when they are doing experiments or measurement.

At the start of each year, Max’s father has the habit of asking the classroom teacher, “are you academically gifted”? This year the classroom teacher answered, “yes I am”. Max’s father thought this was interesting as it is the first time a classroom teacher has professed to be academically gifted. The father believes this is contributing to Max having a good year, as the classroom teacher “gets him”. Max’s father said he read that, “to be successful in teaching academically gifted children you need to be gifted yourself, or at least have spent a lot of time with gifted children and appreciate their thinking process”. The father recognises Max appreciates having a male classroom teacher. This classroom teacher spent a considerable amount of time at the start of the year developing a mutual rapport with Max. The classroom teacher believes this was worthwhile, as some of the challenging, antisocial behaviours Max had displayed previously have decreased. His level of maturity, as well as being prescribed Ritalin by a paediatrician, may also have contributed to his calmer, more controlled behaviour. The classroom teacher has an explicitly prescribed level of required classwork for all the students, including Max. Nevertheless, he is also flexible with Max in regards to differentiating and personalising the content, and the way in which the work can be presented. The classroom teacher has regular communication with Max’s father. Intriguingly, when the father was asked if he was academically gifted he was most uncomfortable in answering the question. He said, “have you seen an adult squirm when asked if they are gifted”? He did divulge, “I do view things differently from other people and many traits Max exhibits I know I either had as a child or still have now.” The mother has a Law degree.

Max’s wellbeing is a critical factor for his parents when considering the appropriate school for him. They are very satisfied at present with the current primary school. Max is happy to attend school and appears to be having positive learning experiences and developing socially, even though he is more than twelve months younger than his peers. When it comes time to investigate secondary schooling the parents will undertake extensive research. They will consider the local Catholic
secondary school, an independent Catholic school and an independent non-denominational school for which Max will apply for a scholarship. The father said they will meet with each of the principals and gauge if they have an understanding and an appreciation of gifted education, that includes meeting the complex needs of academically gifted students. The flexibility of the curriculum, learning pathways and interesting programs will also be considered. The father did stress that keeping Max engaged and motivated to fulfil his potential in a safe and supportive environment, is what they would be looking for in a secondary school. While both parents are Catholic and a Catholic school is the preferred option, if moving from the Catholic system means that Max receives the education he deserves, they would do that. The father believes that the Catholic system so far has provided the desired education for Max.

4.2.2 School F: Catherine, Cooper, Jane

This medium sized coeducational Catholic primary school has a principal who has an awareness of the necessity to provide educational opportunities that meet the diverse range of students in the school. The principal has completed a Masters of Gifted Education, as well as other professional learning about giftedness. The gifted education coordinator has completed more professional learning for students with learning disabilities. The principal believes, in general, that the expectations about student achievement from the teaching staff are not high enough. There are a number of young classroom teachers who do not have the knowledge or experience in identifying giftedness and then differentiating the curriculum. The principal has allocated funds from the school budget for all classroom teachers to complete a university certificate in gifted education. The principal's rationale for this approach is that this professional learning will assist in the teaching of all students and the reporting to parents. A systematic process of identification and tracking of students’ learning needs, accompanied by seeking the advice from The System personnel, are strategies that will also be implemented. It is a juggle to manage the school resources fairly so the diverse needs of students are addressed. Additionally, the principal believes the class sizes are too large, which adds to the challenge of providing
diverse learning. The principal, gifted education coordinator, and the classroom teachers do not perceive themselves as gifted.

*Catherine and Cooper – at the end of the day education is much more important than the religious side*

Catherine (Kindergarten) and Cooper (Year 1) are brother and sister and they both attend School F. They have an older sister who attends a non-Catholic independent primary school. However, she used to attend School F until Year 4. In a psychometric test Catherine scored in the top one percentile and Cooper scored in the top 0.1 percentile. After several bad experiences with the oldest child not being understood or catered for at the school, the parents made the decision to change schools and have been satisfied since. The eldest child was becoming a typical underachiever, but that has now changed with the opportunities she has been given at the independent school. The mother says as soon as they can afford it, Cooper and Catherine will change schools. Catherine will attend the school where the older sister is, and they will apply for Cooper to attend an independent non-Catholic boys school. The parents will not consider a government selective school, as they believe the students who attend these schools have been tutored and continue to be once at the school.

Catherine and Cooper's mother believes there have been some positive changes since a new principal commenced at School F two years ago. Conversely, Cooper said he still finds the work unchallenging and becomes bored. Cooper also stated that he does not like classwork being repeated and that homework is “a waste of time”. Cooper has a passion for collecting different rocks and crystals. He said his collection is “precious”. His favourite subject is mathematics and Catherine's is reading. They are both in extension classes for these subjects.

Even though the mother and three children are Catholic and attend church, religion is not a factor when considering schooling options for the children. Cooper does not believe in God, and Catherine has not made up her mind as yet. The father is an atheist. The mother wants the children to know that the Catholic religion is not the only religion and that they have a choice about what they believe, but must always
be respectful. School F was believed to be the “best option” at the time of their eldest child starting school. It is in close proximity to where they live and they can afford the school fees. However, the mother anticipates that they will be able to afford to have all three children at independent schools in the years to come. The mother does not consider herself gifted but thinks she is talented. Both she and her husband “have a love of learning”. Her definition of talented is “having the capacity to work hard”. The mother is bilingual, she has Italian parents, and the children are learning this language.

*Jane – can be lucky with the classroom teacher, if they take an interest in giftedness and give the student a variety of opportunities*

Jane, who is in Year 5, started school a year earlier than most children, who generally start at age five. The principal at the time interviewed her and suggested Jane start early, as she was more ready to start school than half of the students who were the correct age. Jane’s older brother was accelerated a year group, and her younger brother also started school early. All three children are academically gifted. The mother believes the school has been inclusive, with the classroom teacher understanding her children and accepting their differences. However, she does not believe the same can be said about the parents. There was always “playground talk” between the parents about how different my children were. “I was frowned upon for advocating for my children”, Jane’s mother said. The mother has a good understanding of giftedness and the difference between gifted and talented. She also knows and expects that The System will cater for her children’s particular needs.

Jane enjoys school and likes it best when they learn in different ways and do not do “boring worksheets”. Her favourite subject is English and she likes dancing, drama and performing. She has dancing and drama lessons outside of school. Jane also likes using the computer and iPad both at school and home. Jane is looking forward to secondary school. It is important to Jane and her family that she attends a Catholic school. Jane’s mother stated that they “made that decision as a family that we wanted our children to grow up with Catholic values.” The older son attends a Catholic boys secondary school within The System and they expect Jane to attend a Catholic girls secondary school within The System.
4.2.3 School G: Daisy

School G is a small coeducational Catholic primary school that has a culture of recognising and supporting children who are identified as gifted. Both principals, while Daisy and her brother have attended the school, strongly support ensuring that the students at the school are given the education and encouragement that matches their learning needs. As a result of information from Daisy’s preschool and a psychometric test that supported the early entry, the then principal was very open to Daisy starting school one year early. The current principal has been able to employ a specialist teacher who has qualifications in gifted education one day a week. This employment is funded by the school directly and not by The System. This teacher liaises with classroom teachers, parents and the school’s leadership team. The creation of this role has enabled identification, testing and the subsequent implementation of programs to cater for the needs of Daisy and other gifted children. Unfortunately, due to budgetary restrictions the role is limited to one day per week. Daisy’s classroom teacher was quite frank in stating she would like to see the current system of employing a specialised gifted education teacher changed. She believes all classroom teachers should have professional learning in, and an understanding of, gifted education. The classroom teacher is not an advocate of students being withdrawn from class; she believes their needs should be catered for in class as the need arises. Daisy’s classroom teacher is currently completing a Masters degree in Gifted Education and the principal has completed a certificate qualification in Gifted Education. The gifted education coordinator has completed considerable professional learning in gifted education. The principal and classroom teacher did not have any gifted education instruction in their initial teaching qualification, and they do not perceive themselves to be academically gifted. However, the principal perceives herself to be a gifted leader, and the classroom teacher perceives herself to be a gifted teacher.

*Daisy - Challenged by an early start to the student’s schooling career*

Daisy (Year 5) has an older brother who attends the local boys’ Catholic secondary school and who is also academically gifted. Prior to Daisy starting school, her preschool teachers recommended that Daisy’s parents investigate the possibility of her commencing school at an early age of 4 years and 5 months, as they believed it
was to her advantage to begin formal schooling earlier. Daisy has a good retention of knowledge and has a high reading ability. She also displays perfectionist behaviours, is independent and responsible, and has a strong sense of justice. Daisy prefers to immerse herself in her learning and does not enjoy working in a group. She is highly emotional and has a heightened sense of taste and smell. The family are involved with their parish and attend church regularly, with all members of the family being ‘Readers’ and Daisy acting as an Altar Server. The Catholic Church is very important to the family and is part of their family tradition. The mother could not clearly define the difference between giftedness and talent or the difference between intelligence and giftedness, but perceived herself and Daisy’s father as being gifted. They were both educated in Ireland and attended single-sex Catholic schools.

Daisy enjoys going to school, as she believes learning and socialising with her friends are of critical importance. She can be quite social and likes to interact with boys. She is highly energetic and single-minded, but also compliant. She can, however, also appear bossy and stubborn. Daisy is strong-willed and very keen to succeed in life. Daisy’s favourite subjects are mathematics and English. She finds mathematics easy and attends an extension mathematics class twice a week. She likes to explore on the laptop. She has her own iPod and shares an iPad and computer at home. At school her favourite device is a chromebook as it is simple to use for research and for creating documents and presentations. Her mother believes that for a small school with limited resources, the primary school does the best it can with mixed-ability classes. Daisy attends nine classes of dancing per week. She also has a piano lesson each week. She thoroughly enjoys these activities and is excelling at both. Daisy also plays netball and participates in Surf Life Saving nippers activities. Daisy was very keen to mention her interest in and love of animals, and she would like to study Veterinary Science at university.

Several schools will be considered for Daisy’s secondary schooling. Daisy’s parents will apply to both the local Catholic schools, which are systemic Catholic girls schools. She will also apply to the local government selective school. While these schools will be considered, they will not be “at the top of the list” as Daisy and her
mother both named an independent Catholic girls school as their first choice. This school has an exclusive reputation with expensive school fees. They believe this school provides a good holistic education with an extensive dance and music program, whilst being a Catholic school.

Intriguingly, Daisy’s mother and the classroom teacher had a meeting to discuss Daisy’s progress, as Daisy had become quiet and withdrawn in class. She had a perception that the classroom teacher did not like her, which was a shock to the teacher. There had been tension between the classroom teacher and Daisy in her manner of giving responses to questions being asked in class. Daisy had thought the classroom teacher was not asking her to answer, whereas the teacher wanted to give other students the opportunity to answer and had not wanted Daisy to call out the answer. Daisy’s mother commented that another contributing factor to Daisy’s classroom demeanour was the very small number of girls in the class. In a class of 28 there are only 8 girls. The mother believes if she were in a class with children like her, she would not be faced with this issue. “She is uncooperative not disrespectful, but I guess her teacher will say she is a big personality and she likes to put her hand up and get things right. We have tried to explain to her that everyone has to have a turn but she just does not understand” Daisy’s mother stated. Additionally, Daisy’s mother believes that in hindsight she would not have started Daisy at school a year ahead of her peers. The mother’s concerns are that Daisy is very small, although she is not immature. The mother elaborated, “she is head strong about certain things, where I often think if she had that extra year of maturity, would she be a bit better? Because of her all-roundedness, when she goes to join groups or teams that her friends are in, she is the youngest. She will be young when she finishes school. I have been thinking about changing schools and getting her to repeat a year so she will be the same age as other girls.” The current principal invited an expert in to advise the mother, who has now decided to leave Daisy in her current year group.

4.2.4 School H: Jemima, Lachlan

The school that Jemima and Lachlan attend is a small coeducational Catholic school. Three years ago three Catholic primary schools, including School H, collaboratively
introduced a gifted education initiative (the other two schools were not involved in this study). The principal of one of the schools (not School H) was very passionate about this program and was proactive in ensuring the program was viable. She chaired meetings and employed a researcher to write the program and the selection criteria for students. She subsequently employed a teacher part-time to implement the program. For children to be invited to the multi-aged group and participate in the program, they had to be identified by a psychometric test as being in the top 1% of the population. Jemima and Lachlan both participated in this program. Students were withdrawn from class one day a week and gathered, using a mix of online and face-to-face sessions, at one of the schools. The program aimed to address the learning, social, and emotional needs of the selected students. These children had the opportunity to immerse themselves into a project for the day and mix with like-minded peers. The parents received a report attached to their child’s regular school report and were given the opportunity for a face-to-face interview. Due to it being a newly created and implemented initiative, it was explained to parents that the program might not continue indefinitely. The instigating principal retired at the end of the second year of implementation and since then the program has not continued. The principal of School H commented that the greatest learning he has had within gifted education was with the implementation of the program. He said, “the specific criteria for the identification and the program content was a valuable education for our teachers and myself”. One of the classroom teachers said, “I loved the program, I loved watching the kids, seeing how capable they were and what they brought to each of their projects. The linking of like-minded children was great to witness”.

Neither the principal, gifted education coordinator, nor classroom teachers had gifted education as part of their pre-service training. The gifted education coordinator has post-graduate qualifications in gifted education, the classroom teachers have completed significant professional learning in gifted education and the principal has not received any gifted education training. The principal was not formally identified as gifted, but was a high performing student who was very competitive at school and was always in the ‘A class’. The classroom teachers did not perceive themselves as gifted.
Jemima - All schooling options will be considered

Jemima’s mother teaches at a Catholic secondary school and is a member of the middle management team. Jemima, who is in Year 5, has rapid speech and is a compulsive talker. She has nervous tics that come and go. The mother has tried to identify the cause. The tics typically appear at the end of the year when she is excited about her birthday, Christmas and the holidays, and then over the holidays they decrease and go away. Jemima has a strong sense of social justice and she displays an inner confidence unusual in a child of her age.

Jemima’s mother believes the school encourages academic success to some degree but is more focused on ‘all-round’ success. Two years ago, when Jemima was identified as academically gifted, there was a stronger culture of acknowledging gifted education at the school and in surrounding Catholic schools. It was at this time that Jemima was invited to participate in the three-school collaboration program described in the previous section. According to Jemima’s mother, working on the independent project was fabulous for her. Jemima said she liked the program because she was able to choose a topic of interest to explore. She considered her involvement in this program as her favourite time at school. Now that this program has been disbanded, Jemima is now occasionally withdrawn from class to work on projects in the library, but this program is not as structured as the previous one. The practice of either whole grade or partial acceleration has not been raised with Jemima’s parents. Curriculum differentiation within Jemima’s class depends on the classroom teacher. This year the teacher differentiates the content and how she groups the children. Jemima is working with a group of children who challenge her academically, which her mother is very happy about. Additionally, Jemima enjoys the regular opportunity she is given in class to use an iPad to research topics and present her work.

Jemima likes going to a Catholic school and learning about religion. She finds the Bible stories very interesting. Jemima also enjoys both the swimming and athletics carnivals, as she usually does quite well in them. She loves reading and reads a variety of books. Jemima does not have her own mobile phone but does have an iPod.
and iPad. Jemima enjoys playing netball and doing jazz ballet outside of school hours. Jemima says she would like to be a teacher when she grows up.

Her mother is pleased that Jemima was identified as gifted, as this information has meant the teachers have given her extension work. Jemima is very compliant and her friends are reportedly very similar to her. The mother went to a Catholic school and believes that neither she nor Jemima’s father are gifted. The mother thinks her sister (Jemima’s aunt) is gifted as she was accelerated a grade at school.

Jemima and her parents are already deliberating secondary school options by gathering information and attending Open Days. There are many factors they are considering during this decision-making process. At this stage, Jemima’s parents are not including the prospect of school choice for Jemima’s younger brothers in their school choice decision for Jemima. Jemima would like to still keep attending a Catholic school and her preference is for a girls’ school. Her mother would like the school to be convenient, close to home, and for Jemima to be able to get there independently of her parents. The school must support gifted education and provide for the needs of gifted children. Her mother thinks Jemima will apply for the local government selective school just to have options to choose from. Her father attended an independent coeducational Christian school (non-Catholic) that Jemima would be able to get to by public transport. She will apply for a scholarship to that school. At present they are considering five different options, two of which are schools within The System.

*Lachlan – Despite a lack of consistently meeting his needs, only Catholic schools will be considered*

Lachlan’s mother teaches at a Catholic secondary school. Lachlan (Year 6) has a younger brother who is in Year 3 and who has also been identified as academically gifted. Lachlan is a very compliant child who shows a level of maturity beyond his years. His father died when Lachlan was very young. Lachlan and his mother have nurtured a relationship where high-level, intellectual conversations are a part of their everyday communication. Lachlan is an intellectual and measured thinker, and has a strong sense of social justice.
Lachlan’s mother believes the primary school values academic success, but identifies that there are times when other pursuits are celebrated more than academic success. Whilst Lachlan is happy at the school, he has not been challenged nor extended beyond his ‘comfort zone’ and his mother is disappointed with this. Lachlan very much enjoyed being part of the three-school collaboration program and like Jemima, considers the experience to be a highlight of his schooling experience. When Lachlan was in Year 3 he was achieving Year 5 mathematics outcomes but his school report did not reflect this. He is now in Year 5 and still working to those same outcomes. His mother said, “I have always been open to specific subject acceleration but it has never happened. As I said earlier, a value is placed on academic success but it is not followed through as well as it could be”. The mother is clear that she wants her son to lead a balanced life and he is encouraged to engage in lots of different pursuits, academic success is important but it is only one of many important things.

Lachlan likes going to a Catholic school because he says people are nice to each other. His favourite subject is science and he hopes to be a scientist or engineer when he leaves school. During the three-school collaboration program, he loved being able to work intensely on an advanced science project with a boy who attended another school. Lachlan is hoping to meet up with the boy again at secondary school. At home Lachlan plays with Lego, electronics and his iPad. He has his own iPad that he takes to school to use for schoolwork. He plays soccer in a local team on the weekend. Lachlan likes reading and is currently enjoying The Lord of the Rings.

Together as a family of three, they have been thoughtfully and methodically considering secondary school options. From the start of their investigations, Lachlan was very definite about wanting to continue his education at a Catholic school. His mother discussed with Lachlan that before his father died, he said he would like Lachlan to go to a selective school. His mother said, “we talked through the whole dynamic of a selective school, including the extra work and the impact that would have, and the competitive culture that is evident in selective schools. Lachlan was adamant that he so badly wanted to go to a Catholic school that we thought we would
not go through the selective school testing”. Lachlan said, “It would be a waste of everyone’s time when the selective school would be my last choice”. So they have considered three Catholic schools, two schools within The System and one independent Catholic school, and have attended the Open Days of each school.

The family believes the local Catholic school (a school within The System) has a lot of advantages. Lachlan is familiar with the school as he has visited it a number of times when he was involved with the three-school collaboration program. These visits were specifically for mathematics and science, so Lachlan feels he already knows the teachers and facilities. Lachlan’s mother believes the school will provide a differentiated curriculum that will challenge Lachlan, and there are a variety of programs that will extend his thinking and keep him engaged with his learning. As a single parent, family convenience is an important factor. Lachlan would easily be able to get to the school himself in a safe and timely manner. Also, as a System school the fees are affordable. The school is coeducational which is an important consideration to the mother, as Lachlan does not have a sister. The disadvantage is that the school only goes to Year 10 and then a decision about further schooling will be required. However, there is a senior College (within The System) that the majority of the students attend.

The second option is also a Catholic school within The System and has a lot of the same advantages. It is coeducational and has affordable fees. Its distinct advantage over the first school option is that it has an explicit and embedded gifted program that is funded by The System. The disadvantage of this school is that it is more difficult to travel to and Lachlan’s school day would be longer.

The independent Catholic school did not have any advantages over the first two choices. It is a single-sex boys’ school with much higher fees. Neither Lachlan nor his mother were impressed with the curriculum alternatives and they were concerned that the specific needs of gifted students were not addressed. The school is also a considerable distance from home. The only advantage is that the school has a strong agricultural emphasis that would suit Lachlan’s younger brother, but not Lachlan. The family are keen that both the boys attend the same school.
They have decided that Lachlan will apply for the local Catholic school, which he is very much looking forward to attending. They believe the school will cater for Lachlan’s academic needs. In addition, it will provide the environment to nurture a happy, well-adjusted person who has a broad outlook on life.

4.2.5 School I: James

This small coeducational Catholic primary school recognises and provides for the diverse needs of students, and creates opportunities for students to reach their potential. The principal is very committed to this ethos. There is no additional funding specifically provided for meeting the needs of gifted students from The System, so any resources and staff time is funded from the school budget. Academic success by any student is recognised and celebrated. The classroom teacher believes the school’s culture around academic success was "very nurturing, very respectful, honest and supportive". Even though there is not a student currently at the school who has been accelerated, the philosophy is supported by the principal as long as correct and thorough processes are adhered to. Grouping students according to their academic needs for specific subjects is widely used within the school, as is personalising the learning by writing Individual Adjustment Plans. The use of a variety of technologies is embraced within the classroom. The school offers and allows for students to be involved in Regional Office gifted education initiatives where appropriate. External competitions such as The Australian Mathematical Olympiad are also accessible.

*James - the influence and involvement of the principal has been very obvious and appreciated*

James is in Year 4 and has only been at this current Catholic school for eight months, having previously attending a larger Catholic primary school. James’ family decided to make this change after considerable investigation and thought. At his previous school James had been unhappy both in the classroom and playground, and was becoming quite frustrated and stressed about attending school. He was feeling he did not belong or ‘fit in,’ which is in contrast to how he feels in his current school. His mother indicated that she had not fully appreciated James’ unhappiness. James’
mother suggested that the two classroom teachers he had at his previous school were not skilled in accommodating James’ needs. The gifted education coordinator is employed part time by both schools. For James this was an advantage because not only did he know a teacher when he moved to the new school, it was a teacher he respected, who understood his needs and who enabled opportunities that engaged James positively.

James is part of an interesting immediate family and extended family that has complex diverse needs. He is the middle child of three boys, each of whom has specific learning needs and sensitivities. James has been identified as highly gifted, as he is in the 99.9th percentile. Many of these children who are identified in the top 1% struggle to connect with peers, often feel lonely, and may exhibit antisocial behaviours. James is intensely sensitive and can appear to overreact to situations others may take in their stride. He is intolerant of mild teasing and has a low threshold for boredom and repetition. He shows compassion to others but dislikes being incorrect and shows signs of perfectionism. His mother stated, “I have three very out-of-the-box children”. The mother also has an exceptionally academically gifted niece and autistic nephew. This is a family familiar with accommodating the requirements of children with different learning and social needs.

James’ mother attended a Catholic school and did very well at school and university, but she questions that she is academically gifted. His father is not Catholic, but is supportive of the Catholic religion and the mother and boys practising their faith. James does not perceive himself as talented but as gifted. His mother believes that gifted education is about tailoring the education to the child's needs. Her experience of this new school is that they celebrate all successes and that they are proactive in identifying giftedness. James feels very supported and understands that he does receive extension work that makes him feel good. James admitted he liked this school because it is Catholic: “You can concentrate on whatever you like, everyone is happy, there is not as much noise, and it is a small school”.

James and his mother stated that his learning needs were being met. This was facilitated by using the practices of ability grouping, personalising the learning and
using technology when appropriate. The mother liked the ‘inquiry-based learning’ approach and James enjoyed participating in Regional opportunities. The move to this school has been extremely positive for James. The mother said, “the culture here is coming from the top down”. The individual attention and intervention that James receives was not something he had experienced previously. She is very impressed by how open the school is in seeking advice from external service providers. The school embraces the opinion and guidance from expert professionals. James indicated that he felt welcome and catered for. He said, “I feel better and more confident in what I do, and I feel a lot more challenged in this school than I did at the other school”.

James enjoys going to church, “it is one of my favourite things”. He says he likes “thinking about God and praying”. Going to a Catholic school is very important to him, he said, “I love Catholics”. James was very open in saying that if he had the choice to attend the local government selective school he would choose not to because “I like the religion”. When his mother spoke of the government selective school option, she was concerned about the lack of pastoral care, which she says, is important to her. She recognised that James is an extremely spiritual child and has a strong sense of his faith. The principal is already meeting with the high school to discuss James’ needs and how to cater for them. The mother would worry were the principal to leave, because she has a passion for making sure the needs of these students are met. The mother said, “she is an exceptional principal, the culture of this school is what it is because of her and I see it straight away when I come in here. I do worry whether The System will look after James if she is not fighting for him, and it were left to just me”. She also recognises that James likes to feel he is at the top of the tree, so from that point of view a selective school may not suit him.

There are three important factors in the school choice decision-making process that both the mother and James have articulated. Firstly, a Catholic environment appears to be a significant factor for James, and the mother wants her children to know about God, and live like Jesus. Secondly, the individualised and personalised attention James receives for both his learning and social needs are an important priority for them. Finally, the influence and involvement of the principal has been very obvious
and appreciated. She has been proactive in seeking the guidance of external expertise, implementing specific strategies for James, and creating a link and starting conversations with the feeder Catholic secondary school.

### 4.3 Summary

The 13 stories are very different. Each story is rich with data, describing unique experiences and explaining different priorities and processes when making the decision for future schooling. All of the 14 students commenced their school life enrolled in a systemic Catholic primary school. The common elements among all students is that they are academically gifted and want to be engaged and motivated in their learning. The common element in the students’ stories is that their parents want their child to be challenged educationally, but at the same time, want their child to be happy and accepted. All students are unique in that they have different reasons for making their school choice decision.

The analyses of the findings are in Chapters 5, 6 and 7. Chapter 5 examines data gathered from the 55 semi-structured interviews, with particular focus on the ‘individual’ needs of the child, and ‘individual’ families. Chapter 6 will concentrate on quantitative data obtained from the semi-structured interviews. The findings in Chapter 6 are about the ‘influences’ that contribute to the inherent understanding of gifted education. Chapter 7 will discuss system and school documents relevant to gifted education, and teaching and learning pedagogies. The central point of analysis is the ‘ideology’ of these documents and the actual and/or perceived delivery of gifted education programs, provisions and structures.
Chapter 5: Individuals (Findings 1 – Interview Data)

Dr Deborah L. Ruf: Most parents of gifted children go through a similar process of discovering that their children are different from others and that the schools won’t necessarily recognize or support the needs of their children. Early delight in their precocious, engaging newborns and toddlers turns to confusion and worry as other people point out problems with the children or the children themselves don’t conform to everyone else’s expectations. These worried parents find themselves having to become activists and advocates for their children through self-education, assessments, and considerable time and effort. (Ruf, 2009, p. 23)

The findings of this thesis will be the focus of the next three chapters. This chapter will discuss data gathered from the 55 semi-structured interviews, with particular focus on the ‘individual’ needs of the child and ‘individual’ families, both from an interpersonal and environmental perspective, and the relationship between ‘individual’ students and their classroom teacher. Consequently, the title of this chapter is ‘Individuals’. Chapter 6 will concentrate on quantitative data obtained from the semi-structured interviews, with the data divided into the following categories: (a) classroom teacher and parent personal school experience; (b) results from a parent religiosity survey; (c) professional learning of classroom teachers; and (d) pedagogical practices implemented in schools. The findings in Chapter 6 are about the ‘influences’ that contribute to the inherent understanding of gifted education; hence, Chapter 6 is titled ‘Influences’. Chapter 7 will discuss The System and school documents relevant to gifted education and teaching and learning pedagogies. The central point of analysis is the ‘ideology’ of these documents and the actual and/or perceived delivery of gifted education programs, provisions, and structures. Therefore, the title of Chapter 7 is ‘Ideologies’.
In order to answer the research question, two data collection methodologies were used. The main source of collection was from 55 semi-structured interviews and these findings will be discussed in Chapters 5 and 6. Additionally, relevant System and school documents were collected to substantiate the material and perceptions gathered from the interviews. The document analysis will be the focus of Chapter 7.

5.1 Using Gagné’s Model

Françoys Gagné developed a Differentiated Model of Giftedness and Talent (DMGT) 2.0, (2008) which was discussed in detail in Chapters 1 and 2. This model is well known in the field of gifted education and gives a clear definition for the transference from ‘Natural Abilities’ (Gifts) to ‘Competencies’ (Talents). Gagné’s model is based on the premise of the existence of natural abilities. By this he means, “Mental or physical abilities (a) whose development is significantly influenced by our genetic endowment and (b) that directly act as casual agents in the growth of competencies (knowledge and skills) characteristic of a particular occupational field” (Gagné, 2009b, p. 155).

Gagné has created a schematic representation (Figure 5.1) of the complex and intersecting elements that underpin his model (a larger version is in Chapter 1, Figure 1.1).
Natural abilities are “outstanding gifts” (Gagné, 2009b, p. 155). These outstanding gifts represent the potential that can be developed into measurable achievements, or talents, or competencies. For this transference to occur, Gagné believes a form of catalyst must be present. These catalysts are factors that influence and/or affect, in either a positive or negative way, the change of a natural ability into a measurable competency. Gagné divided these catalysts into two broad categories: Environmental and Intrapersonal.

Gagné’s catalysts were used to stratify and present the rich data produced from the 55 interviews conducted as part of this research. The essence of these catalysts is that they bring about a change. In Gagné’s model, the change is the transference from Natural Abilities to Measurable Competencies. For this thesis, the change being analysed is the decision-making process of parents of academically gifted children deciding whether to stay or leave a Catholic school system. What are the significant intrapersonal factors that affect this decision? What environmental influences impact on this choice of the parent? The researcher categorised the emergent
themes for this research using Gagné’s headings of interpersonal and environmental catalysts. Figure 5.1 highlights the section of Gagné’s model, the catalysts, that were used for this research.

Figure 5.2. Gagné’s intrapersonal and environmental catalysts (2008).

Gagné divides the intrapersonal catalyst into two basic dimensions, firstly, both physical and mental traits; and secondly, goal management processes, such as awareness of self and others, motivation, and volition. The environmental catalyst is divided into three subcomponents: milieu, the influence of significant individuals, and provisions. These are the focus of this researcher’s analytical framework (see Figure 5.3).
Figure 5.3. The analytical framework based on Gagné’s catalysts.
5.2 Towards an Analytical Framework

As outlined in Chapters 3 and 4, data were gathered by conducting semi-structured interviews. Fourteen students were interviewed: 10 from primary schools and four from secondary schools. Two of the primary school students are a brother and sister, with the girl only being in her first year of school. As she was very shy and not forthcoming, the researcher grouped these siblings as one case. It was critical to include this case as the mother had very strong views and opinions. Therefore, for this analysis, 13 cases will be considered, that is, nine from primary schools and four from secondary schools. Eight of the 13 cases consisted of five semi-structured interviews. The five interviewees were the student, a parent, the school principal, gifted education coordinator, and a classroom teacher of the student. Four of the 13 cases consisted of four semi-structured interviews. For these four cases, the gifted education coordinator was unavailable. One of the 13 cases consisted of six semi-structured interviews. The six interviewees were two students (siblings), a parent, the school principal, the gifted education coordinator, and only one classroom teacher as the classroom teacher of one of the siblings was also the gifted education coordinator. There was a total of 55 interviews.

The researcher analysed each interview transcript by examining the data that were categorised as being related to three contexts: (a) the system, school, and classroom, (b) the gifted student, and (c) the parent, and family context. For each of these contexts the researcher determined if the data were an intrapersonal factor with the gifted student as the protagonist, or an environmental factor that affected the student and their family. The researcher used a template (Figure 5.4) to record and categorise the data from each case, with the more detailed summary included in Appendix H.
The separation of the data into intrapersonal and environmental factors will be discussed now in further detail.

### 5.3 Intrapersonal Factors

The first of the two catalysts is intrapersonal factors. The data collected, which fit to the intrapersonal component of the analytical framework, has been further divided into two categories: traits, that is physical and mental; and goal management processes, such as awareness of self and others, motivation, and volition (see Figure 5.5).

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4 Psychometric test: Stanford Binet 5
Intrapersonal factors within the analytical framework.

5.3.1 Traits

Gagné divides traits into physical and mental. There are many physical traits; some of these are appearance, gender, and disabilities. In this study, physical traits were not deemed to be a significant factor among the particular research cohort and were not discussed in the interviews. Conversely, mental traits were discussed at length. In the context of this study, mental traits refer to the intellectual, psychological, emotional, and spiritual behaviours and qualities displayed by the student. Gagné refers to mental traits that have a strong hereditary component and can be described as behaviour or temperament, as well as the term personality, which “encompasses a large diversity of positive and negative styles of behaviour” (Gagné, 2008, p. 4). For this research a checklist of the characteristics of giftedness (including positive and negative associations) (Appendix B) was used in the interviews as a basis for discussion with the parent and school personnel in
describing the intrapersonal factors of the gifted student. The following analysis is the data from a parent perspective followed by that of the school.

From the parents’ perspective
Parents want the best opportunities for their child. They want them to be happy, well-balanced, and socially accepted at school. This is highlighted by Audrey’s mother who said, “our focus as parents is more in our children being happy, kind individuals that live a happy life and it is not necessarily just in their academic achievements”. A further example is Max’s father who said, “first and foremost, like any parent, the wellbeing of our children is at the front of our minds”. Audrey and Max are in primary school, but parents of secondary school students gave similar responses. Patricia attends a secondary school, her mother states, “it has always been important for us, even though she has been highly intelligent that it is not the be all and end all of life and that she needed, she needs the social aspect and it can not just all be study, study, study”.

Gifted children are individuals and the data illustrated diversity amongst the students. Audrey’s mother believes Audrey is very social, is invited to many parties and is accepted by different groups of children. However, in contrast is Max who attends the same school. His father said, when asked about Max having friends, “he does now, he went through a long period without any real close friends” and “he does not have any friends come to our home”. Max’s father stated that while on the surface this does not seem to bother Max, it is a concern for Max’s mother and she is pleased he is more accepted now. Additionally, Max’s father stated very clearly that they do not want their child to be “seen as different”.

Coupled with this idea of happiness and social acceptance, is the parents’ desire that the children’s academic needs are met and that they are prepared by having the required skills for life after school. Parents expect that school personnel, including the classroom teacher, will understand the characteristics associated with identified academically gifted students. Most parents were proactive with their communication with the school, with some of the parents giving the impression they were challenging the school to be dynamic and accountable in the recognition and
provision for their child. As an illustration of this, one parent used the phrase, “I had a bit of ammunition when I spoke to them” when referring to the psychometric test, which was an intelligence test that the child had completed externally to the school environment, and which she intended to discuss with the teacher as evidence for justifying a differentiated program. Other parents were more passive with their communication. Lachlan’s mother said that perhaps she should have been in contact with the school more regularly but she had not.

Parents were more inclined to see the positive side of the gifted characteristics checklist in comparison to classroom teachers. Most parents described their child as being a compliant, curious and creative high achiever. They also believed their child to be spiritual, independent and self-motivated whilst being sensitive, emotionally mature, and having a strong sense of social justice. All the students were described as having both a mature or quirky sense of humour and dedicated to learning by being self-driven. Two parents described their child as persistent, while four parents described their respective daughters as anxious and unsure, and with a tendency to put pressure on themselves. All but one parent described their child as a perfectionist. The researcher’s checklist (Appendix B) was used to acknowledge these characteristics.

From the school’s perspective

In contrast to the perspective of parents, classroom teachers tended to observe more negative characteristics in the gifted students. For example, the teachers described the characteristic, “does not like to get anything wrong” rather than “a perfectionist”. Other negative characteristics stated by the classroom teachers and not the parents included, struggles at times, capable but not interested, can be unpredictable, attempts to control the class, headstrong, presents with challenging behaviour, egocentric, and can be offensive. There were many examples of this from the interviews. Two primary school examples were Cooper and Daisy. Cooper’s mother described him as extremely intelligent and not interested in school. She believed he was unchallenged, misunderstood, and not given work that captured his interest. She said, “he has already spoken to me on a number of occasions that he does not want to come to school because school is boring and it is all the same thing.
The repetition is what kills my kids it seems”. On the other hand, Cooper’s classroom teacher thought Cooper was “very interesting and he is gifted, but he lacks a lot of motivation and potential”. She added that “he sort of just sits there and you will not get much out of him unless you ask him yourself”. The classroom teacher claimed she particularly chose topics that Cooper was interested in so as to motivate his interest in learning, but this was not successful. She said, “I think there is a lot more potential and he is just very lazy”. This caused a tension between Cooper’s mother and the classroom teacher, and the school more broadly.

In the second primary school example, there was a complete disparity shown in the interpretation of Daisy’s characteristics between the classroom teacher and the mother. Daisy’s mother described her as being “a passionate learner who has strong opinions and voices them”. Daisy also has a strong sense of justice and moral judgement according to the mother. Whereas the classroom teacher said, “Daisy tries to control the class and dominate all discussions”. Daisy expressed to her mother that the classroom teacher “did not like her” as she “does not choose me to give answers”. The classroom teacher’s purpose in this was to give the other children a chance to answer and participate in class discussions. Daisy was very upset and disturbed by this.

A secondary school example that illustrated a different interpretation of behaviour between the parent and school is Marlene. Marlene’s mother described her as being “independent and focused on her learning”. The description the classroom teacher used was “head strong”. However, despite this the school, Marlene and the mother worked very closely to obtain the best opportunities for Marlene. Both Marlene and her mother were very happy with the secondary school after they had an unfortunate experience at the primary school. The Catholic primary school Marlene attended was not prepared to accept the recommendations from the psychometric report to alter the curriculum or provide extra opportunities for Marlene. It appears that despite the variation in the perception of Marlene, she is significantly happier in the secondary school environment.
There were common positive behavioural characteristics mentioned by the educators and the parent. Some of these were: independent, creative, fast learner, compliant, confident, curious, and has a strong sense of social justice.

5.3.2 Goal management processes

Goal management processes is the second category within the intrapersonal factors of the catalyst section. Gagné divides the goal management category into three dimensions. The first dimension is awareness of self and others, including an ability to define strengths and weakness. The second dimension is motivation, which includes the presence of the gifted person's values, interests and passions. The third and final dimension of the goal management processes is volition, which is evident as autonomy, effort, and perseverance. Students were asked about their school experiences and personal interests to determine the impact of these intrapersonal factors.

From the students’ perspective

All students said they liked or loved going to school, except one boy who liked going to school but only so he could see his friends. Students indicated that they do not want to be perceived as being different, particularly by other students. They want to be accepted and understood, and feel ‘normal’. However, at the same time they want to be engaged in learning, which many of the students commented they enjoy. Most of the students said they were motivated to learn and felt as though they were challenged. However, some students did comment that they did not like work to be repetitive or homework to be boring.

Students shared their varied interests with the researcher. Interests ranged from playing musical instruments, to playing sport, to creative arts. Interestingly, the older students said they were not part of the social media scene. The reasons they gave were, “I cannot be bothered”, “I do not see the point”, “none of my friends are”, and “it is a distraction”. However, they did like technology to research, play games, or create program applications. The younger students all wanted a smartphone and expected to have a smartphone when they went to secondary school. The researcher
got the sense that having a smartphone was a sign of ‘growing up’ and having to take more responsibility for their own wellbeing. They also liked computers and iPads for research and playing games. A number of the students liked attending church and three students specifically stated they enjoyed the Homily component of a church service. In general, faith and spirituality were important for both the younger and older students.

### 5.4 Environmental Factors

The second of the two catalysts is environmental factors. The data collected, which fit into the environmental component of the analytical framework, has been divided into Gagné’s three components: milieu, the influence of significant individuals, and provisions (as shown in Figure 5.6).

![Figure 5.6. Environmental factors within the analytical framework.](image-url)
5.4.1 Milieu: Environmental influences

Gagné describes milieu as the environmental influences such as physical, cultural, social, and familial. For this research the influences of Catholic identity, family influences and the physical environment of the school will be discussed.

*Catholic identity*

All participants spoke favourably about the Catholic identity and ethos of the schools in this study. Many comments were made about the unmistakably Catholic and welcoming nature of the schools. Interviewees, including the students, were able to give numerous examples of how Catholicism was demonstrated. These included: the celebration of the Eucharist, the school liturgies and Masses, the way people treat each other, the expectation of behaviour, symbols and signs around the school, and prayer and the curriculum within the classroom.

Following are two examples to illustrate this, one from a primary school student and another from the parent of a primary school student. Both interviewees were asked, “How would I know this school is a Catholic school if I walked in off the street?” Firstly, part of James’ response was, “we have religion classes, Mass in the hall, and also we talk a lot in the afternoon, usually about God and Jesus and different stories. The friendship of everyone, that sort of relates to God, because everyone’s a good person at this school”. Secondly, the answer Jemima’s mother gave was, “through nearly everything they do really, and most importantly to me, through the way my children speak about what happens at school. So they speak the words that the teachers obviously use with them, which I think is the Catholic ethos shining through”.

*Family influences*

The family experiences, including the schooling of the parents and the influence of siblings, were discussed with each parent interviewed. Most of the parents had a Catholic education and believed it was the natural progression that their children begin schooling in a Catholic school. One of the mothers had attended an academic government selective secondary school and was determined that her children attend a Christian school. The mother was not Catholic, but the father was and so
were the children. She wanted them to receive a “holistic education” and attend a school that had a “culture of values”. This same mother remarked that, “it is not all about the academics, but a strong pastoral care program is very important”. Her three children all attended Catholic primary and secondary schools. Another mother, who described herself as a non-practising Catholic and had attended Catholic schools herself, was adamant her daughter would attend Catholic schools so she could learn and was exposed to the Catholic religion. This ‘influence’ will be discussed further in Chapter 6.

There were mixed comments about the influence of siblings attending the same school. For some parents it was very important that all children go to the same school. Marlene’s mother stated, “Patrick (older brother) was already here (at the secondary school) and his needs were being met”. A further example was from Mark’s mother, “yes, well this is where his siblings had come to”. For others this was not an issue and the parents wanted each child to attend the school that best met the individual child’s needs. This was the case for Jemima’s family as specified by the mother,

Well Jemima and I have had lots of discussions about high school, because she doesn’t necessarily have to go to the same school as the boys, so we are really looking just for her, not for the whole family, I think that puts a different light on things. (Jemima’s mother, interview)

The researcher surveyed 13 parents to measure their religiosity. The detailed findings from this religiosity survey will be discussed in Chapter 6.

**Physical environment of the school**

There were a variety of comments made about the importance placed on the student population of the school. For one family it was a great advantage that the school was small. They had experienced a larger school and this was one of their considerations in moving to a smaller school. With the school being small they believed their son received “more specialised and individualised attention”. They did not feel as lost as they did in the bigger school. Conversely, for another family the small school was a negative. The parent was adamant her daughter would be attending a large
secondary school. This was so she could have the “opportunity to mix with a larger number of people and consequently create friendships with like-minded girls”. The parent understood that with the single stream in the primary school, there was less chance to have other gifted students in the class. The parent also believed that due to the small school the “resources were limited”. She believed the Catholic education system did not allocate as much funding for staffing to the small school as they did to a larger school.

Rather than the size of the school, the class size was an important factor for some parents. They assumed that in a larger class, the classroom teacher would not know the specific needs of their child and would be unable to provide an alternative challenge program. In addition, they believed that individualised feedback would be limited. For one parent the class size was the sole reason she chose to send her youngest daughter to a government school. “At the government school she was in a class of 16 whereas at the Catholic school she would have been in class of 34 children,” the mother said. Her older children had attended the Catholic school.

When asked about class sizes, most of the primary school classroom teachers stated that they believe they are too big. They said it was difficult to know each child and give personalised attention to all the children in the class as well as offer a differentiated curriculum. They expressed exasperation by the lack of time to prepare adequately for the diverse learners.

All the principals interviewed stated it was a continual challenge to provide the required environment for students, including gifted students. Class sizes, the school budget, and appropriate learning spaces always create tension for the principals to manage.

5.4.2 The influence of significant individuals

This second environmental component in Gagné's model includes the influences of parents, family, peers, classroom teachers, and mentors. The areas of classroom
teacher expertise and the principal’s attitude are both significant to this study and will be discussed.

Classroom teacher expertise

Each classroom teacher interviewed acknowledged they recognise gifted students and believe their needs should be provided for. One teacher in particular was quite disturbed by her perception that she could not adequately challenge and deliver stimulating and appropriate learning opportunities for the gifted boy in her class. She hoped he got a “better teacher next year”. She was a young classroom teacher and had not received any gifted education professional learning, either in her teaching qualification or since she started teaching. Another classroom teacher identified himself as gifted and believed he was at an advantage in being able to relate to the gifted student. This teacher stated it was this reason that he was “not experiencing the behavioural issues that previous teachers had”. At the three schools where the principal offered the opportunity of a gifted education qualification for teachers, not one classroom teacher mentioned this opportunity during the interview.

One parent reported frustration with the Catholic school but was still going to keep her son in the Catholic system. She said things like, “I am not a pushy parent”, “I should have contacted the school more”, and “I am so disappointed I have to explain my son’s situation every year to the new teacher”, but “the school tries its best”. Another parent made the comment “the school does its best with limited resources”. Yet for another parent, the only reason she had her two children still attending the Catholic school was that she could not afford to enrol them in a non-Catholic private school. She said, “the private school has an extensive gifted program, and teachers understand and cater for gifted students”.

Classroom teachers are conscious of developing an amicable relationship and open lines of communication with the parents. Many classroom teachers noted that the parents are very active in their child’s education. They realise too, that gifted students may not achieve to the level they are capable of. One of the gifted education coordinators commented that, “there is the constant battle with the ‘tall poppy
syndrome’. Some classroom teachers can have the misconception that these children will achieve regardless with what the school provides”. Raising gifted education as a social justice issue can be difficult at times.

The researcher asked the 28 school personnel interview questions about their gifted education professional learning, both in their original teaching qualification and since they have been teaching. The detailed findings from these questions will be discussed in Chapter 6.

*The principal’s attitude*

Parents had strong opinions about the leadership of the school. For those parents who had experienced a change of principal they were able to compare and contrast the different leadership styles. The parents who had the most positive experience said that the principal was proactive, supportive, and understanding of their gifted child. This made a positive difference to the culture of the school towards the recognition of giftedness and provision of gifted education, especially when academic success was celebrated as well as sporting achievements. James and Mark are two examples that highlight this. Firstly, James transferred from one Catholic primary school to another Catholic primary school. His mother was most adamant about her opinion of the principal at the second primary school. She made the following statement about the Principal:

> She has a passion for making sure these kids’ needs are met, and you can see it in all of, everything she does and not just the bright ones, like the really bright ones, all of them. She is an exceptional principal, the culture of this school is what it is because of her and I saw that straight away when I came in here. I do worry that whether the system will look after him if she is not fighting for him, if it was just me. (James’ mother, interview)

Mark, a secondary school student, had unhappy years at primary school. His mother said the following:

> In all honesty it took a few years for the school to come on board and I think that was – I don’t like to point fingers, but a new principal coming on board really acknowledged Mark – and finally Mark got married up with a suitable
teacher who made a difference to him. Years 5 and 6 were wonderful years, and it was so nice to have a nice ending to primary education for him. (Mark’s mother, interview)

Parents reported their frustration when they had to repeatedly give the same information to the school year after year. Parents were keen to work in partnership with the school and wanted regular communication.

Three of the gifted education coordinators who experienced a change of principal, noted the new principal had a greater focus on gifted education. An example of this is that the same three principals made a considerable financial commitment to ensure staff had the opportunity to complete a substantial gifted education course. These principals strongly encouraged staff to complete the qualification. This invitation was accepted positively.

All nine principals interviewed were definite about their responsibility to implement opportunities to engage all students in their learning. They spoke about the importance of promotion and celebration of academic results and achievements. Some of the principals aimed to create an embedded culture of understanding and implementation of gifted education. These principals believed this approach would raise the staff’s academic expectations of all students, not only of gifted students. A number of principals spoke of approaches and plans to improve the prospects for gifted students, for example, clearer criteria for ability grouping, a continuum of identification, more explicit pre-testing, and implementation of truly differentiated programs, assessment and reporting to the parents. Most of the principals expressed that they had high expectations of their classroom teachers to take responsibility for the implementation of such strategies. Principals see this implementation process as being a team approach, with potential for a stronger link with the feeder school to input into the gifted students’ transition process from primary to secondary school. This comment came from both primary and secondary principals. Most principals remarked that it was a privilege to work in partnership with interested parents who are committed to the education of their children.
5.4.3 Provisions

Gagné’s final environmental component includes the subcomponents of ‘enrichment’, such as curriculum and pedagogy, and ‘administrative’, such as grouping and acceleration. The three significant areas within the analytical framework to be discussed are: educational opportunities, The System’s gifted programs, and funding for gifted education.

Educational opportunities

As previously stated, parents of academically gifted children want the best educational opportunities for their child, whilst at the same time want them to be happy, socially accepted, and have their academic needs met. It could be argued that any parent could make this statement about their child and that these objectives are not isolated to the parents of gifted children. The students interviewed also articulated educational practices that made a positive difference to how they felt about themselves and school in general. The school personnel interviewed, that is, the principal, gifted education coordinator, and classroom teacher, all spoke about and gave specific examples of gifted education pedagogical practices.

So what are the specific practices these parents of identified academically gifted children and the school personnel are referring to? They are ability grouping, acceleration, differentiated curriculum, personalised learning, and learning technologies. Data were collected using a Likert Scale (ranging from 1: not at all to 5: extensively). The researcher asked 25 people about the implementation of these five different pedagogical practices. The detailed findings from these questions will be discussed in Chapter 6.

Other opportunities

Parents primarily wanted their child to be part of a gifted, extension or personalised program all the time rather than the ‘pull out of class option’. The parents gave examples of different extension and enrichment opportunities that their child was offered at school.
Among the classroom teachers interviewed, there was a range of knowledge about gifted education, gifted students and how to meet their needs. Some parents acknowledged that the school was able to articulate a learning plan and pathway for their child. Mathematics was a subject that a number of students mentioned. Almost all students liked doing extension mathematics and being challenged. All the students liked learning; one of them said, “I like learning something new every day”. They did not like it when the work was repetitive or if the classroom teacher gave them “extra work”. Their attitude towards homework was mixed. All students liked it if it was research and something they were interested in, but did not like it when it was “boring” or had “no point”. Students who had been involved in specific gifted programs within the school, such as the System Gifted Program (Newman) or a specific in-school initiative, spoke encouragingly about that. Almost all of the students were involved in these programs and liked having choice and an input into their learning. They also liked being acknowledged and recognised for their academic achievements. However, they did not like being teased about knowing everything or making a mistake. One student was not happy with her classroom teacher who did not choose her to answer questions. Another student did not like having to read a book in class that was significantly below his reading ability; he found this boring and uninteresting.

Three of the nine schools involved in this research (one primary and two secondary), utilised Individual Adjustment Plans (IAP) for their gifted students. The IAPs were implemented by the gifted education coordinators and were a tool used to assist in understanding and supporting students through the formal creation of a learning plan. All three coordinators stated that the four students in this study who attended these three schools were on an IAP. This involved consultation with the student’s teachers and parents, and the parents signing the plan. Interestingly, not one of the four parents mentioned the plan despite their consultation in the process.

Most gifted education coordinators had a process of tracking the results and progress of gifted students within their school. Schools considered that the strategy to keep identified students in the classroom rather than withdraw them spasmodically for programs, was the most worthwhile approach. One of the larger
primary schools that has more than one stream in a grade, group like-minded learners into a class rather than spread these students over a number of classes. The gifted education coordinators place a high importance on keeping up-to-date with identification processes, implementing programs, and providing opportunities for gifted students. It is a constant cycle of evaluation and change. At some schools it is the parent’s responsibility to organise for their child to have a psychometric test.

The System’s gifted programs
The students who participated in system-based gifted programs found the experience very challenging and at the same time enjoyable. The ability grouping principle adopted through this program provided additional learning experiences to their usual class-based learning. All the parents whose children attended these programs were also very positive about it. The parents made comments like, “a shame the program could not continue”, “it was the best part of the week when my child attended that program”, and “my child was challenged and mixed with like-minded students”. These comments were made despite the parent’s preference for their child to stay in the classroom and not participate in “pull-out” programs.

The Newman Gifted Program is a system-based gifted education initiative that commenced in 2012. The aim of the program is to improve the provision for gifted students by creating a system-supported pathway for the student that spans from Kindergarten to Year 12. Four of the nine Catholic schools in this study were part of this initiative. All four principals spoke very encouragingly about the program. The main advantages are the funding received and the availability for specific professional learning in gifted education for the classroom teachers involved. The funding allows the principal to appoint a gifted education coordinator. It is this person's responsibility to implement a gifted education strategic plan that includes identification, implementation of appropriate curriculum and a process to track the identified gifted students. The principals were very grateful for the professional learning that was accessible to them. The gifted education coordinators who were teaching at a school that had implemented the Newman Gifted Program spoke very favourably of that initiative. They believed that due to the professional learning, the classroom teachers had a much better understanding of gifted students and gifted
education. One of the coordinators said, “it is interesting to consider the paradox between the humble approach to Catholic education and the celebration of gifts”. Schools that agree to implement this program are accountable to The System each year. Funding for the following year is reliant on this. With the principals being so positive, it was surprising that not one classroom teacher from the four schools mentioned the Newman Gifted Program.

*Funding for gifted education*

The issue of how principals budget for the provision of gifted education as well as staffing of a gifted education coordinator, is a challenge for them. One of the principals interviewed unfortunately had to abandon a highly successful gifted program due to a lack of funds. Principals find it frustrating that students identified as gifted are not acknowledged with financial support. The biggest advantage of the Newman Gifted Program is the significant extra money that is added to the school’s budget for the year. Nevertheless, one principal did comment that, “funding from The System is uncertain”. Some of the principals are so committed that they prioritise funding within their existing budget to gifted education. They propose that to really embed gifted education provisions and strategies into the school culture, a coordinator with gifted education qualifications and with a suitable time allocation is required.

The six gifted education coordinators interviewed had a vast understanding of gifted education, various degrees of support from the school in terms of time and salary, and a wide variety of implementation initiatives, programs and processes. Most of the coordinators believed ‘gifted education’ should receive the same funding and system support as ‘special education’. They are frustrated at the lack of time and money to implement programs and complete identification procedures.

5.5 Summary

Chapter 5 discussed the data gathered from the 55 semi-structured interviews using Gagné’s two catalysts, intrapersonal and environmental, as the two main categories. In summary, parents want the best academic opportunities for their child coupled
with them having a happy and well-balanced life. Classroom teachers feel challenged in being able to suitably achieve these objectives and meet the needs of each individual in their class, which often has at least 30 students. The students hope to be socially accepted and have friends, as well as be engaged in purposeful learning experiences and be given appropriate challenging educational opportunities. All interviewees acknowledged the obvious Catholic nature of the school. Principals are continually challenged by the need to adequately fund sustained gifted education programs, including the appointment of a gifted education coordinator, relevant professional learning for classroom teachers, a constant identification and tracking procedure, providing opportunities for gifted students to access gifted programs, and gifted education resources.

The next chapter will concentrate on data that ‘influences’ the inherent understanding of gifted education and that can be represented in a quantitative format, that is, (a) classroom teacher and parent personal school experience, (b) results from a parent religiosity survey, (c) professional learning of classroom teachers, and (d) pedagogical practices implemented in schools. These data were also informed by the semi-structured interviews.
Chapter 6: Influences (Findings 2 – Quantitative Data)

Dr Karen Rogers: Successful educational planning for bright children requires positive collaboration between the parents (who, incidentally, do generally know their child better than anyone else!) and the teachers in the school that the parents select for their child. The goal is to achieve ongoing collaboration between parents and educators. Selection of the school and its specific services is the first step, as well as a key aspect of educational planning. (Rogers, 2002b, p. xviii)

This is the second of three chapters that discuss the findings of this thesis. The previous chapter discussed the data gathered from the 55 semi-structured interviews focusing on the ‘individual’ needs of the child, family, and the relationship between ‘individual’ students and their classroom teacher. This chapter will concentrate on data acquired during the interviews that can be represented in a quantitative manner and ‘influences’ the inherent understanding of gifted education. This includes: (a) classroom teacher and parent personal school experience, (b) results from a parent religiosity survey, (c) professional learning of classroom teachers, and (d) pedagogical practices implemented in schools. Chapter 7 will discuss System and school documents relevant to gifted education teaching and learning pedagogies; the ‘ideology’ of these documents; and the actual and/or perceived delivery of gifted education programs, provisions and structures.

6.1 Analytical Framework

The analytical framework used to analyse the findings of this research is based on Gagné’s Differentiated Model of Giftedness and Talent (DMGT) 2.0. This model was previously discussed in more detail in Chapters 1 and 5. Figure 6.1 shows the part of Gagné’s model on which the analytical framework for this research is based.
According to Gagné’s Model of Giftedness and Talent (Gagné, 2008), natural abilities are outstanding gifts and represent potential that can be developed into measurable achievements, or talents, or competencies. For this transference to occur Gagné talks about catalysts. These catalysts are factors that influence and/or affect, in either a positive or negative way, the change of a natural ability into a measurable competency. Gagné divided these catalysts into two broad categories, intrapersonal and environmental. Gagné subdivides the intrapersonal catalyst into two basic dimensions. Firstly, both physical and mental traits; and secondly, goal management processes, such as awareness of self and others, motivation, and volition. The environmental catalyst Gagné subdivides into three subcomponents: milieu, the influence of significant individuals, and provisions. These are core elements of this analytical framework and are represented in Figure 6.2 (see Figure 5.3 for a larger version).
Figure 6.2. Analytical framework for this study.

The data presented in this chapter are those which can be represented in a quantitative format. This is comprised of (a) educator and parent personal school experience, (b) results from a parent religiosity survey, (c) professional learning of educators, and (d) pedagogical practices implemented in schools. This data will be discussed under the second catalyst of environmental factors. The intrapersonal catalyst was not used with the quantitative data, as these findings linked more clearly to the environmental component of the framework.

6.2 Environmental Factors

The second of the two catalysts is environmental factors. The data collected that align to the environmental component of the analytical framework have been divided into Gagné’s three components: milieu, the influence of significant individuals and provisions.

6.2.1 Milieu: Environmental influences

Gagné describes milieu as environmental influences such as physical, cultural, social, and familial. Within the milieu component, the personal experiences of the
parents and educators will be discussed. Two groups of questions regarding personal experiences can be represented in a quantitative format. They are ‘educator and parent personal school experiences’ and ‘parent religiosity’. Personal school experiences influence the type of schooling a parent desires for their child (Perrone et al., 2010). Personal perception of one’s own giftedness and the identification of it, influences a person’s beliefs about how a gifted child is treated and perceived. The findings of this study reinforce that of previous studies which have inconclusive outcomes regarding the understandings of gifted students developed through one’s own experiences of being gifted (McCoach & Siegle, 2007; McHatten et al., 2010).

**Educator and parent personal school experience**

The principals, gifted education coordinators, classroom teachers and parents interviewed were asked questions regarding their self-perception of giftedness and their personal school experience. One of the parents was not asked this series of questions due to the parent’s limited time availability for the interview. This totalled 40 responses to these questions, of which there were nine principals, six gifted education coordinators, 13 classroom teachers, and 12 parents. It was not considered appropriate or necessary to ask the students these questions, as the purpose was to gather data about the classroom teachers’ and parents’ perceptions and school experience. During the interview, the researcher provided the interviewees with a Characteristics Checklist (Gross et al., 2001) (Appendix B) and a checklist used for describing Dabrowski’s overexcitabilities (Piechowski, 1986) (Appendix J). In addition to these two resources, the following questions asked by the researcher guided the discussion:

1. Briefly describe your school experience. Did you attend a Catholic school? Did you attend a selective school?
2. Do you perceive yourself as gifted?
3. Were you identified as gifted at school?

The outcomes of the 40 educators’ and parents’ responses using these questions and who answered that they: (1) attended a Catholic school, (2) attended a selective
school, (3) perceived themselves as gifted and (4) had been identified as gifted at school, are represented in Figure 6.3.

![Figure 6.3. Educators and parents school experience.]

When speaking of the educators’ and parents’ personal schooling, they were at ease chatting about their school experience and the reasons why they attended particular schools and the opportunities they had been offered. Most of the interviewees found the questions regarding their perceptions, and possibly identification of giftedness, difficult to answer and were uncomfortable talking about their own academic ability. “No, not at all” was a common response to these questions. Many also stated that the concept of ‘gifted’ wasn’t around when they were at school. When the researcher asked the principals if they believed they were a ‘gifted leader’, they seemed to be more confident in their professional domain. One principal’s answer was “maybe, yeah. I know I’m good at maths, and at logical thinking”. The researcher found this comment insightful due to the perceived association between “logic” and “giftedness”.

Most interviewees felt they were hard working, both when they attended school and in the workplace. From a familial perspective, several parents believed they had
academically gifted siblings. Audrey's mother, who has a Masters degree, is an example of this, stating:

I have two older brothers who were very, or still are very, different from me. They are very mathematical and very science whereas I was more into the humanities and the languages, so I just perceive the subjects that I was studying were less intelligent to them doing their four-unit maths and their Physics and their Chemistry. (Audrey's mother, interview)

Not one of the principals interviewed perceived themselves as gifted. Only one principal said they were identified as academically gifted at school, and yet they still did not perceive themselves as gifted. All the principals were educated in Catholic schools, including the occasions where some principals attended a number of schools, but these were all Catholic schools. Only two of the 40 people who were asked these questions attended a selective secondary school, a third person was offered a place at the selective school but did not accept, and instead attended a government school. Two gifted education coordinators, two classroom teachers and two parents attended neither a Catholic nor a selective school, they all attended government schools. Most people interviewed had positive memories of their schooling and most had no recollection of students being identified as academically gifted, or there being different programs or opportunities for some students.

Parent religiosity
Religiosity is considered an important construct in this study as the research focus is on religious schools. In addition, parent religiosity aligns with Gagné’s description of milieu. Religiosity is defined by McDaniel and Burnett (1990) as a “person’s relationship with a supreme being and how an individual expresses that relationship in society” (p. 101). Furthermore, some research divides religiosity into two dimensions - intrinsic and extrinsic (Vitell et al., 2005). The distinction between the two is that an intrinsically motivated person tends to have a lived experience when it comes to religion, whereas an extrinsically motivated person tends to use religion (Allport & Ross, 1967). Results from research indicate intrinsic religiosity is a significant factor, whereas extrinsic religiosity is not related to ethical beliefs (Vitell et al., 2005). Religiosity may be an influence on parents’ choice of school for
their academically gifted child. For the purposes of this study, the researcher utilised existing intrinsic/extrinsic religiousness scales that are used to measure religiosity (Allport & Ross, 1967; Gorsuch & McPherson, 1989; Wilkes et al., 1986).

The researcher surveyed 13 parents to measure their religiosity (a brother and sister were part of the group of 14 students, therefore there were 13 parents). There were 14 items within the survey: eight that measured intrinsic (lived) religiousness, and six items measured extrinsic (used) religiousness. Responses were measured on a 5-point Likert Scale (ranging from 1 = strongly disagree to 5 = strongly agree). The total of the scores provided by each response to all the items gave a ‘religiosity’ score. Thus, scores range from 8 to 40 for intrinsic religiousness, and from 6 to 30 for extrinsic religiousness. For the purpose of comparative analysis, each score is converted to a decimal between 0.0 and 1.0 and as per the design of the tool, the greater the score the greater the impact or importance of religion.

The justification of the parent religiosity survey was to align their responses with what they thought was the Catholic identity of the school their child attended, and how important it was that their child attends a Catholic school. One parent chose not to complete the survey, as they are not Catholic and do not attend church. Of the parents who completed the survey, nine of the 12 had a greater intrinsic (lived religion) score, and three parents had a greater extrinsic (used religion) score. Figure 6.4 represents these data.
Figure 6.4. Intrinsic and extrinsic parent responses to the religiosity survey.

Interestingly, almost all 55 interviewees, and certainly the 13 parents interviewed, spoke very positively of the obvious Catholic identity of the school. Reported evidence of this identity included public signs and symbols of Catholicity and the way people interacted with each other. One male secondary school student interviewed was the exception to this finding. He acknowledged the Catholic identity of the school negatively. The fact that the student has attended a Catholic school exclusively and had recent mitigating family experiences, may impact upon this student’s response.

Patricia’s mother, who scored the lowest score for the intrinsic items, was very definite and precise with her answers. She stated that she was a non-practising
Catholic but wanted her children to learn about Catholicism. She went to a Catholic primary school and then a government secondary school. When they were deliberating over the choice of secondary schools for Patricia, only one other school was considered and that was another Catholic systemic girls school. So, despite the lowest intrinsic religiosity score, this parent was one of the most vehement in her desire for her child to attend a Catholic school.

Catherine and Cooper’s mother, who has a Catholic background, scored lower on the intrinsic scale than the extrinsic. She stated very clearly “education is much more important to me than the religious side of what they get at school”. Her eldest child was already in attendance at an independent private school and she stated that financial reasons were a significant factor as to why Catherine and Cooper were not at the same school.

As a single parent, Steve’s father felt supported pastorally by the Catholic schools, both primary and secondary. He attended a Catholic school as a child and appeared to have a high value in being in a Catholic community. Despite this, he was quite ambivalent or unsure in his responses, most times opting for the unsure/maybe grading to the questions. Therefore, he scored mostly 3s.

Austyn’s mother scored relatively high on the intrinsic items, but made the choice for her child to attend a non-Catholic academic selective secondary school. Austyn’s family are active parishioners.

Lachlan, Daisy, Jemima, and Max’s parents all scored higher on the intrinsic items. They were undecided on the secondary school their child will attend. All three said they are keeping their options open. Lachlan’s mother, a single parent, wanted her son to consider a non-Catholic academic selective secondary school, as that had been his deceased father’s wish. Lachlan, however, only wanted to attend a Catholic school, either private or systemic.

Audrey, James, Jane, and Marlena’s mothers, were all definite that their children attend a Catholic school. All four scored highly on the intrinsic items of religiosity.
Audrey’s mother was undecided about which Catholic school Audrey should attend. She commented that she would like a girl’s Catholic secondary school and that they were going to investigate private Catholic schools. Conversely, the mothers of James and Jane were very keen to keep their children at a systemic Catholic school. Marlena already attended the local systemic Catholic secondary school and this was a deliberate choice.

The parent religiosity results and comments are thought-provoking and demonstrate how it adds to the complexity of school choice for academically gifted children. It is concluded that while religiosity of the parent did not statistically correlate to a school choice for the child, it was a valuable contributing factor to the decision-making process. For instance, Austyn’s mother had the second highest score for the intrinsic items and her daughter is attending a non-Catholic academic selective secondary school. Furthermore, Patricia’s mother scored the lowest on the intrinsic items and Patricia attends a systemic Catholic secondary school. All families have their own unique story and experiences, and therefore these religiosity scores can be explained for each.

6.2.2 The influences of significant individuals: Teacher expertise

The second environmental component in Gagné’s model includes the influences of parents, family, peers, classroom teachers, and mentors. The area of classroom teacher expertise will be discussed.

*Gifted education professional learning*

The researcher asked the 28 educators interviewed, that is, principal, gifted education coordinator, and classroom teacher, questions about their professional learning in gifted education in their original teaching qualification and since they have been teaching. The results are shown in Figure 6.5.
The 28 educators interviewed answered questions about their participation in professional learning focusing on gifted education, at either tertiary, System or school level. Most of the people who indicated they had completed some training in their undergraduate qualification had chosen gifted education as an elective. The less experienced classroom teachers had this as an option in their teacher training.

The University of NSW (UNSW) offers a Certificate of Gifted Education (COGE), which is a ‘stand-alone’ qualification delivered at postgraduate level and contributes toward a Masters Degree. Three of the six people who have postgraduate qualifications have completed the COGE. One of these educators continued their study in this area and completed a Masters of Gifted Education. Most of the people who indicated they had completed professional learning provided by The System participated in the Mini Certificate of Gifted Education (Mini COGE), which is delivered by personnel from UNSW and funded by The System. Some principals have taken the option to fund the delivery of the Mini COGE at school level, to allow for more classroom teachers to have access to this professional learning. This then counted towards school-based professional learning. The other professional
learning that was completed by educators, at a System or school level, was associated with The System's Newman Gifted Program. As outlined in Chapter 2, research into educators' attitudes to gifted students strongly suggests the importance of teacher education about the needs of gifted learners (Geake & Gross, 2008).

6.2.3 Provisions: Educational opportunities

Gagné's final environmental component includes the subcomponents of 'enrichment', such as curriculum and pedagogy; and ‘administrative’, that is ability grouping and acceleration. All interviewees could articulate educational opportunities which are available to them now, and opportunities which they would like to experience or continue with. These were discussed in Chapter 5. The responses to the provision of pedagogical practices will now be considered.

Pedagogical Practices

The specific pedagogical practices discussed in the interview were ability grouping, acceleration, differentiated curriculum, personalised learning, and leaning technologies. Data were collected using a Likert Scale (1: not at all, 2: to a small extent, 3: to some extent, 4: to a moderate extent, 5: extensively). Of the 28 educators interviewed, data were obtained from 25 people about the implementation of five different pedagogical practices. Three of the more inexperienced classroom teachers believed they did not have the knowledge to respond accurately from a whole school perspective. The results are shown in Figure 6.6.
Figure 6.6. Responses from the 25 educators asked about the actuality of specific pedagogical practices within their school.

The 25 of the 28 educators responded to the use of specific pedagogical practices within their school. The three inexperienced educators chose not to answer. The responses are displayed in Figure 6.6 and show the ranking of importance from 1 (not at all) to 5 (extensively). The remaining interviewees indicated that the two pedagogical approaches of ‘Ability Grouping’ and ‘Learning Technologies’ were used extensively in their school. Not one person selected ‘not at all’ or ‘small extent’ on the Likert scale for either of these pedagogical practices. The integration of technology into comprehensive classroom settings is naturally on the increase with the implementation of the one-to-one laptop program (a Federal Government initiative to promote each student having access to their own laptop). Two reflective questions a researcher might ask though would be, ‘is the pedagogy different?’ and ‘are student outcomes increasingly achieved?’ For students who are identified as academically gifted, accessing a variety of technologies does give them some flexibility in what and how they learn, and then subsequently, how they present their learning. Ability grouping has been a practice used in primary schools for grouping like-minded students for reading and numeracy. All four of the secondary schools in this study have a nominated extension or challenge class in each year level of the junior year groups, that is, Year 7 to Year 10. Further research would be around student engagement, improved outcomes and criteria for being placed in this class. In addition to this, due to the Australian Curriculum mathematics requires students to be placed in ability grouped mathematics classes in Years 9 and 10.
The educators indicated in their interviews that they believed writing and imparting a differentiated curriculum within classrooms was happening, but that it could be improved. Issues around differentiated assessment and reporting to parents remains a topic that has to be addressed in some cases. Principals acknowledged that addressing the learning needs for all students, particularly those with a diverse range of educational needs, was a focus area for professional learning in their school.

Whilst no one selected ‘not at all’ for ‘Personalised Learning,’ it was an area that interviewees admitted is not done as well for academically gifted students as it is for those who are identified as having learning support needs. It appears that some interviewees confused personalised learning with the concept of ‘know each student,’ as opposed to the concept of an individualised educational learning pathway. Intriguingly, none of the parents mentioned that their child was on an Individual Adjustment Plan (IAP), even though some schools said they implemented IAPs for gifted students that involved the parent having a conversation with the school and signing it.

‘Acceleration’ is a pedagogical practice that is not understood, accepted or implemented widely within the schools. Some principals are not against acceleration but did not cite any cases of acceleration in their school, either in subjects or grades. In the small number of incidents where acceleration has taken place, there have been concerns presented by the principal and classroom teachers. Parents and educators expressed apprehension about this strategy to address the needs of academically gifted students. The concerns are about the social and emotional developmental needs of the child. The five students who were significantly younger than their peers, because they had either been accelerated one or two-year groups, or they had started school early, did not find this a problem. They reported that the other students forgot about the age difference.

6.3 Summary

This chapter discussed the data that ‘influence’ the understanding of gifted education and can be represented in a quantitative format. These data covered: (a)
educator and parent personal school experience, (b) results from a parent religiosity survey, (c) professional learning of educators, and (d) pedagogical practices implemented in schools. These data were obtained from the semi-structured interviews. In summary, most educators and parents had a Catholic education themselves and do not consider themselves to be academically gifted. The parent religiosity survey adds a dimension to the family story, but the results did not correlate to the school the parents decided to send their academically gifted child to. Less than a quarter of the educators interviewed have had gifted education as part of some aspect of their undergraduate teaching qualification and again, less than a quarter have completed any post-degree qualifications in gifted education. Most educators have had the opportunity to do professional learning, either at a System or school level. Schools identified ability grouping and learning technologies as being pedagogical practices that are implemented to address the needs of academically gifted students. Acceleration is the strategy least used.

The third and final of the findings chapters is Chapter 7. Relevant documents to gifted education, and teaching and learning pedagogies from The System and schools that were part this research, will be analysed. That is, the ‘ideology’ of these documents and the actual and/or perceived delivery of gifted education programs, provisions, and structures will be explored in detail.
Chapter 7: Ideologies (Findings 3 - System and School Document Data)

Dr Joyce VanTassel-Baska: Developing and implementing national, state, and local policies that govern the administration of gifted programs and services is the glue that holds gifted education together. (VanTassel-Baska, 2009, p. 1310)

Chapter 7 is the third of three chapters that discuss the findings of this thesis. This chapter will examine the analysis of The System and school documents relevant to gifted education, and teaching and learning pedagogies, that is, the ‘ideology’ of these documents and the actual and/or perceived delivery of gifted education programs, provisions and structures. This extends on the interview and quantitative data provided in Chapters 5 and 6.

The school is answerable to The System⁵ and at the same time the school strives to provide an authentic and relevant learning environment for students with diverse individual needs. In this chapter, documents from The System and from each of the students’ schools will be discussed. Figure 7.1 represents the interconnectedness among students and their families, the schools, The System, and the research about giftedness and gifted education philosophies and strategies. At the heart of the figure is the student, supported by their family. The gifted education provisions offered by the school are a subset of the provisions supported by The System, which are supported by gifted education research.

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⁵ The System refers to Sydney Catholic Schools, which prior to 2016 was called Catholic Education Office, Sydney.
Documents related to giftedness provide an insight into the culture and expectations of The System and the school. Within this research the term *document* refers to a variety of resources including written, visual, digital, and physical material which would be relevant evidence in answering the research questions (Merriam, 2009). Merriam refers to “limitations and strengths of documents” (2009, p. 153) as a source of evidence. The limitations Merriam cites as problems: documents may be incomplete, they may not fit the research design, or it may be difficult to confirm the authenticity of the document. Some strengths include: as the document exists independent of the research agenda the document does not represent a biasness, documents are authentic and, there is no cost to attaining document. For this research the limitations Merriam refers to are not applicable as the documents stated in the above list are mandatory for each school and The System documents are in existence. Therefore, an added advantage of using documents as a source of evidence source is that they are easily accessible. Furthermore, determining the authenticity and accuracy of The System and school documents is not an issue. The System documents analysed in this study will be discussed first, followed by the individual school documents.
7.1 The System Documents

The Vision and Mission Statement of The System (see Appendix K) has remained largely unchanged for many years. At the core of these statements is the dual moral purpose of evangelisation, and excellent learning and teaching. All of The System’s documents are underpinned by this philosophy. There are currently 111 documents that are accessible on The System’s intranet, which can be accessed by any employee of The System but cannot be accessed by the public. These documents include policies, frameworks, position papers, foundation documents, and guidelines. Of these 111 documents, 45 are available to the public. For this study, 19 documents from the public website and intranet were examined (Appendix L). These 19 documents were selected based on their relevance to gifted education, either implicitly or explicitly. Many other documents, for instance, the Student Wellbeing and Pastoral Care Policy, Supporting Students with Complex Social and Emotional Needs Policy, Jesus Christ – The Heart of the Matter – A Faith Formation Framework, and Early Learner Position Paper (K – Year 2), have an implicit connection to gifted education but were not explicitly analysed for this study. The researcher selected the 19 documents (outlined in Figure 7.2), as they represented a wide cross-section of documents for the purpose of this study. Each document was categorised, analysed for how each document is connected to gifted education, and examined for the interaction between these documents and the actual and/or perceived delivery of gifted education programs, provisions and structures.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Document grouping</th>
<th>The System documents</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
Vision and Mission |
| 2. System strategic planning documents | Building on Strength – Strategic Improvement Plan 2011-2015  
How Effective is our Catholic School (2011)  
New Horizons – Strategic Improvement Plan 2016-2018 |
| 3. Pedagogical documents | Statement on Authentic Learning  
 Authentic Assessment  
The Learning Framework  
eLearning with the iLe@rn Model |
| 4. Enrolment and parent documents | Enrolment Policy  
Enrolment Policy - Parent Brochure  
Application to enrol at Sydney Catholic Schools  
Questions frequently asked by parents about Catholic education in Sydney  
Parent Charter for Sydney Catholic Schools |
| 5. Gifted education documents | Gifted Education Policy  
Gifted Education K-12 Position Paper  
Gifted Education Glossary  
Gifted Education Framework  
Newman Gifted Program |
| 6. Website and intranet | System Website and Intranet |

*Figure 7.2. The System documents of relevance to gifted education.*

**Group 1: Context documents**

The documents analysed support all policy, position papers, and documents produced and/or endorsed by Sydney Catholic Schools. *The Archbishop's Charter for Catholic Schools* (Catholic Education Office, 2015a) first published in 2012, consists of 11 foundation statements that are to assist the strengthening of “the religious life of school communities” (p. 4). Two of these foundation statements are curriculum-based. The first is about nurturing the love of learning and the development of
‘intellect’, and the second concerns implementing practices and policies for ‘student wellbeing’ and ‘inclusive curriculum’. The Vision and Mission Statement (see Appendix K) for The System is stated in many documents and there is an expectation that employees know this statement, or at least have knowledge of its existence. Within The System’s vision there are four statements. The fourth statement is the one that is relevant to this study, “We commit ourselves to developing authentic Catholic schools which are committed to the development of the whole person”.

Of the 13 mission statements (Sydney Catholic Schools, 2015b, p. 4), four are related to promoting quality teaching and learning practices for all. These statements are:

1. rejoicing in our cultural diversity
2. promoting our schools as places of learning and excellence
3. embracing the privilege and the challenge of teaching in Catholic schools
4. fostering the dignity, self-esteem and integrity of each person.

These statements explicitly aim to embrace the whole person and include all people within the community. With the gifted student as the focus of this study, the capacity for fulfilment of these statements is of interest. The aim to embrace the challenges that teaching can present, such as meeting the needs of gifted students, is a target that should continue to underpin all future approaches.

Group 2: System Strategic Plans

This research study spanned two Strategic Plans developed and implemented by The System. The first, Building on Strength – Strategic Improvement Plan 2011-2015 (Sydney Archdiocesan Catholic Schools Board & Catholic Education Office, 2010) consisted of eight key areas. Two key areas interact clearly with gifted education, they are Key Area 2: Students and their Learning, and Key Area 3: Pedagogy. The other six key areas, namely, Catholic Life and Religious Education, Human Resources, Resources Finance and Facilities, Parents Partnerships Consultation and Communication, Strategic Leadership and Management, and Knowledge Management and ICT, whilst in the broad sense link indirectly with gifted education, for the purpose of this study only the two key areas previously mentioned will be considered.
Within Key Area 2: Students and their Learning, two out of the five strategic intent statements are explicitly linked to gifted education. The first is about the “provision of personalised pathways tailored to meet individual need and abilities” (Sydney Archdiocesan Catholic Schools Board & Catholic Education Office, 2010) A key performance indicator for this strategic intent is “more centres for Trade Training and centres for gifted education and special needs have been established” (p. 16), with the major project being the “development of a personalised learning model as a centre of excellence” (p. 16). The second out of five strategic intent statements that are explicitly linked to gifted education is: “increased enrolment, retention and sustainable provision for all gifted and talented students”. The major project was “the establishment of the Newman Centre for Gifted and Talented” (p. 17). While this centre was established, it only remained operational for two years. The System moved to an alternate model that aligned more closely with the schools. Schools were invited to apply to be part of a school-based Newman Gifted Program. More details about this program are described later in this chapter.

One of the five strategic intent statements from Key Area 3: Pedagogy states that K-12 teaching practices are “informed and characterised by the principles of contemporary learning” (Sydney Archdiocesan Catholic Schools Board & Catholic Education Office, 2010). While not mentioning gifted education explicitly as part of the performance indicator, it does mention “personalised learning for students” (p. 19). Gifted education or words that are associated with gifted education such as challenge, excellence, or high expectation, are not mentioned in this key area of pedagogy. However, phrases within this key area that can be associated with gifted education are, “personalised learning”, “contemporary learning practices”, “build leadership and teacher capacity”, and “explicit professional learning” (pp. 19-22).

The second document in this group of System strategic plans is How Effective is our Catholic School (Catholic Education Office, 2011b). This document has a set of indicators for schools to determine their effectiveness in implementing their Annual Improvement Plan. This document aligns with, and has the same eight key areas as the Building on Strength document. Two of the key areas are relevant to gifted education, that is, Students and their Learning and Pedagogy. Gifted education is not
mentioned explicitly, but these two areas focus on contemporary and authentic teaching and learning practices. Within Key Area 2: Students and their Learning, words such as “extend”, “enrich”, “motivate”, and “independent learners” (p. 16) are used. One of the sections in Key Area 3: Pedagogy is very detailed about catering for the needs of diverse learners, but does not explicitly name gifted students. This creates ambiguity as to whether gifted students are included in this section. Schools may interpret the term ‘diverse learners’ more broadly when logging their evidence, by giving examples of how gifted education strategies have been implemented into the school’s learning culture. In this study, five of the nine schools (three secondary and two primary) specifically referred to the diverse needs of gifted students and named strategies within Key Area 3: Pedagogy in their annual or five-year strategic plan.

The System’s second strategic plan that spans this study is *New Horizons, Inspiring Spirits and Minds – Strategic Improvement Plan 2016-2018* (Sydney Catholic Schools, 2015b) and is The System’s current three-year strategic plan. It is referred to in this study, as it is the current plan at the writing of this thesis. Prior to the strategic priorities there are two sections, “Principles for strategic planning” (p. 5) and “Looking forward” (p. 6). Both of these sections include words that are associated with gifted education such as, “inclusive”, “high expectations”, “personalised”, and “diversification of teaching practice” (pp. 5-6), but does not specifically mention giftedness, gifted student, or gifted education. This can be explained, as these two sections are contextualising the strategic plan. Unlike *Building on Strength*, which had eight key areas, *New Horizons* has five strategic priorities. Part of each of the five priorities can be aligned loosely to gifted education. However, the second priority, Learning and Teaching, is the one that has the most explicit links to gifted education. The other four strategic priorities are Catholic Identity and Mission, Student and Staff Wellbeing, Capacity Building, and Stewardship of Resources.

Within Learning and Teaching, of the five key improvements in this priority, two relate specifically to gifted education. These are “provide experiences that engage, challenge, extend and empower students” and secondly, “enhance provision of and the support for students with diverse needs such as gifted and talented needs” (pp.
A number of The System's documents focus on pedagogical processes and practices. This study will specifically examine four documents that outline contemporary and authentic teaching and learning, and assessment practices.

The purpose of the *Statement on Authentic Learning* (Catholic Education Office, 2015b) and *Authentic Assessment* (Sydney Catholic Schools, 2016b) is to have a shared understanding and language that guides pedagogical processes in the schools. Both documents clearly articulate the necessity of providing learning, teaching and assessment that respects the dignity of learners. To illustrate this, some examples of phrases used in both documents are: ‘is rigorous and challenging’, ‘have high expectations’, ‘promote excellence and equality in learning’, ‘provide opportunities that require higher order thinking and application’, and ‘is personalised’. While the word ‘gifted’ is not stated, the previous examples are words that connect to gifted education.

*The Learning Framework* (Catholic Education Office, 2005) discussion paper and the *eLearning with the iLe@rn Model* (Catholic Education Office, 2009a) position paper are two documents that have been superseded by the *Authentic Learning* (Catholic Education Office, 2015b) and *Authentic Assessment* (Sydney Catholic Schools, 2016b) statements. However, these documents have been included in this study, as at the time of gathering data schools were more familiar with these documents than the more recent two. Even though giftedness and gifted education are not specifically mentioned, phrases that promote striving for excellence, and providing for diversity of individual learners, are. Some examples include: ‘promote
intellectual quality', ‘personalise learning’, ‘maintain high expectations’, and ‘creative and critical thinking and problem solving skills’.

**Group 4: Enrolment and parent documents**

The System developed five documents that outlined enrolment processes and parent information, and that were also relevant to parents who have an academically gifted child.

**Enrolment Policy and Enrolment Parent Brochure**

The System’s *Enrolment Policy* (Sydney Catholic Schools, 2016c) is adhered to strictly by principals. There is an unmistakably stated enrolment criterion of nine levels for primary school enrolment and ten levels for secondary school enrolment. While provision for gifted students is not specifically mentioned, students who have special needs are given provisions, as The System is “committed to the inclusion of children with special needs” (p. 2). The *Enrolment Parent Brochure* (Sydney Catholic Schools, 2016d) repeats the same information, as does the policy. Again, providing information on services or opportunities for identified academically gifted students is not declared. Both of these documents are available on the Sydney Catholic Schools website. It is not clear whether the reference to ‘special needs’ provides an opportunity for giftedness to be included within this brief, or whether gifted students are excluded because of the lack of the explicit mention.

**Application to enrol at Sydney Catholic Schools**

A system form is generated for each calendar year that parents are to use when making an application to enrol their child in any school within The System. The same form is used for applying to either a primary or secondary school. The application is 13 pages in length. On page 6 is a section titled ‘Diverse Learning Needs’. The question, with eleven options to select from, asks: “Is your child a young person with (please tick as applicable supporting documentation MUST be provided)?” The eighth out of 11 options is “Exceptional abilities (giftedness in any domain)”. The next question is about adjustments made to the teaching and learning strategies, educational environment, and special provisions for learning tasks and assessments at the child’s previous school/preschool/educational setting. Finally, the parent has
an option to add additional information “that may assist to plan adjustments to meet your child’s particular needs” (Sydney Catholic Schools, 2016a, p. 6). As giftedness is not specifically mentioned in the last two questions, parents may interpret the words ‘adjustments’ and ‘special provision’ to be referring to children who find learning difficult and require extra support.

Questions frequently asked by parents about Catholic education in Sydney
To assist parents in their understanding of Catholic education there is a resource on the public website titled Questions frequently asked by parents about Catholic education in Sydney (Sydney Catholic Schools, 2015d). It is a four-page brochure that includes a three-paragraph section under the heading “What provisions are made for students with diverse learning needs?” Toward the end of the first paragraph there are two sentences about ‘gifted students’ which specifically refers to the Newman Program (note the word ‘gifted’ is omitted), stating that a growing number of schools offer this program and are accredited to do so.

Parent Charter for Sydney Catholic Schools
The Parent Charter for Sydney Catholic Schools (Sydney Catholic Schools, 2015c) is a document that explores the premise that parents and schools work in partnership, respectfully and honestly. There is a strong encouragement for two-way communication, and a clear commitment to partnership and responsiveness. In this document it is implied that parents must disclose all information to the school that impacts on the provision of an appropriate learning and educational setting that matches the needs of their child. As parents are expected to identify giftedness, they may reasonably believe that the school has a duty of response, to meet the specific learning requirements of their academically gifted child.

Group 5: Gifted Education documents
The System has developed four documents that are related to gifted education. All four documents are linked and are written in a way that is easy to read and understand. These documents are separate to the Newman Gifted Program documents, but all form The System’s overarching approach to gifted education.
Gifted Education Policy

The System’s current Gifted Education Policy (Sydney Catholic Schools, 2015a) acknowledges the Gifted Education K-12 Position Paper (Catholic Education Office, 2007a) and is a formal statement of The System’s approach to gifted education. Schools are required to have their own gifted education policy based on The System’s document. Of the nine schools in this study, eight shared their copy of the Gifted Education Policy with the researcher. A secondary school was the one exception.

Gifted Education K-12 Position Paper

The Gifted Education K-12 Position Paper (2007a) was the first formal statement published by The System on the education of gifted and talented students. The purpose of the position paper was to be a resource for principals and school communities to inform school policy and practice, as well as have a common language and shared understanding of gifted education (2007a). The document is based on Gagné’s definition for giftedness and talent. As well as the definition of associated terms, the paper gives suggestions of possible provisions, strategies, and effective assessment and reporting processes.

Gifted Education Glossary

To encourage the common language and shared understanding, a separate document titled Gifted Education K-12 Position Paper Glossary (Catholic Education Office, 2007b) was produced to support the main position paper. This document is used in schools as a ‘stand-alone’ document, as it is extensive and detailed.

Gifted Education Framework

The Gifted Education K-12 Standards Framework (Catholic Education Office, 2009b) was developed to guide schools in self-evaluation and school improvement in gifted education. Three levels are described in detail in the framework, entry (2), developing (4) and advanced (6), for the five elements as shown in Figure 7.3. This document aligned to The System’s process of school evaluation as documented in How effective is our Catholic school? (2011b).
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Personalised Education Heading</th>
<th>Gifted Education Standards Framework Elements</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| **A.** Effective Teacher and Learning Strategies | 1. Identification  
2. Effective Provision in the Classroom  
3. Standards |
| **B.** Enabling Curriculum Entitlement and Choice | 4. Enabling Curriculum Entitlement and Choice |
| **C.** Assessment for Learning | 5. Assessment for Learning  
6. Transfer and Transition |
| **D.** School Organisation | 7. Leadership  
8. Policy  
9. School Ethos and Pastoral Care  
10. Staff Development  
11. Resources  
12. Monitoring and evaluation |
| **E.** Strong Partnership beyond the School | 13. Engaging with the Community, Families and Beyond  
14. Learning beyond the Classroom |

*Figure 7.3. The Five Elements of the Gifted Education K-12 Standards Framework (p. 7).*
CHAPTER 7: IDEOLOGIES

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Generic Elements</th>
<th>Entry 2</th>
<th>Developing 4</th>
<th>Advanced 6</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Identification</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A range of strategies and multiple criteria are used to identify the learning needs of students, so that appropriate intervention can be implemented for improvement</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>i. The school is developing systems to identify gifted and talented students in all year groups. Staff has an agreed definition and shared understanding of giftedness and talent.</td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ii. The identified gifted and talented population broadly reflects the school’s ethos, social and economic composition with reference to Gagné DMGT model.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>iii. A register of identified gifted and talented students is being developed.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>iv. A member of staff is assigned by the school leadership team to support these identification processes / procedures and coordinate ongoing agreed implementation strategies.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>i. Individual students are screened against clear criteria. Clear identification processes. Clear understanding and implementation of elements of the DMGT within the school.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ii. Identification systems address issues of multiple exceptionality from all domains established in the DMGT.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>iii. The register of identified gifted and talented students is being implemented, including multiple criteria and reference to specific gifted domains as well as underachievement.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>iv. The gifted coordinator supports tracks and reviews identification processes / procedures and coordinates ongoing agreed implementation strategies in consultation with the school leadership team. Tracks student progress and shares with staff.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>i. The school has established sophisticated procedures of identification, encompassing a broad range of multiple criteria and tools. All relevant domains of the DMGT are well represented in these processes.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ii. The identified gifted and talented population is fully representative of the school ethos, social and economic composition. It embraces all relevant aspects of the DMGT model.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>iii. An accurate and regularly updated register of identified gifted and talented students is fully implemented including multiple criteria and reference to specific gifted domains as well as underachievement. The school has an established policy and procedure.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>iv. Fully supported by the school leadership team, the gifted coordinator supports, tracks and reviews identification processes / procedures and coordinates ongoing agreed implementation strategies in collaboration with the school learning support team.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figure 7.4. An example from the Gifted Education K-12 Standards Framework (p. 8).

The Gifted Education K-12 Standards Framework (Catholic Education Office, 2009b) is a practical, hands-on document, as shown in Figure 7.4. Leadership teams can assess the gifted education strategies and processes implemented in their school. Furthermore, it gives a ‘roadmap’ that demonstrates future directions for teaching staff. The document outlines examples of evidence for each level, and encourages educators to be proactive in planning the ‘next steps’, as shown in Figure 7.5.
Evidence

i. A computer data base / register of identified students is maintained and available for reference.

ii. Identification of gifted and talented students is developing using principles of triangulation incorporating KLA outcomes national standardised testing/assessment checklists/assessment results.

iii. Whole staff professional development offers understanding of definitions of Giftedness and Talent derived from the DMGT model and school-specific application of these.

i. A computer data base / register of identified students is reviewed and referenced to inform appropriate student intervention strategies.

ii. The data base / register will be used as a source of information regarding the identification of students who are:
   • Gifted or talented in specific domains
   • Dual exceptional
   • Underachieving.

iii. The introduction of a differentiated professional development model is implemented to further enhance staff understanding and identification of gifted and talented students within their classroom.

ii. This data base is fully implemented as a tool for informing the school learning support team.

iii. Staff members are consistently supported through a differentiated professional development model on identification and needs of gifted and talented students.

Figure 7.5. A second example from the Gifted Education K-12 Standards Framework (p. 9).

Newman Gifted Program

The Newman Gifted Program is an initiative instigated by The System in 2012 to improve the provision for gifted and talented students. By doing this it is hoped that the enrolment and retention of gifted students will be increased. This was a strategic intent statement from The System’s strategic plan, Building on Strength (Sydney Archdiocesan Catholic Schools Board & Catholic Education Office, 2010). The program is a systematically developed “whole school program in gifted education and thus provides a Kindergarten to Year 12 pathway for gifted and talented students” (Sydney Catholic Schools, 2016e, para. 1).

Each year, both primary and secondary schools have the opportunity to apply for acceptance into this program. Once in the program there is a rigorous four-year Newman Accreditation process, which is based on the Gifted Education K-12 Standards Framework (Catholic Education Office, 2009b). Schools who are part of this program receive significant funding to enable the appointment of a gifted education coordinator or facilitator, the implementation of gifted education
programs and provisions, and the delivery of professional learning for staff. Once a school has completed the thorough accreditation process which takes a minimum of three years, it entitles the school to use the Newman Gifted Program logo on official school advertising, as well as to continue to receive the substantial funding for a further three years.

This research supports the following statement from The System Newman Gifted Program document:

> It has been the experience of most schools that the program of meetings, professional learning and in-school support has been the catalyst for whole school change in the approach to pedagogy, resulting in improved learning and teaching for all students, not just the gifted and talented. (Sydney Catholic Schools, 2016e, p. 1)

Group 6: System Website

On The System’s website the public can access the Gifted Education Policy and Gifted Education K-12 Position Paper. There is no specific reference to the Newman Gifted Program on the public website. However, on The System intranet under the tab of ‘Support Programs’ there is a detailed account of the Newman Gifted Program, including a link to an “expression of interest application” and the Gifted Education K-12 Standards Framework. The public website can be difficult to navigate with a number of resources placed in a variety of different sections. Adding to the ineffectiveness of the website is the fact that some parents could not access the enrolment information unless they had a registered Google account.

7.2 School Documents

Each school’s vision and mission underpins school documents and policies. In some cases, charism is a strong influence. Schools have a number of documents that detail policy, process and procedure. For this study five documents and the school website were examined. Figure 7.6 lists the school documents reviewed.
Annual Improvement Plan and Five-Year Strategic Plan

For this study, the schools’ policy and documents were gathered in 2014 and 2015. Within the schools’ five-year strategic plans, gifted education was mentioned a number of times in Key Area 3: Pedagogy. The main focus was about differentiation of programs to meet the needs of students. The four schools that are part of the Newman Gifted Program mentioned it in this area. Only two schools had a link to gifted education in Key Area 2: Students and their Learning. In both these cases gifted education was not mentioned specifically, but they made reference to raising the expectation of student achievement.

This is curious as gifted education is mentioned more in Key Area 2 in The System’s strategic plan rather than in Key Area 3. This leads to the discussion about whether strategies pertaining to gifted education should be associated with ‘Students and their Learning’, ‘Pedagogy’ or both. The current System strategic plan has combined these two areas into one, ‘Learning and Teaching’. Consequently, to remove any ambiguity, that is the obvious area where gifted education belongs.

Pedagogical Policy (Teaching and Learning)

Five of the nine schools had a pedagogical policy. Each of the five schools had a policy that outlined contemporary teaching and learning practices. These practices referred to developing students who are lifelong learners, and who are skilled

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>School documents</th>
<th>Schools in this study</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School 5 Year Strategic Plan</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Annual Improvement Plan</td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pedagogical Policy (Teaching and Learning)</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gifted Education Policy</td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Newman Documents (if applicable)</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School Website</td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
creative thinkers and dynamic problem solvers. However, not one policy mentioned the words ‘challenge’ or ‘extension’. ‘Individualised or personalised learning plans’ were not explicitly mentioned either.

Gifted Education Policy
All but one of the schools provided a Gifted Education Policy, but only one school had the policy on their website. Of the eight schools that had a Gifted Education Policy, all except two based their policy on Gagné’s model. These are powerful findings given all schools are required to have a Gifted Education Policy and the policy should reflect The System’s Gifted Education Policy which is based on Gagné’s model. However, as the researcher did not have follow-up interviews as part of this study, further questioning and investigation was not pursued.

Present in the policy
The description of the identification process for gifted students and the programs and provisions provided, are two items predominantly present in these policy documents. Three of the schools had a detailed sequential whole school identification process outlined per year group. These identification processes included both standardised testing and subjective measures such as a parent checklist and teacher nomination. Common to these policies were statements about differentiating the curriculum and identifying them explicitly in class programs. However, it was not clear how this was implemented, achieved, assessed and reported on. It is common practice for primary schools to group students according to their reading and numeracy ability for these lessons. Some schools do this in year groups and others in stage groups. The four secondary schools in this study had a designated challenge or extension class. Three of these secondary schools are part of the Newman Gifted Program and therefore have a Newman class. The criteria for selection to these classes vary for each school.

Absent from the policy
In contrast, an explicit description of individual or personalised learning plans, and the professional learning opportunities for classroom teachers were absent from these policy documents. This is surprising as all The System documents are very
specific about developing individualised learning for students. It is a Federal Government requirement for students who are identified with a disability to have an Individual Adjustment Plan written, implemented, evaluated and readjusted for them. These students attract extra funding for staff at a school level. Catholic schools are traditionally known for their nurturing and caring nature (Bishops of NSW and the ACT, 2007; Fisher, 2010), and just as these students need extra support to learn and meet their potential, so too do identified academically gifted students. Data from Chapters 5 and 6 stated that classroom teachers require professional learning to develop strategies and write programs that can challenge and extend gifted students. In addition, teachers need professional learning to recognise and understand the characteristics of giftedness.

Inconsistently present in the policy

The description of the tracking process and the extracurricular opportunities provided for gifted students appeared inconsistently throughout these policy documents. Only two schools described a tracking system of results even though all schools had a detailed identification process. None of the primary schools mentioned how information was transferred to the secondary school and, equally, none of the secondary schools mentioned how they liaised with the primary schools to learn about incoming students or to continue the tracking process. Traditionally, due to students with learning disabilities receiving extra funding for the school, the information and learning plans for these students are meticulously transferred to the secondary school. Tracking these students’ progress and intervention is a critical part of the care and accountability procedure. This process requires the principals, special needs coordinators, regional personnel, and parents to communicate and manage the process for a smooth transfer to occur. Unfortunately, this same level of coordination and management does not happen for identified academically gifted students, as the accountability is not scrutinised in the same way as for students who find learning difficult.

Newman Documentation

It is a requirement for schools to follow the program guidelines when undertaking the Newman Gifted Program. Of the four schools examined that are part of this
Newman program, three secondary and one primary school, two shared the documentation with the researcher. One of these two schools, a secondary school, shared a detailed action research report. This report described, with evidence, the difference to classroom teachers’ understanding of giftedness and how gifted students learn. The report also detailed the strategies implemented to meet the needs of these students. This was a direct result of the funding provided and the Newman accreditation requirement. The other school shared a less detailed report that was to be shared with The System. The two remaining schools did not present their Newman documentation. Given the investment of professional learning and funding to achieve Newman accreditation, it is a surprising finding that the documentation was not shared as evidence of gifted education support.

School Websites
Gifted Education was cited on three of the nine school websites. The Newman Gifted Program was absent from all primary school websites, including the primary school that was a part of the program. Two of the four secondary schools have details about their gifted policy and provisions on their website (one of these schools is a Newman School and the other is not). The third secondary school, which is part of the Newman Gifted Program, provided information about the Newman Gifted Program only, including links to publications about the implementation of this program at the school. The fourth secondary school (a Newman School) makes no mention of either the Newman Gifted Program or gifted education.

7.3 Summary
Chapter 7 discussed The System and school documents relevant to gifted education. It identified and discussed the teaching and learning pedagogies; the ‘ideology’ of these documents; and the actual and/or perceived delivery of gifted education programs, provisions, and structures. In summary, gifted education is identified more in The System documents under the heading of Students and their Learning rather than Pedagogy, but this is in reverse in the school documents. With the implementation of the current strategic plan New Horizons (2015b), this uncertainty will not occur as gifted education strategies will fit obviously into the area of
Learning and Teaching. The 2007 gifted education System documents are still being used in schools today. Additionally, a system *Gifted Education Policy* is now implemented. Whilst schools have a Gifted Education Policy that outlines identification processes, they do not have a method that tracks gifted students’ test results. The development of writing and implementing personalised or individualised educational plans is not raised in any school policy. As detailed in Chapter 2, this is an area which needs more exploration, as ‘Personal Learning Plans’ are used widely and successfully for students with special needs or disabilities (Prunty, 2011), but not for gifted students. The System’s gifted education focus is currently on the Newman Gifted Program. The schools that are part of this program have the required documentation and appreciate the program for the funding it attracts. Surprisingly though, not all schools shared or cited this documentation as evidence of gifted education. Gifted Education is not featured on the primary school websites and only appears on one secondary website. This latter finding is significant because it sends a signal to parents and the community that gifted education is not valued significantly by schools, especially not in primary schools.

Many of The System documents use words and terminology that may be associated with gifted education. Figure 7.7 is a summary of these words and phrases. As specified earlier in this chapter, these words are often used without explicitly having a link to giftedness or gifted education.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Document grouping</th>
<th>The System documents</th>
<th>Words and phrases that may be associated with gifted education</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| Context documents     | Archbishop’s Charter for Catholic Schools (2012)                                      | • Nurturing the love of learning  
• Development of intellect  
• Implementing practices and policies for student wellbeing and inclusive curriculum |
| Vision and Mission    |                                                                                       | • Development of the whole person  
• Cultural diversity  
• Places of learning and excellence  
• Privilege and challenge of teaching in Catholic schools  
• Fostering the dignity, self-esteem and integrity of each person |
| System strategic planning documents | Building on Strength – Strategic Improvement Plan 2011-2015 | • Personalised learning  
• Contemporary learning practices  
• Build leadership and teacher capacity  
• Explicit professional learning |
| How Effective is our Catholic School (2011) |                                                                                       | • Extend  
• Enrich  
• Motivate  
• Independent learners |
| New Horizons – Strategic Improvement Plan 2016-2018 |                                                                                       | • Inclusive  
• High expectations  
• Personalised  
• Diversification of teaching practice  
• Engage  
• Challenge  
• Extend and empower students  
• Enhance provision of and the support for students with diverse needs such as gifted and talented needs |
| Pedagogical documents | Statement on Authentic Learning  
Authentic Assessment | • Rigorous and challenging  
• High expectations  
• Excellence and equity in learning  
• Higher order thinking and application  
• Personalised |
| E-Learning with the iLe@rn Model |                                                                                       | • Intellectual quality  
• Personalised learning  
• High expectations  
• Creative and critical thinking  
• Problem solving skills |
| Enrolment and parent documents | Application to enrol at Sydney Catholic Schools | • Exceptional abilities (giftedness in any domain) |
| Questions frequently asked by parents about Catholic education in Sydney |                                                                                       | • Gifted students  
• The Newman Program |

Figure 7.7. Words and phrases from The System documents associated with gifted education.
Clearly, the documentation regarding gifted education is complex and there are many layers and components that form an interconnected system. It would appear that when the diverse needs of children are addressed, the necessities of learning disabilities obscure those of gifted education, which is often to the detriment of meeting the specific needs of identified academically gifted students. There is a tension between The System and school documents as to where gifted education is placed, that is, in Students and their Learning or in Pedagogy. The System’s current strategic plan, *New Horizons* (2015b) may have addressed this by naming this strategic intent, Learning and Teaching. However, the limited articulation of gifted education to parents and community calls into question the Sydney Catholic Schools level of commitment to this area of educational support. Due to the espoused partnership between schools, families and community, Bronfenbrenner’s *Ecological System’s Theory* (Bronfenbrenner, 1979) will be used as a framework in Chapter 8, to synthesise and analyse the findings presented from the three data chapters.
Chapter 8: Discussion

Brooke Lumsden: All Australians know Ian Thorpe, and his amazing swimming achievements, but how many know of Terrence Tao? At 12, Tao was the youngest winner in the International Mathematical Olympiad’s history and he went on to win the Fields Medal for mathematics. (Lumsden, 2017, para. 13)

This research set out to explore why parents of academically gifted children are choosing to stay or leave a Catholic schooling system. In order to appreciate how parents come to make this choice, the following statements were considered, firstly, the personal and contextual factors that a parent considers when making a decision about the schooling for their academically gifted child. Secondly, the links between the child’s current experiences at their school, and the choice for a future school. Thirdly, the alignment between the parent’s perception of their child’s school experience and what the school believes they offer.

The three previous chapters presented the findings of this research. Chapter 5 discussed the data gathered from the 55 semi-structured interviews. Chapter 6 analysed the quantitative data acquired during the interviews, with a focus on the influences in the decision making process. Finally, Chapter 7 examined the Catholic system and school documents that were of relevance to gifted education. Chapter 8 will now combine the numerous factors analysed and discussed to answer the main research question.

When drawing this research together the researcher considered a vast field of human development models, as examined in Chapter 2, and reflected upon, engaged in, and grappled with the research. Bronfenbrenner’s Ecological Systems Theory (Bronfenbrenner, 1977, 1986) provides context to understanding the complexity of school choice in meeting the specific needs of academically gifted children. The representation of the choice as an ecological system illustrates those potential influences on decisions or happenings that can arise from many different sources.
In light of this ecological system theory, Figure 7.1 within Chapter 7 demands greater complexity. The Catholic system doesn’t fit wholly into gifted education and neither is the converse true. This ecological theory will be used in this chapter as a framework to synthesise and analyse the findings presented in the preceding three chapters.

Following a brief summary of Bronfenbrenner’s Ecological Systems Theory (Bronfenbrenner, 1979), the chapter will discuss the research findings in light of this theory. The chapter outlines the implications, and discusses the interconnectedness and complexities of the data from Chapters 5, 6 and 7. Following this, the chapter will outline the challenges and complexities of potential tensions among the interactions of the student, parent, school and system. It is these implications and challenges that contribute to the understanding of why parents of academically gifted children are choosing to stay or leave a Catholic schooling system. The movement between these layers contributes to either the uncertain or deliberate way the child’s development is nurtured and the school choice is made.

8.1 Ecological Systems Theory

Urie Bronfenbrenner developed the Ecological System’s Theory in the 1970s with modifications being made until his death in 2005 (Rosa & Tudge, 2013). Bronfenbrenner expanded his initial theory, which became the Bioecology Theory based on a person-process-context-time model (Bronfenbrenner, 2005; Bronfenbrenner & Ceci, 1994; Özdoğru, 2011). After careful deliberation this study will use the ecological rather than the bioecological theory. The ecological theory “emphasises the nurturing of a child’s development” (Özdoğru, 2011, p. 301) and the interaction with significant people in the child’s life such as parents, siblings, teachers and peers. A variety of environmental factors are considered, in particular, the home, school, church, and the cultural neighbourhood.

Bronfenbrenner’s Ecological Theory defines connections in the complex environment of the development of a child. “This ecological environment is conceived as a set of nested structures, each inside the next” (Bronfenbrenner, 1979,
His theory can be explained diagrammatically using concentric circles, with the individual in the centre and each expanding circle representing a significant factor that affects child development.

There are five systems surrounding the individual which are described succinctly in the *Encyclopedia of Child Behavior and Development* (Özdoğru, 2011, pp. 300 - 301):

1. **Microsystem**: the most immediate and direct impact on the individual’s development such as family, school, church, peers, neighbourhood.
2. **Mesosystem**: the interconnections and relationships between the Microsystems. That is, between family and teachers, family and peers, and family and church.
3. **Exosystem**: experiences that the individual is not directly or actively involved with. That is, not in the immediate context, for example, experiences in a peer’s family.
4. ** Macrosystem**: this is the cultural context. That is, the socioeconomic status, poverty and ethnicity. This group share a common identity, heritage and set of values.
5. **Chronosystem**: patterns of events and transitions over time.

These five ecological systems are relevant to this study on school choice for gifted children, since many layers of ecological influence impact this decision. These include: family, school, community, and religious affiliation. This researcher has adapted a diagram that summarises Urie Bronfenbrenner’s (1979) theory (Figure 8.1).
8.2 Implications

The connectedness and complexities within and between various factors can be hard to contextualise. The external perceptions about identifying a child as academically gifted and adequately being able to provide a learning environment that meets their educational, social and emotional needs is an ongoing challenge and can cause angst for both the child and the family. With Bronfenbrenner’s theory in mind, there are competing layers that pull and push, and affect the decisions made and the nature of the decision-making process. In the context of the school choice decision, the student and family are at the centre with the competing layers of Catholic ethos and religiosity, the Catholic education system, the school options, and
beliefs about gifted education surrounding the individual. Life and life experiences are dynamic and not as neat as a first glance at Bronfenbrenner’s model implies. This researcher has therefore adapted the model and represented this adaptation in Figure 8.2. The development of the child is still at the centre but instead of the layers (circles) being neatly concentric, they are now overlapping. This is to represent the non-uniform nature of the educative and life decision-making processes.

**Figure 8.2.** A modification of Bronfenbrenner’s Ecological Systems Theory model.

As shown in Figure 8.2, the findings from Chapters 5, 6, and 7 can be best delivered by grouping these into four areas: Catholic ethos and religiosity, beliefs about giftedness and gifted education, leadership, and school experiences. These areas are common themes from the data gathered and are supported by the research outlined in Chapter 2. The model reinforces the overlapping outlined earlier within the contexts of family, school, gifted education and a Catholic education system. All the interviewees can be considered as belonging to one of these situations.
8.2.1 Catholic ethos and religiosity

The terms ethos and religiosity are difficult to define and understand as outlined in Chapter 2. The subjective nature and the defining and measuring of these concepts have been explored and discussed by many researchers (Donnelly, 2000; Freund, 2001; McLaughlin, 2005; Solvason, 2005). Words used to explain ethos and to give a better understanding to this nebulous concept are ambience, atmosphere, climate, culture, ethical environment, and spirit.

Chapter 5 reminds us that all the schools in the study presented, have a strong connection to the Catholic faith. As discussed in Chapter 3, the researcher developed a framework (see Figure 3.3) to assist with understanding and defining ethos when interviewing the principals and classroom teachers. The framework received positive comments from the principals about the potential use of such an outline of Catholic ethos.

In Chapter 6 the researcher disputed the perceived importance of religiosity in contributing to the decision-making process for school choice. Religiosity, as defined by McDaniel and Burnett (1990), is a “person’s relationship with a supreme being and how an individual expresses that relationship in society” (p. 101). The researcher used a survey tool (Allport & Ross, 1967; Gorsuch & McPherson, 1989; Wilkes et al., 1986) to gain insight into this influence. The results from this survey were thought provoking and added to the story surrounding the school choice for the academically gifted child. However, there was no collective conclusion for this group of parents regarding a connection between their religiosity and the school their child attends. For instance, one mother wanted her children to receive a “holistic education” and attend a school that had a “culture of values”. Whereas for a second mother, this was not important as the family had a strong link to the local parish where she believed her children would develop their faith. So in this case the exposure to religion at school was not a consideration. In general, for both the younger and older students their faith and spirituality was important to them, but the school did not necessarily have to be the source of this spirituality, or to explicitly nurture it.
One of the gifted education coordinators said, “It's interesting to consider the paradox between the humble approach to Catholic education and the celebration of gifts”. A belief that all children are a gift and have gifts is a philosophy that underpins Catholicism and the education system. The researcher acknowledges this concept, but in the context of Gagné’s model (Gagné, 2008) of innate gifts being transformed into measurable talents, educators should not confuse gifts with personal strengths (Gross et al., 2005). All children have areas of strength and are unique (Margrain, Murphy, & Dean, 2015) and special in the ‘eyes of God’, but this does not mean they are necessarily gifted. The System’s Vision and Mission Statement (Sydney Catholic Schools, 2015b) (Appendix K) states that they firstly, have a commitment to the “development of the whole person”; secondly, will work with those who are “experiencing disadvantage”; and thirdly, will “promote our schools as places of learning excellence” (p. 4). The paradox or contradiction is that as a Catholic education system there is a commitment to honour the dignity of each individual and ensure they reach their potential and are challenged, and at the same time, give all students equitable opportunities. As stated previously, The System is perceived as doing an outstanding job in nurturing the development of those who are disadvantaged, marginalised or who have a disability, either physical or learning, but finds it more difficult to provide for the specific needs of academically gifted students.

8.2.2 Beliefs about giftedness and gifted education

Most people interviewed were uncomfortable and found it difficult to answer questions about their own academic ability. “No, not at all” was a common response to the questions about perceiving themselves as gifted and being identified as academically gifted. There was also a level of uncertainty when the classroom teachers were discussing their level of understanding of giftedness. Pre-service training and ongoing professional learning influences how teachers respond to academically gifted students. In an influential article by Geake and Gross (2008), it was stated that a number of studies have shown a significant improvement in classroom teacher attitudes and the understanding of giftedness as a result of professional learning. The improvement was specifically in the understanding about
gifted education and the particular needs of academically gifted students. The data concerning pre-service training, postgraduate studies and ongoing professional learning were presented in Chapter 6. Those classroom teachers who had giftedness as part of their pre-service training had chosen it as an elective, and it was the teachers newer to the profession who had this as an option. With competing agendas and requirements for professional learning opportunities, it is difficult to allocate gifted education the time and continuity that is required to make a measurable difference.

All the classroom teachers interviewed acknowledged the recognition of gifted students and the belief that these students’ unique social, emotional and learning needs should be provided for. An example that illustrates that more professional learning is required, is a teacher who was quite disturbed when she could not challenge the gifted boy she had in her class, or deliver stimulating and appropriate learning opportunities for him. There is the constant battle with the ‘tall poppy syndrome’. Some teachers can have the misconception that these children will achieve regardless of what the school provides. It can be argued that providing gifted education opportunities is a social justice issue but this provision can be difficult at times. This perception relates to myths such as “every child is gifted” and “gifted children don’t need to be taught as they know everything already” (Margrain et al., 2015).

8.2.3 School leadership

The research on gifted education leadership is limited. The literature is dominated by frameworks that capture features for successful leadership as well as evaluative scaffolds (Bezzina et al., 2007). VanTassel-Baska (2007) developed a “10-step program that may be used by administrators at the program level and teachers at the classroom level” (p. 5) which should guide leadership strategies for the implementation of gifted education services and improve classroom instruction. VanTassel-Baska clearly stated the need for processes that address gifted education being embedded into school systems and schools. This approach facilitates the continuation of processes without reliance on personnel.
The nine principals interviewed in this study stated that providing the resources and pedagogical practices required for gifted students is a continual challenge. Principals are given funding and a staffing allocation based on the student enrolment numbers, and they are accountable for the distribution of the funds and staff. The parents who had the most positive experience said that the principal was proactive, supportive and understanding of their gifted child. Funding of resources is a serious issue. Principals are required to allocate resources to support students who are classified as having ‘special needs’ or a learning disability. The System is provided with funding from the Federal Government to assist in meeting the needs of these students. In contrast, students who are identified as academically gifted do not attract this funding. However, many of these gifted students experience the same frustrations with their school experience as students with learning disabilities. This competition for resources places leaders in a difficult situation at a time when budgets are ‘stretched’. The allocation of resources must be prioritised and often, gifted education is not regarded positively in this list of priorities.

None of the interviewed classroom teachers mentioned completing a gifted education qualification where the principal had provided the opportunity, even though this was a significant commitment from the school budget. It is the hope of these principals that this professional learning raises the academic expectation of staff for all students, not only for academically gifted students. Even though these principals are supporting the professional learning, the classrooms teachers do not acknowledge it and there was no evidence this knowledge was transferred into classroom practices.

In Chapter 7 the system and school documents that related to gifted education were examined. There was a disparity between how schools presented these documents, including information that is published on the school website. A description of the identification process and the programs and provisions provided for gifted students were predominantly present in the school’s gifted education policies. Absent from these policy documents was an explicit description of individual or personalised learning plans, and professional learning opportunities for classroom teachers. Another two items were only present in some of these policy documents, that is, a
description of the tracking process, and the extracurricular opportunities provided for gifted students.

Less than a quarter of the classroom teachers in this study have had gifted education as part of their pre-service teaching qualification and again less than a quarter have completed any post degree qualifications in gifted education. The research on the effect this has on classroom teaching is well documented (Bangel et al., 2010; Carrington & Bailey, 2000; Gross, 2010; Megay-Nespoli, 2001). However, most classroom teachers have had the opportunity to do professional learning at either a System or school level. Likewise, the effect of ongoing professional learning is well researched (Adams & Pierce, 2004; Chan & Smith, 1998; Ely, 2010; Geake & Gross, 2008; Hansen & Feldhusen, 1994; Lassig, 2009; McCoach & Siegle, 2007; Sisk, 2009).

The System’s pedagogical documents do not specifically mention giftedness or gifted education, but do use words and phrases that support gifted education strategies. Some examples are: high expectations, creative and critical thinking skills, problem solving skills, and personalised or individualised learning. Gifted education is mentioned more in Key Area 2 (Students and their Learning) in The System strategic plan rather than in Key Area 3 (Pedagogy). This is the reverse in the school documents; gifted education is addressed in the Key Area 3 (Pedagogy). This is in line with how the schools write their gifted education policy and matches the school strategic plan. For instance, personal learning plans are not addressed at a school level but are addressed at a System level. Again there is ambiguity within The System enrolment information provided to parents. There is specific reference made to providing for children who have ‘special needs’, but giftedness is not specifically mentioned. It is unclear that parents are expected to disclose the level of giftedness of their child.

Schools that agree to implement the Newman Gifted Program are accountable to The System each year. Funding for the following year is reliant on this. With the principals being so positive it was surprising that not one classroom teacher from the four schools mentioned the Newman Gifted Program. Given the investment of professional learning and funding to achieve Newman accreditation, it is an
unexpected finding that the documentation was not shared as evidence of gifted education support.

8.2.4 School experience

Parents want their child to be happy, well balanced, and accepted socially at school. One father clearly stated that he does not want his child to be “seen as different”. The students want to be accepted and understood, and to feel normal. However, at the same time they want to be engaged in learning, which many of the students commented they enjoy. Most of the students said they are motivated to learn and feel as though they are challenged. All the students like learning and one of them said “I like learning something new every day”. They do not like it when the work is repetitive or if the teacher gives them “extra work”. This presents a contradiction, as unless the student is recognised as different they will not be catered for, but the student wants to be accepted and not be seen as the exception.

Several parents were aware of the difficulty of resource allocation within the school. “The school does its best with limited resources”, a parent commented. Yet for another parent, the only reason she had her two children still attending the Catholic school was that she couldn’t afford to enrol them in a non-Catholic private school. She said, “the private school has an extensive gifted program, and teachers understand and cater for gifted students”. It is a concern that the perception is that an appropriate education is for those who can afford it, that is, privilege influences provision. Parents were keen to work in partnership with the school and wanted regular communication. Parents were not happy when they had to repeatedly give the same information to the school year after year. Parents primarily wanted their child to be part of a gifted or extension or personalised program all the time rather than the ‘withdrawal option’. Schools considered that the most worthwhile strategy was to keep identified students in the classroom rather than withdraw them spasmodically for programs. One of the larger schools that has more than one stream in a grade, group like-minded learners into a class rather than spread these students over a number of classes. Thus yet again, presented a contradiction of whether gifted students should be in class or withdrawn. Parents and schools agreed
that the students' learning and social needs are to be addressed, but it is problematic striking the right balance. So what is the best way of attending to this balance between competing issues, and is there even a 'best way'?

Some of the parents gave the impression they were challenging the school to be dynamic and accountable in the recognition and provision for their child. As a demonstration of this, one parent used the phrase, “I had a bit of ammunition when I spoke to them” when referring to the psychometric test that are conducted externally to the school environment. Parents find it frustrating when they believe they are not listened to or taken seriously. The myth that “every parent wants their child to be gifted” (Margrain et al., 2015, p. 108) is refuted by this study. As stated previously, parents want their child to be happy, well balanced, and accepted socially at school. Nevertheless, parents want the best for their child.

“Personalised learning will connect children, parents and community resources to construct learning opportunities through collaboration and cooperation” (Prime Minister's Science Engineering and Innovation Council, 2009, p. 42). Definitions of personalised learning can be ambiguous (Courcier, 2007), in fact personalised learning is not individualised learning (Sullivan, 2011a), as is the common misconception (Campbell et al., 2007). As reviewed in Chapter 2, ‘personalised learning’ as opposed to ‘individualised learning’ is an area that needs more exploration in relation to gifted students. Individual Adjustment Plans (IAP) are used widely and successfully for students with special needs or disabilities (Prunty, 2011), but not for gifted students. It appears that some principals, gifted education coordinators and classroom teachers who were interviewed confuse personalised learning with the concept of 'know each student'. In the literature there is a clear delineation between the informal knowledge of one's student and the formalised process of creating a personalised learning plan. Three schools claimed to be providing an IAP for gifted students, interestingly though none of the parents mentioned the plan. If a formal plan such as the IAP is not at the forefront of the parents’ awareness about actions being provided for their gifted child, then the efficacy and the creation process (which should include parents) of the IAP must be questioned.
One of the findings from this study is that where acceleration has taken place, there have been concerns presented by the principal and classroom teachers. Parents and school staff expressed apprehension about this strategy to address the needs of academically gifted students. ‘Acceleration’ is a pedagogical practice that is not broadly understood, accepted or appropriately implemented despite the literature supporting acceleration to meet the needs of highly academically gifted students (Colangelo et al., 2004a, 2004b; Gross, 2006).

The Newman Gifted Program is an initiative developed by The System in 2012 to improve the provision for gifted and talented students. The main advantages of this program are the funding received, as schools don’t usually receive a budget specifically for gifted education initiatives, and the availability of specific professional learning in gifted education. The funding allows the principal to appoint a gifted education coordinator. It is the gifted education coordinator’s responsibility to implement a gifted education strategic plan that includes identification, implementation of appropriate curriculum, and a process to track the identified gifted students. By doing this it is hoped that the enrolment and retention of gifted students within Sydney Catholic Schools will be increased. When grouping students it is important to follow defined selection criteria and that the group has a purposeful educational curriculum (Gross, 2010; Kulik & Kulik, 1992; Rogers, 2002a). The inference here is that it is hoped that the Newman Gifted Program is intellectually demanding and at the same time groups students of similar ability.

8.3 Challenges and Complexities

There is ongoing discourse regarding the competing demands and various degrees of influence of the four areas discussed in the previous section (Catholic ethos and religiosity, beliefs about giftedness and gifted education, leadership, and school experiences). Bronfenbrenner would describe this as the interactive processes between the person and the environment (Özdoğru, 2011). In this study, the ‘person’ is the student, and the ‘environment’ is the family, educators, and The System. These demands could be interpreted as the interactions and relationships between the individual and the different layers of the surroundings. Within the
‘Microsystem’, which is the layer closest to the student, are family and religious affiliation. The student’s behaviour is shaped by the interplay of the family members and the type of family the student belongs to. The formation of the family unit is varied and at times multifaceted. The development of the child is impacted by whether religion is practised within the family and by the nature of this practice. Gagné refers to all of these influences as ‘the chance factor’ (Gagné, 2008). An individual has no control over which family or social environment they will be born into.

The next layer is the ‘Mesosystem’. This layer comprises the school; the child’s friends and peers; and the interactions between the family and the school, religion, and the child’s friends. The System and the Catholic religion are placed in the third layer, the ‘Exosystem’. Fourthly, society’s culture, beliefs and values are what Bronfenbrenner describes at the ‘Macrosystem’ layer. The final layer, the ‘Chronosystem’, is the dimension of time. This layer is not as relevant in this study, as the data were gathered by interviewing each person once. However, the System documents were compared over the time span of this study, that is, from 2011 to 2017.

The connection between the individual and family, and the family and school, and the school and The System, has the potential to cause some pressures. The back-and-forth interplay between these layers contributes to the spectrum of emotions or balanced way the child’s development is nurtured. These tensions or pressures have been clustered into six groups: balancing individual needs and group acceptance; aligning lived experience and espoused policy; intersecting gifted education with special education; Catholic social teaching and cultural acceptance; specialist approaches and universal provisions; and competing visions: values, diversity, provisions.

8.3.1 Balancing individual needs and group acceptance

Specific characteristics emerge as an academically gifted child develops that may alert a parent to their child having particular learning needs which are not seen as
‘the norm’. This can be confronting, despite the common misconception that all parents think their child is gifted. A parent may not understand or recognise their child’s behaviour as being different, especially if the child is in the top percentile academically. Perhaps the child is the eldest and/or other children in the family display the same characteristics. Unless the parent is aware of the availability of psychometric testing or other diagnostic tools, this different behaviour can go unidentified and misinterpreted for some time. The school or preschool may recommend testing but it is expensive and testing availability is limited. Once a child has been identified as academically gifted the parent may feel alone and with no one to talk to, share experiences with, or seek reassurance from (Ruf, 2009).

An academically gifted child needs to be challenged so they are motivated and engaged in learning. They also require the opportunity to experience different learning opportunities where work is new and not repetitive. These children prefer to learn and socialise with other like-minded students (Gross, 2004). This can cause unhappiness for a child who is part of a mixed ability class group and is not accepted by their peers. According to Gross, parents do not like to see their child lonely and socially misunderstood. This study supported Gross’ statement as the parents believed that being seen as ‘normal’, and invited to ‘parties’ and ‘play dates’, are very important contributing factors to their child’s contentment at school. If a child does not have social interaction they may not want to attend school or seek alternate ways to attract attention. This was evident in several of the case studies in this research. Being accepted and understood in a setting that provides an academic and social environment is an argument for grouping gifted students together. “Few parents wish to see their child come to school and work alone for the next 13 years of school” (Rogers, 2002b, p. 206). Rogers continues, “neither do most parents of gifted children wish to see their child work exclusively at an average pace of mixed-ability groups for the next 13 years of school” (p. 206). Getting the balance right and having the flexibility to match the learning environment to the educational needs of the child can be difficult; nevertheless it should be strived for.
8.3.2 Aligning lived experience and espoused policy

An organisation or system develops a vision and mission that gives a basis for a common understanding of its purpose. Subsequent documents, policies, guidelines and frameworks are aligned to this vision and mission. The Catholic Education System replicates this. The System documents espouse educating the whole child, challenging the learning needs of the individual, knowing each child, and at the same time respect the dignity of each person. This can be quite a challenge. Schools are required as part of a compliance process, to write, publicise and implement their own policies based on The System documents. Even so, there can be a misalignment between The System, school, and implemented policy.

In reality with the competing demands and agendas of schools, the school’s Gifted Education policy is rarely referred to, evaluated and updated. Principals struggle with being able to fund and resource gifted education strategies even though strategies are written about in System policy. Classroom teachers are committed to teaching but are not being provided specific professional learning or classroom support to be able to achieve what they hope to. Teachers acknowledge the need to know each child and how they learn best so that learning can be personalised and the curriculum differentiated. This practice can be an enormous challenge to implement, particularly when some classes have up to 33 students, as was the example given in this study. When the curriculum program is differentiated, and extended outcomes are taught, the flow-on effect is implementing a differentiated assessment process and then reporting on these extended outcomes. Unfortunately, these activities can be very difficult with the pressures of time and other priorities.

8.3.3 Intersecting gifted education and special education

Students, who require their learning curriculum adjusted due to being identified as having a particular learning need or disability, receive support from a number of sources. Some of these support services include funding that can be used for additional staffing and resourcing, specific provisions for completing assessment tasks, examinations, and homework assignments; as well as the option to access alternate learning pathways. This researcher supports these initiatives, however,
questions the equity for students who are identified as academically gifted. Academically gifted students require similar support, such as an adjusted curriculum, assessment tasks that are written to extended outcomes and alternate learning pathways. Despite this need and despite a model for differentiation already existing for students with learning needs, gifted students do not receive the same level of support. It is a common misconception that because these students are bright they will succeed regardless of their educational experience. In some cases, this approach may lead to a disengaged, unmotivated and underachieving student.

An Individual Adjustment Plan (IAP) is mandated for students who are identified with a learning disability. The IAP includes all the information that is pertinent to the student’s learning, including any testing results, comments and recommendations. The IAP allows the learning to be tailored to maximise the learning opportunity. The use of IAPs is a highly regarded process that has been shown to improve the outcomes of the student. The creation of the IAP involves the relevant stakeholders, including a parent, and is dynamic in nature, which means it is continually evaluated and amended to meet the current needs of the student. Classroom teachers are able to access this IAP and contribute to its ongoing implementation and modification. This researcher supports this process and believes it should be extended to students who are identified as academically gifted.

When a policy is written and programs are implemented under the umbrella of diverse needs, it is unfortunate that it is automatically interpreted that these are addressing students with a learning disability. The System does a remarkable job of nurturing, supporting and providing opportunities for students with learning difficulties. However, academically gifted students require and deserve the same consideration.

We are reminded that the students in this study are in the top 1% of the population. As with students with learning disabilities, these students identified as academically gifted need to have their educational provisions adjusted to meet their learning needs. In their article, Robinson, Zigler and Gallagher (2000) reflected on the similarities and differences of learning disabilities and giftedness. They highlight
that these two groups of individuals “share the burden of deviance from the norm, in both a developmental and a statistical sense” (p. 1413). Significant amendments are needed in terms of parental and educational expectations, and social and leisure activities. These two groups of students in the classroom setting and life in general are “out of sync with more average people, simply by their difference from what is expected for their age and circumstance” (p. 1413). This creates a lack of social justice, as our culture does not perceive gifted students to be disadvantaged or marginalised.

8.3.4 Catholic social teaching and cultural acceptance

As discussed in Chapter 7, the Vision and Mission Statement of The System has remained unchanged for many years. These statements demonstrate a commitment to a dual moral purpose of evangelisation, and excellent learning and teaching. All System documents are underpinned by this philosophy. There is a dichotomy in providing for the poor, marginalised and those in most need, compared to believing that acknowledging and providing opportunities for academically gifted students is being elitist. “In terms of effective inclusion, these students (academically gifted) are often excluded from access to an education that matched their capacity to learn” (Munro, 2017, p. 12).

The ‘tall poppy syndrome’ is a phenomenon experienced in Australia and in other countries whereby a person who has higher than average ability can be ‘cut down’ and scrutinised severely (Peeters, 2004). To gain acceptance students may try to conceal their giftedness. To compare to a different context, as a population we tend to hold gifted sportsmen in high regard and celebrate their achievements at events such as the Olympic Games. But the same cannot be said for those who compete in the Mathematics Olympiad, in fact much of the population would not even know such an event occurs. While elite sportspeople are seen in a positive light, it tends to have a different connotation to the perception of Mathematics Olympiad competitors who are seen as elitist. Unfortunately, these two different gifts are accepted and fostered differently (Gross, 2010).
Regrettably, the corporate dollar is more attracted to sporting events than academics. The flip side is the following quote from the Archbishop’s Charter, “Nurture students’ love of learning through a Catholic pedagogy that fosters the development of the intellect, moral knowledge, understanding and reasoning in a relational, social and cultural context” (Catholic Education Office, 2015a, p. 8).

8.3.5 Special approaches and universal provisions in schools

For decades there has been much debate and many research papers written about homogeneous (like-minded) or heterogeneous (mixed ability) classes and/or schools. Again, it’s worth remembering that this study is about students who are academically gifted (top 1% of population) as opposed to students who are of high ability (top 15% of population). Students who are in the top 1% have different educational requirements to students in the top 15% as discussed in Chapter 1.

There are many outstanding advantages to The System’s current gifted program. The programs implemented by The System have the potential to directly impact on the child’s experience at school, and the alignment of this experience and what the school believes they offer. Schools that became part of the Newman Gifted Program are allocated significant extra staffing resources and funding. An advantage is that the funding is assigned to professional learning for staff. Conversely, the non-existence of professional learning for classroom teachers has been cited as a major issue, supported by research from Chapter 2. The lack of understanding of the characteristics of academically gifted students, and the fact that classroom teachers need support through targeted professional learning to make the necessary curriculum adjustments that are required, are both factors in responding quickly and fully to the needs of these students (Gross, 2010). Additionally, raising community awareness and understanding is a positive by-product. This in turn will hopefully foster the acceptance of academically gifted students by dispelling common misconceptions. These broader impacts can be considered to be contextual factors that may influence a parent’s decision making process about the schooling for their academically gifted child. It is anticipated in future years that all primary and secondary schools within The System will have a Newman class and be part of
the Newman Gifted Program. This is a positive outcome as no one school will be put before another, that is, all schools will be comprehensive schools that can meet the needs of all students. It is to be noted, however, that it is high ability students who will be enrolled into the Newman class. These students are in the top 15% of the population. Schools have devised criteria to select these students, including objective testing, portfolios, parent and student interviews, and previous educational setting information.

A streamed class is an excellent option for these capable students. The tension here though, is this does not capture the educational adjustments required for academically gifted students who are in the top 1% of the population. It is this 1% who has been the focus of this study. Many researchers agree that these students should be grouped together (Gross, 2004, 2006, 2010; Robinson, Shore, & Enersen, 2007; Rogers, 2002a, 2002b; VanTassel-Baska, 2006). These students require alternate learning pathways, interaction with like-minded peers, and links to universities. For classroom teachers to adequately facilitate these educational options, specialised and targeted professional learning is needed, ideally at post-graduate level. An added complexity is due to the small number of academically gifted students; it would be difficult to group these students in a specific location.

8.3.6 Competing visions: values, diversity, provisions

Finally, there is difficulty around balancing resources between the values of a Catholic education system, students with diverse needs, and being able to provide a sustainable, authentic educational opportunity for all students. Parents want their child to be happy and accepted by their peers. The student wants to be engaged in their learning and enjoy attending school. Classroom teachers want to be up skilled in order to identify, understand, and provide the most suitable learning experience for their students. Gifted education coordinators want to have a time allocation so as to identify, track, write and coordinate Individual Adjustment Plans (IAPs). Principals want the funding allocation so they can budget for the provisions that are required, so all children in their school have a valid and appropriate education. The System wants to ensure that the values that the vision and mission are based on are
upheld, and the community choose to enrol their child at the systemic Catholic school. The collective challenge is to achieve this list of ‘wants’.

8.4 Summary

This chapter used Bronfenbrenner’s Ecological Systems Theory to draw links between the data. This study shows that there is movement between the layers and that the school choice dilemma doesn’t fit neatly into concentric circles. Bronfenbrenner’s model was adapted to represent this research and the muddled state of this decision-making process. All 13 student case studies were quite different and had their own special story and related circumstances. This study identified six areas of tension: balancing individual needs and group acceptance, aligning lived experience and espoused policy, intersecting gifted education with special education, linking Catholic social teaching with social acceptance, specialist approaches and universal provisions, and competing visions: values, diversity, provisions.

Chapter 9 will respond to the research questions, outline, discuss and present the areas of strength, areas of challenge, recommendations, and methodological limitations of this research. The directions for further research and final thoughts will conclude this research.
Chapter 9: Conclusion

**Associate Professor Robyn Cox:** The obvious richness of Australia’s linguistic diversity is something to be valued and cherished and for the educational landscape to consider in new ways; how do schools and educational systems build upon this unique linguistic resource already existing in classrooms and already poised to support our economic growth in these new globalised transnational times? (Cox, 2015, p. 19)

**Dr Valerie Margrain:** The notion that children can learn spontaneously challenges contemporary contextual perspectives of learning and especially threatens the idea that children’s learning is necessarily attributable to adults’ co-construction and facilitation. (Margrain, 2005, pp. 246-247)

The purpose of this research is to explore the experiences of academically gifted students (restricted to the top 1% of the population) and their families, within a Catholic education system of schools, and the impact this has on the choice of future schooling. Gagné’s Differentiated Model of Giftedness and Talent (DMGT) 2.0 (2008) was used as the foundation for this research study as discussed in Chapters 2 and 5. His fundamental definition of giftedness and talent are as follows (Gagné, 2008, p. 1):

**Giftedness:** The potential to perform at a level significantly beyond what might be expected from one’s age-peers in any area of human ability.

**Talent:** An achievement at a level significantly beyond what might be expected from age-peers.

The critical words in these definitions are ‘potential’ and ‘achievement’. Gagné’s model identifies ‘catalysts’ that transfer ‘potential’ to ‘achievement’. Some examples of these catalysts are, milieu, provisions, physical characteristics, and motivation. ‘Chance’ is a vital element of the model. Gagné defines this element by using the
phrase “roll of the dice” (Gagné, 2008, p. 5). That is, we have no control over our human genetics, the background we are born into, or the opportunities we are afforded.

The analytical framework, Figure 9.1 (see Figure 6.2 for a larger version) developed for this study and used for the analysis of the findings (Chapters 5, 6 and 7) is explicitly based on Gagné’s model, as discussed in detail in Chapter 5. Gagné’s catalyst words were used to sort the themes which resulted from the coding of the data, and that were supported by the literature review (Chapter 2).

![Figure 9.1. The analytical framework based on Gagné's catalysts (Gagné, 2008).](image-url)

Bronfenbrenner’s Ecological Systems Theory model (Bronfenbrenner, 1977; Özdoğan, 2011) was used in Chapter 8 to draw the findings together in the discussion chapter. This ecological system provided a context to understand the complexity of school choice for parents in meeting the specific needs of their academically gifted children. Figure 9.2, which is based on Bronfenbrenner’s Ecological Systems Theory model, illustrates the thought-provoking components presented in this study.
The integrity of the connection between the individual and family, the family and school, and the school and the Catholic system, has the potential to cause some tensions. The back-and-forth between these layers contributes to the spectrum of emotions or balanced way the child’s development is nurtured. These tensions or pressures were clustered into six groups and discussed in detail in Chapter 8:

1. Balancing individual needs and group acceptance
2. Aligning lived experience and espoused policy
3. Intersecting gifted education with special education
4. Catholic social teaching and cultural acceptance
5. Specialist approaches and universal provisions in schools
6. Competing visions: values, diversity, provisions
All 13 case studies had their own unique story. From these stories, it is obvious there are many features of Catholic schooling that The System\textsuperscript{6} is doing extraordinarily well. Equally, the researcher learnt there are areas for consideration and possible improvement, and subsequent implementation within The System.

This final chapter is divided into six sections: firstly, a response to the research questions will be addressed; secondly, the areas of The System strengths identified from this research; thirdly, the areas of challenge and subsequent recommendations based on the research findings; fourthly, the methodological limitations the researcher identified in this study; fifthly, the suggested directions for further research; sixthly and finally, the chapter will present concluding thoughts about the findings of this study.

9.1 Response to the Research Question

This section will respond to the research question that was posed at the conclusion of the first chapter. As reflected in Chapter 4 in the participants’ stories and subsequent three findings chapters (Chapters 5, 6 and 7), each case has an exceptional set of family circumstances, and personal experiences. The answers to the three sub-questions inform the response to the main research question, so they will be addressed first.

Research sub-question 1

The first research sub-question is: \textit{What personal and contextual factors do parents consider in making a decision about the schooling of their academically gifted child?}

The findings of this thesis have shown that the parents’ considerations are varied and linked to the family’s personal experience. For some parents, the fact that their child attended a Catholic school was paramount while for others this was not a major consideration. The understanding and knowledge about giftedness and gifted education that the school principal has is a factor. Further to this is the culture within the school of meeting the individual needs for their child in the classroom.

\textsuperscript{6} The System refers to Sydney Catholic Schools, which prior to 2016 was called Catholic Education Office, Sydney.
Some parents expressed frustration at the school not listening or acknowledging the diverse needs of their child. Conversely, other parents were happy with the school’s response to the particular needs of their child. One parent admitted if they were in a stronger financial situation she would enrol her children in an independent school which she believed had an excellent culture of gifted education practices. Alternatively, another parent was adamant that the nurturing and pastoral environment of the Catholic school was vital for her son in their current family situation.

In summary, although each family deliberated on different elements, the personal and contextual factors parents consider in making a decision about the schooling of their academically gifted child are:

- The significance of a Catholic education,
- the current and past experiences encountered with the principal and classroom teacher,
- the perception of how the school addresses the specific needs of their child by providing appropriate and alternate opportunities,
- the financial situation of the family, and
- the importance placed on a nurturing, pastoral school environment.

Research sub-question 2
The second research sub-question is: To what extent does the child’s experience at their current school link to the choice of future schooling? Parents and students want to be happy and accepted at school but at the same time have their academic, emotional and social needs acknowledged and catered for. As with the first sub-question, the responses regarding the impact of the child’s experience was varied. Some parents believed that the Catholic environment was the most suitable and other parents have pursued alternate options. One parent, who as a family made the decision for their daughter to attend a non-Catholic selective school for her secondary education, made the decision based on the experience the daughter had with the Catholic secondary school whilst still in primary school. They strongly believe that the selective school will be able to cater for her academic needs more
appropriately. Another parent had unpleasant experiences at a Catholic primary school where the school would not accept that the child required curriculum differentiation, even after the parent arranged for psychometric testing of the child and shared the report with the school. Even so this family only considered systemic Catholic options for secondary schooling as attending a non-Catholic school is not an option for them based on their faith. For the parents and their child, being socially accepted is important. Again, there were two cases which presented contrary points of view about this. In one case, the son found it difficult to make friends and was not invited to parties, therefore the parents were considering independent schools, both Catholic and non-Catholic. However, in another case the son was a loner and was not accepted by his peers when at his primary school. Even so, the parents decided that being in a Catholic environment would still be better for him as, overall, they believed that the pastoral environment would offer deeper support.

In summary, the extent of the child’s experience at their current school that links to the choice of future schooling depends on:

- The child’s academic, social and emotional needs being met,
- the school acknowledging the child does require an alternate curriculum,
- the acceptance of the child socially, and
- the importance of a Catholic education regardless of the current school experience.

Research sub-question 3

The third research sub-question is: What is the alignment between the parent’s perception of their child’s school experience and what the school believes they are offering? As with the previous two sub-questions, there was a variety of responses regarding the alignment of perceptions. One example of non-alignment is when educators interviewed said that Individual Adjustment Plans (IAP) were implemented in their school for students who were identified as gifted, but not one parent from these schools mentioned their child was on an IAP. The perception of the opportunity for these identified academically children to access alternate and rigorous curriculum was different between the school and family in some cases. The
school believed opportunities were offered, but the parent and child did not believe that this happened often enough or at the expected academic level. On the other hand, some students and parents were most appreciative of the in school, cluster and regional extension programs and opportunities. Some parents expressed frustration at having to ‘tell their story’ each year to the new classroom teacher. There was an expectation from the parents that information about their child would be and should be forwarded to the Catholic secondary school. There is no evidence that this routinely occurred for the participants.

In summary, the alignment between the parent’s perception of their child’s school experience and what the school believes they are offering, differ in these areas:

- The implementation of IAPs,
- curriculum opportunities, and
- the transference of information.

Main research question

The main research question is: Why are parents of academically gifted children choosing to stay or leave a Catholic schooling system? The responses to the research sub-questions lead to the conclusion that the parental choice of schooling for their academically gifted child is characterised by complexity. The 13 cases had similarities and differences, in respect to answering this main research question. All parents want the best educational opportunities for their academically gifted child, and for them to be happy and socially accepted. The students collectively crave a challenging, rigorous curriculum that engages them cognitively. The issue of the importance of a Catholic school varied among the families, as did the experiences past and present in their association with the school. The financial commitment of schooling was a consideration for two of the families. It was obvious from the interviews there are strengths within the Catholic system but also challenges.
9.2 Areas of Strength

These eight areas of strengths were clearly articulated by the participants in this study, as summarised in Figure 9.3 followed by an explanation.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Areas of Strength</th>
<th>1</th>
<th>Catholic school ethos</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2</td>
<td>Pastoral and nurturing care</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>3</td>
<td>Professional learning for classroom teachers</td>
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<td></td>
<td>4</td>
<td>Flexibility for early entry to school</td>
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<td></td>
<td>5</td>
<td>Cluster and regional programs</td>
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<td>6</td>
<td>Detailed System documents</td>
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<td></td>
<td>7</td>
<td>Detailed gifted education documents</td>
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<td></td>
<td>8</td>
<td>Newman Gifted Program</td>
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*Figure 9.3. A summary of the Areas of Strength.*

*Area of strength 1: Catholic school ethos*

All participants spoke positively and optimistically about the Catholic identity and ethos of the schools. Many comments were made about the unmistakably Catholic and welcoming nature of the school. Interviewees, including the students, were able to give numerous examples of how Catholicism was demonstrated. These included: the celebration of the Eucharist, the school liturgies and Masses, the way people treat each other, the expectation of behaviour, symbols and signs around the school, and through prayer and the curriculum in the classroom.

*Area of strength 2: Pastoral and nurturing care*

Parents were appreciative of the concern for the wellbeing of their children. The considerate and nurturing actions were clear. At times when a student’s behaviour could not be understood, the child was treated with dignity, and with the intention from the school to provide the most suitable learning environment, while respecting the rights of the other students to learn. The System does an outstanding job at nurturing, supporting and providing opportunities for students with learning difficulties.
Area of strength 3: Professional learning for classroom teachers

While it was acknowledged in this study that professional learning in gifted education should be more available and that a mandatory unit in a teacher’s pre-service qualification should be included, three principals budgeted from school funds for their classroom teachers to complete a 16-hour certificate in gifted education delivered by a university. One of these principals was from a non-Newman School so the school did not receive additional funds for gifted education. However, this principal was particularly committed to the classroom teachers having access to substantial professional learning. The principal anticipated implementing additional support to classroom teachers as required, so they are suitably equipped to write differentiated programs, know and understand student learning needs, and be able to provide appropriate learning experiences for all students, and particularly for those students identified as academically gifted.

Area of strength 4: Flexibility for early entry to school

Of the 16 students in this study, two had been given the opportunity to start school a year earlier than their age cohort. These two students attended different schools. In both cases, the parent had pursued this option on the recommendation of the preschool and supported by documentation from a psychometric test. The principals from both schools had been open to this option and after thorough consideration, had agreed to the early enrolment which has been a positive experience for both of these students.

Area of strength 5: Cluster and regional programs

Students and parents commented favourably about programs that extended beyond the school environment. The students who had been given the opportunity to attend one of these programs found it to be stimulating, challenging, and they benefitted personally from the social and academic interaction with like-minded peers.

Area of strength 6: Detailed system documents

The System’s Vision and Mission Statement (Appendix K) underpins all policies, processes and decisions. There is an expectation that employees know this statement, or at least have knowledge of its existence. The educators interviewed
were familiar with the statement’s existence and supported the intent of The System's vision and mission.

The System’s current three year strategic plan, *New Horizons, Inspiring Spirits and Minds – Strategic Improvement Plan 2016-2018* (Sydney Catholic Schools, 2015b) is unlike earlier system documents. Whenever diversity or diverse needs is referred to in *New Horizons*, it is clear that gifted students as well as students who require learning support, are included by this term. Gifted education is explicitly addressed in only one of the five strategic priority areas, Learning and Teaching. The school’s strategic plan and annual improvement plans are meant to align with The System’s strategic improvement plan.

The System has a number of policy documents, position papers and support documents that outline contemporary and outstanding teaching and learning practices. This research examined four of these pedagogical documents. While the word ‘gifted’ is not stated in these four pedagogical documents, words that are associated with gifted education are.

*Area of strength 7: Detailed gifted education documents*

The System has developed four documents that are related to gifted education. All four documents are linked and are written in such a way that they are easy to read and understand. The principals and gifted education coordinators who were interviewed all knew of these gifted education documents. These documents are based on Gagné’s Differentiated Model of Giftedness and Talent (DMGT) (2008).

*Area of strength 8: Newman Gifted Program*

Four of the ten schools in this study are implementing The System’s Newman Gifted Program (in this context they are referred to as Newman Schools). As part of this program The System allocates extra funding to support gifted education specifically. These funds are to be used for the employment of a gifted education coordinator, provision of professional learning for the teaching staff, and the identification and tracking of academically gifted students. Newman Schools are required to explicitly cluster the identified gifted students into one class in each year group, adjust the
curriculum and assessment, and ensure the reporting to parents reflects the students’ learning. This program ensures the school has a strategic approach to the implementation of gifted programs, as there is a high level of accountability. The principal is strongly encouraged to use a portion of the school’s budget to match the funding received from The System. The educators from the four Newman Schools spoke positively about this program and the benefits as a result of embedding these gifted education strategies into the learning and teaching practices and culture of the school.
9.3 Areas of Challenge and Subsequent Recommendations

Following are 10 areas of challenge and subsequent recommendations as an outcome of this study, as summarised in Figure 9.4 and followed by an explanation.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Areas of challenge</th>
<th>Selected examples of evidence from this study</th>
<th>Recommendations</th>
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</table>
| 1. A thorough understanding of gifted education for principals, gifted education  | • Parents who had the most positive experience said that the principal was proactive, supportive, and understood the needs of academically gifted children.  
• Students like to be acknowledged and recognised for their academic achievements, though they do not like being teased about knowing everything or making a mistake.  
• Three students commented:  
  "I do not like it when the work is repetitive, or if the teacher gives me extra work that is the same as I have already done, I like to learn something new every day."  
  "It is boring reading a book that I have already read."  
  "The teacher would never choose me to answer the question even though I had my hand up first."  
• Teachers acknowledged they must recognise and provide challenging, stimulating work for academically gifted students. However, they are frustrated at the lack of professional learning and support in developing differentiated programs, and strategies that can be used for diverse learning and behavioural situations. | Compulsory professional learning in gifted education for principals and gifted education coordinators, and ongoing professional learning opportunities for classroom teachers |
| education coordinators, and classroom teachers                                    |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                |                                                                                |
| 2. Standard identification and tracking of academically gifted students that enables the transference of student information between schools | • Two gifted education coordinators commented:  
  "There needs to be a clearer identification process supported by The System that is common to all schools both primary and secondary."  
  "A student information system should be implemented to track student data and progress."  
• A principal commented that, "the implementation of an identification continuum is required".  
• Parents were not happy and felt frustrated when they had to year after year give the same information to the classroom teacher about their academically gifted child.  
• Primary classroom teachers would like to have input into the transition process from primary to secondary school.  
• Secondary classroom teachers would like to go to primary schools to assist with extension programs and the preparation for secondary school. | A consistent and transparent method for identifying academically gifted students and transferring information from year to year |
<p>| | | |
|                                                                                  |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                |                                                                                |</p>
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<tr>
<th>Areas of challenge</th>
<th>Selected examples of evidence from this study</th>
<th>Recommendations</th>
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<tr>
<td>3. Individual personalized learning pathways</td>
<td>• Of the two schools that said they implemented an Individual Adjustment Plan (IAP) that involved the parent of the gifted student, not one of these parents mentioned that their child was on an IAP.</td>
<td>A personalised learning pathway be implemented for academically gifted students</td>
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<tr>
<td>4. Common understanding of options for acceleration</td>
<td>• The five students who were significantly younger than their peers, due to them being accelerated one or two year groups, or had started school a year early did not find the age difference a problem. • One student who was two years younger than other students in his year said, “that once the class knew I was younger it was forgotten about”.</td>
<td>Explicitly support acceleration as an option to address the needs of academically gifted students</td>
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<tr>
<td>5. Allocation of funds specifically for gifted education</td>
<td>• The gifted education coordinators are frustrated at the lack of time and money to implement programs and complete identification procedures. • A common belief from the gifted education coordinators was that they should receive the same funding and system support as the Special Education or Learning Support Coordinators. • Three principals commented: “Funding from The System is uncertain.” “The lack of System support in terms of funding is a big issue.” “The Newman Program is positive both in terms of funding and professional learning.”</td>
<td>A distribution of funds from The System to the school to be specifically allocated to gifted education</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Strategies that meet the needs of the top 15% do not specifically consider the exceptional learning needs of the top 1%</td>
<td>• Two secondary principals commented: “The challenge class is more a ‘hard workers’ class.” “We lost most of our gifted students this year from a feeder primary school; they chose to to accept a place at the local government selective school, even though we have implemented the Newman Program.” • One primary principal commented: “For the current Year 5 I have signed over 20 applications for the local government selective school.”</td>
<td>The System must provide a suitable pathway for the top 1% of academically gifted students</td>
</tr>
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<td>7. Parent, student and educator support</td>
<td>• Four gifted education coordinators commented: “It is interesting to consider the paradox between the humble approach to Catholic education and the celebration of gifts.” “Some teachers have the misconception that academically gifted children will succeed regardless of the experience of gifted education strategies.” “There is a constant battle with the ‘Tall Poppy Syndrome’.” “Putting forward the fact that gifted education is a social justice issue can be difficult at times.”</td>
<td>The establishment of support groups to foster the understanding of academically gifted students</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Areas of challenge | Selected examples of evidence from this study | Recommendations
---|---|---
8. Implementation of rigorous curriculum options | • Students who had been involved in specific programs for academically gifted students within the school, such as the Newman Program or a specific in-school initiative, spoke favourably about the experience.  
• The gifted education coordinators who are at these schools agree with the student perspective. They believe as a consequence of the Newman Program and professional learning, the classroom teachers have a better understanding of academically gifted students and gifted education strategies. | Implement rigorous curriculum options
9. Class size | • A number of parents commented about the large class sizes being a disadvantage.  
• For one parent, class size was the sole reason why she chose to enrol her youngest child in a government primary school. At the Catholic school the kindergarten class had 33 children, whereas the government school had 20 children in the class.  
• Classroom teachers stated that class sizes are too big.  
• One classroom teacher said, “it is difficult to know each child and give personalised attention to all the different children in the class”. | Smaller class sizes, especially at crucial transition times, that is, kindergarten and the first year of secondary school
10. Programs external to the school | • Three parent comments:  
“it is a shame the program could not continue.”  
“It was the best part of the week when my child attended that program.”  
“My child was challenged and mixed with like-minded students.” | Group like-minded students in external programs and activities

Figure 9.4. A summary of the Areas of Challenge and the Recommendations.

**Area of challenge 1: A thorough understanding of gifted education for principals, gifted education coordinators, and classroom teachers**

This study identified that there were a number of principals and gifted education coordinators that had not been given adequate professional learning in giftedness and gifted education. Only one of nine principals, and half of the gifted education coordinators and classroom teachers had completed a tertiary qualification that included gifted education subjects. The accessibility to system and school based professional learning in gifted education is increasing, however, the consistency and depth of professional learning needs improving. The System has extensive policies and documents about giftedness and gifted education strategies. However, it is difficult for principals to implement The System policies without a thorough
understanding of giftedness and gifted education criteria and terminology. In accordance with a number of other educational provisions, principals must have the opportunity for professional learning that specifically targets gifted education.

The competing demands on classroom teachers' time is an ongoing consideration. There is an expectation that a classroom teacher complete postgraduate qualifications in leadership and religious education in order to be considered for promotion. While these are important, the issue of professional learning in gifted education needs to be addressed. Classroom teachers need ongoing support and instruction in how to write, teach, assess, and report on, differentiated programs. Recognising and understanding the range of characteristics that students exhibit in the classroom is essential to provide the appropriate learning pathway for students. Structured professional learning allows educators to have an understanding of giftedness and gifted education, and provides the necessary support and guidance needed to make the required adjustments to curriculum delivery (Geake & Gross, 2008). In New South Wales, a tertiary education qualification is required to have as mandatory teaching subjects, students who have English as a second language, students of Indigenous background, and students who have a learning disability. Units that address gifted education are not compulsory, but are offered as elective options.

**Recommendation 1: Compulsory professional learning in gifted education for principals and gifted education coordinators, and ongoing professional learning opportunities for classroom teachers**

As educational leaders, principals make decisions every day that affect the learning opportunities for all the students who attend their school. It is expected that principals lead and have expertise in learning and teaching strategies. In order for principals to be proactive leaders who improve the learning outcomes for all students, professional learning in the area of gifted education needs to be compulsory. This professional learning must involve specific guidance on the implementation and adoption of the strategies outlined in The System document, *Gifted Education K-12 Standards Framework* (Catholic Education Office, 2009b), that
was discussed in Chapter 7 with excerpts from the document (see Figures 7.3, 7.4, and 7.5). The five main elements are:

- Effective teaching and learning strategies
- Enabling curriculum entitlement and choice
- Assessment for learning
- School organisation
- Strong partnership beyond the school

Targeted professional learning in gifted education would form a practical basis for principals to gauge the current climate of gifted education practices at their school, design and prioritise a plan for development and improvement, and use the five elements as an evaluative tool that contributes to the school’s Annual Improvement Plan and Strategic Plan.

This same concept of compulsory professional learning in gifted education applies to gifted education coordinators. To be appointed to this position a thorough and extensive knowledge and understanding of giftedness is an essential requirement. Together, the principal and gifted education coordinator continually evaluate, adjust, and therefore improve, processes and provisions for academically gifted students.

Classroom teachers must be given the opportunity to participate in professional learning that focuses on gifted education as part of their overall mandatory professional learning for teacher accreditation. In addition, the literature provides evidence for making gifted education a mandatory unit in teacher training degrees (Megay-Nespoli, 2001). To make a significant difference in a school’s culture and to the mindset of classroom teachers, specific targeted and pragmatic professional learning needs to be facilitated.

Area of challenge 2: Standard identification and tracking of academically gifted students that enables the transference of student information between schools

Within the hectic environment of schools and classrooms, it can be challenging for classroom teachers to recognise the behavioural characteristics of an academically
gifted student. Correctly identifying giftedness is a complex and onerous task, and the school educators working in partnership with the parents, can present challenges. The student may be put under unnecessary strain as they are kept in a state of uncertainty throughout the time-consuming identification process, and until a complete understanding of the student’s learning needs has been identified and subsequent strategies implemented.

It can cause frustration for parents if they have to continually repeat their child’s ‘story’. One of the parents in this study commented that she didn’t understand why she had to explain the specific learning and behavioural needs of her child to the new classroom teacher each year. She believed that information should have been transferred to the new classroom teacher. Each year she felt as though she was ‘starting from scratch’.

Recommendation 2: A consistent and transparent method for identifying academically gifted students and transferring information from year to year

To streamline the process for identifying academically gifted students, a consistent and transparent System-wide method is required. The System needs to develop an additional document that outlines a sequential process of objective testing, and support the licensing of such testing. Recommendations for suitable and preferred psychologists able to complete psychometric testing, should be made available to schools. In addition, a range of subjective identification procedures, including parent nominations, must be included when creating a student profile (Gross, 2001). An online database system that tracks this valuable information about students and is transferred with the student should also be implemented across The System. This information is vital in order to provide the appropriate learning opportunities and recommend the most suitable educational pathway for students.

There should be a commitment that a detailed profile of a student transfers with them each year. As part of the transition process to a new school year all relevant information ought to be disclosed to the new classroom teachers. When moving to a secondary school all the data, including test results, need to transfer with the student. If the student has had an Individual Adjustment Plan, that information
would inform the future pedagogical direction. The philosophy of “putting data on the faces” (Sharratt & Fullan, 2012, p. 29) personalises the information for individual students and their specific learning needs.

**Area of challenge 3: Individual personalised learning pathways**

‘Personalised Learning’ was an area that interviewees admitted is not done as well for academically gifted students as it is for those who are identified as having learning support needs. Of the schools that said they implemented an Individual Adjustment Plan (IAP) that involved the parent of the gifted student, intriguingly, not one of these parents mentioned that their child was on an IAP. For students with a learning disability, the writing; ongoing evaluation; and involvement of the parent, student, and classroom teachers is an expected process that is done in a thorough and meaningful manner (Tsolakis & Cornford, 2010). Writing an IAP is not replicated for students identified as academically gifted.

**Recommendation 3: A personalised learning pathway be implemented for academically gifted students**

To fully address the educational needs of an academically gifted student and more specifically, a student who is identified in the top 1% of the population, a personalised learning pathway must be articulated in an Individual Adjustment Plan (IAP). Just as all the relevant information about a student with learning support needs is articulated in an IAP, so too does all information about the gifted student, including testing, behavioural characteristics, learning adjustments, and recommendations for classroom strategies. As an organic document, an IAP is continually evaluated, adjusted and updated with the knowledge and input from the parent, student and classroom teacher. In addition, all other important information such as access to the wider community, in the form of another school (a secondary school in the case of a primary age student), university, mentor, or other organisations (for example the CSIRO), should be evident in the IAP.

**Area of challenge 4: Common understanding of options for acceleration**

‘Acceleration’ is a pedagogical practice that was generally not understood, accepted or implemented within the schools from the study. There is a large body of research
that supports acceleration in various forms (Reis & Renzulli, 2010). A broad definition suggests that “acceleration is an educational intervention that moves students through an educational program at a faster than usual rate or younger than typical age” (Colangelo et al., 2004a, p. 5). The Iowa Acceleration Scale (Assouline et al., 2009) is an instrument which enables a team to discern the appropriate time and level of acceleration. There are 10 sections and it assists by giving an “objective look at many different aspects of the student” (p. 3). Acceleration can take the form of early entry to school, grade skipping, or subject specific acceleration (see Appendix D for the full list of acceleration options). Radical acceleration is when more than one grade is skipped. Following the guidelines outlined in the Iowa Acceleration Scale (Assouline et al., 2009), careful consideration should take place prior to acceleration. The common concern about social and emotional immaturity compared to academic aptitude, is not supported by research. Disruptive behaviour could very well be a sign that the student is frustrated by an under-challenging curriculum. As a generalisation, collectively, academically gifted students tend to be socially and emotionally more mature than their age peers (Colangelo et al., 2004b).

Recommendation 4: Explicitly support acceleration as an option to address the needs of academically gifted students

It is recommended that The System support the process of all forms of acceleration by purchasing multiple copies of the Iowa Acceleration Scale (Assouline et al., 2009) and making it available to schools. This is an instrument that has been widely tested, is strongly grounded in research, and has been used successfully for many years and in many education systems throughout the world. All forms of acceleration should be contemplated wisely and implemented after carefully considering the results of the Iowa Acceleration Scale.

Area of challenge 5: Allocation of funds specifically for gifted education

The System allocates funds so the school can operate and resource their school effectively. While this allocation is generally at the school’s discretion, there are mandatory requirements within which the principal manages the school’s budget. Class size restrictions, provisions for students with learning disabilities, and school repairs and maintenance, are three such examples. Unless it is mandated that each
school must allocate a specific percentage of these funds to gifted education, these funds will continue to be allocated elsewhere. Most of the principals commented that it was difficult to fund the implementation of gifted education strategies in their school.

**Recommendation 5: A distribution of school funds from The System to be specifically allocated to gifted education**

The System ought to commit to financially supporting the appointment of a suitably qualified gifted education coordinator within each school. If Recommendation 1 were implemented, that is, principal professional learning, it would have the flow-on effect of principals having a greater appreciation and understanding of the significant needs and challenges for academically gifted students, especially those who are identified in the top 1% of the population. The specific learning requirements of these students would therefore be appropriately and justly catered for in the allocation of resources.

**Area of challenge 6: Strategies that meet the needs of the top 15% do not specifically consider the exceptional learning needs of the top 1%**

The System gifted education strategy, The Newman Gifted Program, is a positive option for schools that wish to provide learning opportunities for students who have the ability to achieve above average results, that is, students who are in the top 15% of the population. Unfortunately, while these students will benefit greatly from the challenging curriculum, this option does not provide a suitable pathway or support for academically gifted students who are in the top 1% of the population. Students who have been identified in the ‘Highly Gifted Ability’ or ‘Exceptionally Gifted Ability’ range as determined by a psychometric test require specific academic intervention (Smith & Nguyen-Hoan, 2010). Examples of possible interventions are, acceleration, group like-minded students together, extension of the curriculum, and providing a mentor (Appendix A). The System does not currently have the means to address the learning needs of the top 1% of students System-wide, who require further extension options and alternate modes of learning.
Recommendation 6: The System must provide a suitable pathway for the top 1% of academically gifted students

While clearly a quality initiative, the Newman Gifted Program does not and cannot address the particular needs of highly gifted students. There are, however, many possibilities for providing support, such as grouping these highly to exceptionally academically gifted students together. Acceleration and radical acceleration, when appropriate, is another option that needs to be implemented by using the Iowa Acceleration Scale (Assouline et al., 2009) as a guide. Additionally, enabling access to other worldwide learning experiences, as well as providing realistic and practical links to university content, will also cater to these students’ needs more fully.

Area of challenge 7: Parent, student and educator support

Parents from this study were willing to ‘tell their story’, but were keen for more information and knowledge about giftedness, and wanted to know that they are not the only ones experiencing this situation with their child. Parents can often feel misunderstood and isolated if they believe their child is different from the norm. It is a myth that “every parent wants their child to be gifted” (Margrain et al., 2015, p. 108). The opportunity for parents to gather and share experiences, and at the same time learn from subject matter experts, would be beneficial. Despite being academically gifted, these students require knowledge and support to help them understand who they are and what they are going through. Simply enduring the process of being identified as gifted and having their needs catered for is difficult, and possibly confusing or scary depending on their age. Knowing that there are other people who experience the same feelings and challenges as they do is essential for their wellbeing. Providing this type of care for students is something that Catholic schools, in particular, are set up for.

Classroom teachers from this study stated that they strive to provide the best learning opportunities for the children they teach. It would be beneficial to encourage a culture of sharing resources and teaching strategies as this would be of great benefit. While this may already be encouraged, classroom teachers are generally ‘time poor’, therefore the creation of opportunities, including digital solutions, needs to be more strongly encouraged.
Recommendation 7: The establishment of support groups to foster the understanding of academically gifted students

The recommendation is to formalise parent and student support groups. Creating an opportunity for parents of academically gifted students to connect would assist them in understanding and providing for their child. An unexpected advantage of the Regional Office programs that were discussed in this study was that they allowed time for the parents to chat and connect informally while their child attended the program. Likewise, the students were able to form friendships that continued beyond the program.

Within the school and The System professional learning structures, the allocation of time should be dedicated to the sharing of ideas, strategies, programs, and resources by creating a community of learners. There are a number of scaffolds, frameworks, and websites dedicated to this theory. One such example is a ‘TeachMeet’. A TeachMeet is an informal, collaborative gathering organised by educators, for educators in order to share ideas and experiences, and support each other as they grow professionally. All educators are potential hosts and participants. These gatherings are teacher-driven and highly participatory (Harper, 2017). The concept of the TeachMeet is an ideal way to share and offer support within the safe boundaries of a professional learning environment. The System would benefit from establishing regular ‘TeachMeets’ with a gifted education focus, as an effective way of engaging classroom teachers in addressing the needs of academically gifted students.

Area of challenge 8: Implementation of rigorous curriculum options

Parents and students in this study stated that they expected educators to provide suitable learning experiences that engage, motivate, and extend the thinking of academically gifted students. Two examples of rigorous curriculum models that meet the needs of highly motivated and academically gifted students, are the International Baccalaureate (IB) (International Baccalaureate, 2017) and Advanced Placement (AP) (Advanced Placement College Board, 2017) programs. These programs with a focus on higher order thinking, creative and divergent problem solving, and conceptual reasoning, have a positive academic effect. Reports (Rogers,
ACADEMICALLY GIFTED STUDENTS

2002b; VanTassel-Baska, 2013) state that both the IB and AP examinations are delivered to a high academic standard.

Recommendation 8: Implement rigorous curriculum options
The System needs to implement rigorous curriculum alternatives that have an emphasis on higher order academic thinking and learning. The System could choose either the International Baccalaureate (IB) (International Baccalaureate, 2017) or Advanced Placement (AP) (Advanced Placement College Board, 2017) program, and facilitate the implementation into targeted secondary schools in each region. The IB is the program that is currently offered in a number of Sydney secondary independent schools. The AP is less well known and is offered in two schools in Australia, neither of which are in Sydney. The researcher’s recommendation is for The System to explore the advantages and logistics of the IB as an alternative option to the existing curriculum qualification.

Area of challenge 9: Class size
Several classroom teachers and parents commented on the large class sizes in The System. For one parent it was the main reason for her choosing the local government primary school over the Catholic school. The kindergarten (first year of school) class in the government school had no more than 20 children, whereas the Catholic school had up to 33 children. Classroom teachers find it difficult to adjust and personalise the learning for a large number of students in their class. A meta-analysis relating to achievement (Hattie, 2009) argues against the effect that reducing class size has on student achievement. The argument is based on the fact that if professional practice is inferior, it doesn’t matter how many students are in the class, student achievement will still be poor. However, if we have as a premise that classroom teachers implement a differentiated curriculum and ensure that individual and meaningful feedback is given, then reduced class sizes will definitely have a positive impact on student achievement.
Recommendation 9: Smaller class sizes especially at crucial transition times, that is, kindergarten and the first year of secondary school

For The System to truly commit to differentiating the curriculum for the needs of its students, enabling schools to have smaller class sizes at crucial transition times, is a necessity. Kindergarten students and those entering their first year of secondary school would benefit from this by having more opportunity to have their learning and pastoral needs identified and catered for. Lower class sizes would be advantageous for less experienced classroom teachers who are beginning their teaching career and learning about the profession. Academically gifted students dealing with greater complexity around their learning needs, social needs and transition will benefit from more access to their teacher and there will be a reduced need to compete with a large number of students.

Area of challenge 10: Programs external to the school

The challenge is to ensure academically robust programs are frequently available and accessible to academically gifted students. Students and parents in this study spoke positively about programs external to the school that grouped like-minded students together. These opportunities benefited their children socially and academically. The style of the programs offered allowed students to immerse themselves in alternate styles of learning.

Recommendation 10: Group like-minded students in external programs and activities

The System needs to provide regular opportunities that group students together who have been identified as highly to exceptionally academically gifted. The educational experience must be carefully and thoughtfully designed to ensure that the program is meaningful, challenging, encourages critical and divergent problem solving skills, and at the same time gives these students the opportunity to mix socially. This can be a time when wellbeing and pastoral initiatives can be integrated so that these students gain a deeper understanding of themselves. These opportunities create an opportunity for classroom teacher professional learning by encouraging teachers to be involved with the writing, implementing, evaluating, and rewriting of the programs. At the same time, parents meet and chat informally, however, as mentioned in Recommendation 7 it would be an ideal opportunity for
planned information sessions and workshops for these parents to be facilitated on these occasions.

In summary, from this study the areas of strength shown by The System are its:

- Catholic, nurturing environment,
- detailed documentation, and
- implementation of a System-wide gifted program.

From this study, the areas of challenge for The System can be summarised as:

- Professional learning for the principal, gifted education coo ordinator and classroom teachers,
- the implementation of an academically rigorous curriculum that specifically targets the academically gifted students who are in the top 1% of the population, and
- support networks for educators, parents and students.

9.4 Methodological Limitations

One of the key strengths of this study is the richness and authentic nature of the data collected. However, the researcher has identified six methodological limitations.

*Methodological limitation 1: Pilot case not completed*

The research gathering process, including the interview questions, may have been improved with a ‘pilot case’. Merriam refers to this as an opportunity to reword questions that may be confusing, and for the researcher to gain practice in the art of interviewing (Merriam, 2009). However, the number of potential cases that matched the criteria was limited, so the researcher wanted to maximise the number of cases that would contribute to this study. Therefore, no pilot case was conducted.

*Methodological limitation 2: Parent interview sample and number of interviews*

The fact that only one parent was interviewed on one occasion for each of the 14 students is a potential limitation. The researcher did not specifically ask to interview
both parents, but would have if given the option. It may have added another perspective by interviewing both parents separately. However, four of the students did not live with both parents. Of the 13 parents interviewed (there was a brother and sister, so 14 students and 13 parents), 11 were mothers. At the time of the interview nine of the parents had made the decision regarding the secondary school their child was going to attend, or continue to, attend. As the sample size was small it makes it difficult to generalise the recommendations to other school systems. Even though this research did triangulate across different data sources, there is a need to study a larger sample so strong recommendations can be made on the educational change for these academically gifted students.

Methodological limitation 3: Psychometric test percentile criterion

Originally, one of the case criteria was that the student has a psychometric score percentile that was greater than 99.0, that is in the highly gifted range (Stanford-Binet Intelligence Scales). Nine students matched this criterion. Upon examination of the possible students to be involved, there were seven students who had a score of exactly 99.0. The researcher believed it pertinent to include these students for several reasons. Being in the top 1% of the population, these students, by definition, have numerous educational needs that require investigation. Additionally, the inclusion would increase the sample size which was an important consideration given the non-response from 15 of the schools contacted. In an acknowledgment of the rigidity of classification definitions and the sliding scale of giftedness, it was deemed appropriate that this study research the students that are ‘in’ the top 1% of the population as opposed to the more limiting ‘above’ top 1%.

Methodological limitation 4: School documentation availability

There was a potential weakening of the quantitative data through the difficulty of obtaining all associated strategic and policy documentation from the schools. Of a possible 49 documents, 36 were collected, leaving 13 documents not provided to the researcher. It is important to note that it is a requirement of The System that these documents are created; therefore, it is believed that it was not a matter of the documents not being in existence, but were simply not provided to the researcher. The main two documents not provided were the 2015 Annual Improvement Plan and
the Teaching and Learning Policy. Four of the nine schools did not provide these documents (i.e. eight documents in total). The remaining five documents not provided were one Gifted Education Policy, one 2014 Annual Improvement Plan, two Strategic 5 Year Plans, and one Newman Gifted Program document.

Methodological limitation 5: Time span of the study
Over the 7-year time span of this study, there were changes within The System. Firstly, the name of The System changed from Catholic Education Office, Sydney to Sydney Catholic Schools. Whilst this did not impact on the research it made the writing of the thesis complex. Secondly, this research study spanned two Strategic Plans developed and implemented by The System. The first, Building on Strength – Strategic Improvement Plan 2011-2015 (Sydney Archdiocesan Catholic Schools Board & Catholic Education Office, 2010). The System’s second strategic plan that spans this study is New Horizons, Inspiring Spirits and Minds – Strategic Improvement Plan 2016-2018 (Sydney Catholic Schools, 2015b) and is The System’s current three year strategic plan.

Methodological limitation 6: Interviewees being nervous
It appeared that both the parents and their children were willing to share their experiences honestly and candidly, and were forthcoming answering the questions. The parents were cooperative in arranging a time when the interview could take place. While all 55 interviewees agreed to have their interview recorded, some students did become a little nervous or shy when the recorder was turned on, however, when the researcher checked, these students who displayed shyness were willing to continue. Additionally, the researcher perceived that some of the gifted education coordinators and classroom teachers who were interviewed, a total of 19, may have been slightly hesitant with some answers out of a sense of loyalty to the principal and/or The System. Often the educators were interested in learning more about giftedness and consequently parts of the interview became conversational. The principals were welcoming and allowed the interviews to take place on the school property.
9.5 Directions for Further Research

As a consequence of this study the researcher suggests the following six directions for further research.

*Direction for further research 1: Longitudinal study*
It would be beneficial to have follow-up interviews with the parents and students. This study has the potential to be a longitudinal study. The study could compare the experiences of the students who decided to stay at a Catholic System school and those who opted for a selective school. As one of the limitations was that the sample size was small, it would be an opportunity to gather more in-depth data and interview the other parent, if applicable. A longitudinal study could also explore the consequences of the school choice, if the choice changed, and post-school options.

*Direction for further research 2: Gifted education and funding*
Secondly, it would be worth exploring why gifted education does not attract specific funding, and why students who are more than three standard deviations above the mean do not receive the same support as those students who are three standard deviations below the mean. Recommendation 5 discusses the allocation of funds specifically for gifted education. Investigating if this allocation makes a difference to programs and provisions offered for academically gifted students and therefore affecting the choice of schooling would be the focus of this research.

*Direction for further research 3: The effectiveness of the Newman Gifted Program*
The effectiveness of the Newman Gifted Program in meeting the needs of identified academically gifted students, and whether this program influences these students to stay within The System, could be a topic of research. The Newman Gifted Program is both an Area of Strength (8) and an Area of Challenge (6). The strength is that The System is providing an option for academically gifted students. However, the challenges are the provision for the top 1%, and the selection process for these students. Additionally, is the Newman Gifted Program attracting parents of an academically gifted child to The System initially?
Direction for further research 4: How are academically gifted students appropriately identified?

Further to investigating the effectiveness of the Newman Gifted Program, research could be conducted on the appropriate method of identifying students who should be offered a place in this program. What behavioural and learning characteristics should these students exhibit to best match the style of learning and teaching of the Newman Gifted Program? Should student engagement and high achievement be the only criteria for being placed in a class based on academic measures?

Direction for further research 5: Why are identified exceptional academically gifted students (top 1%) not accepted into government selective schools?

This study identified some examples of students who were identified as academically gifted but were not offered a position at a government academically selective school. It would be interesting to understand why this is the case by investigating the criteria of the testing and offer process, and aligning this to the learning style of these students. This research would be linked to identification criteria.

Direction for further research 6: As a result of the ‘one-to-one laptop program’, is the pedagogy different and are student outcomes increasingly achieved?

With the integration of technology into comprehensive classroom settings and with the increased implementation of the ‘one-to-one laptop program’ (a Federal Government initiative to promote each student having access to their own laptop), a significant research topic could be whether there is a significant difference in teaching strategies and student achievement? Are students more engaged, challenged and motivated to explore their learning options? Or has the style of learning and teaching remained the same, but just using a different medium?

9.6 Final Thoughts on School Choice for Academically Gifted Students

A strong Catholic ethos permeates The System, schools and documents explored in this study. The environment within Sydney Catholic schools is explicitly Catholic and grounded in faith doctrine. The school’s culture is nurturing and pastoral, and some
parents interviewed believed these were highly important attributes. In light of this existing culture, The System and schools within it must continue to strengthen the acknowledgement, support and education of academically gifted students.

All nine principals interviewed were definite about their responsibility to implement opportunities to engage all students in their learning. To best harness this belief, and for academically gifted students’ needs to be met, the principal’s comprehensive understanding and appreciation of gifted education and giftedness, is essential. Collaborative innovation in these approaches and support from The System and other schools within The System, will facilitate an ease in meeting these needs.

A recently published report regarding teacher education *Action now: classroom ready teachers* (2014) states, “there is agreement that Australian students deserve world-class teachers. For this reason, every single teacher must be effectively prepared for the classroom through their initial teacher education, and supported to continually develop throughout their career” (p. 56). One of the overwhelming findings of this study is that teachers need support in aspects of gifted education across their career continuum, commencing during initial teacher training and continuing throughout their career. During the data collection phase, the researcher heard the same story from the educators at all levels about the lack of professional learning to support career development. Additionally, comments were also made that more consideration should be given to the place of gifted education in the initial teacher education. Clearly the wider cultural context of classroom and school response to gifted education needs, or what Bronfenbrenner (1979) refers to as the 'Macrosystem' requires a strong commitment to what the Federal Government wants for Australian students - that is world class teachers.

A transparent and smooth transition process is essential to assist schools to provide appropriate educational experiences. This includes providing a clearer direction to the understanding of the term ‘special needs’ and explicitly articulating the expectation of parents to disclose the learning and behavioural needs of their child, as well as to share any supporting documentation. Schools and parents must work
in harmonious partnership, with the student’s wellbeing and academic needs at the centre of the conversation.

Finally, students who are identified in the top 1% of the population must be engaged and challenged throughout their educational experience. It is appropriate they receive an education to match their learning capacity but at the same time supported to be happy and accepted by their peers. Robust curriculum programming that is rigorous, challenging and exciting, while at the same time being authentic, is critical. These students ought to be given the opportunity and encouragement to consistently and significantly outperform their peer group.

Academically gifted students could be labelled the ‘forgotten diverse learners’. Rightfully so, as a community we are so concerned about meeting the needs of students who struggle with learning and forget that these extremely bright children are just as deserving. The System has an obligation to cater for the learning, and social and emotional needs of all students. It must be ensured that these academically gifted students stay within The System, and further, that The System attracts the ‘best and the brightest’.

Modern society is reliant on these academically gifted students who have infinite potential to creatively and divergently solve the issues that will face this planet in the second half of the 21st century. As an educational system and community, we must guarantee and have a firm commitment to nurture an environment that allows for the transformation of this infinite potential to become measurable and tangible achievement.

Educators, have an ethical commitment “not to leave our brightest children behind” (Lumsden, 2017, para. 1). The Catholic faith and mission calls upon everyone to celebrate diversity, ensure that the dignity and integrity of each individual is preserved, and honour the development of the whole person in a faith-filled environment enlivened by the Gospel values.
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Appendices

Appendix A: Ability Levels (Smith & Nguyen-Hoan, 2010)

Ability Levels

Levels of giftedness may be reported on some websites or referred to in the literature. Although these levels may be loosely based around standard deviations or population distributions, it is important to understand that they are essentially arbitrary in nature. These levels, and their labels, generally reflect differences in experts’ notions of what intelligence means. However, tables that include these levels should be interpreted with caution, especially with regard to scores above 140. It is important to recognise that scores attained on more recently constructed tests (e.g., SB5 in 2003 and WISC-IV in 2004) are not comparable to those attained on tests constructed prior to 2003 (e.g., SB-LM) because of their distinct theoretical bases. Owing to this, there has been some confusion as to what constitutes a score that may indicate ability in the Highly to Profoundly Gifted ranges.

Pre-2003: The following levels are still widely used in the literature and may appear on various web sites.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Level</th>
<th>IQ Score</th>
<th>SD</th>
<th>Portion of population</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Mildly Gifted</td>
<td>115 – 129</td>
<td></td>
<td>16 in every 100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Moderately Gifted</td>
<td>130 – 144</td>
<td>+2</td>
<td>2 in every 100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Highly Gifted</td>
<td>145 – 159</td>
<td>+3</td>
<td>1 in every 1000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Exceptionally Gifted</td>
<td>160 – 179</td>
<td>+4</td>
<td>3 in every 100 000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Profoundly Gifted</td>
<td>&gt; 180</td>
<td>+5</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The table below may be more relevant to tests such as the SB5 and WISC-IV:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Ability Levels</th>
<th>Percentile Ranks</th>
<th>Possible Academic Interventions</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>High Ability</td>
<td>85th – 94th</td>
<td>Differentiate/cluster</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gifted Ability</td>
<td>95th – 99th</td>
<td>Group/extend</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Highly Gifted Ability</td>
<td>&gt;99th – 99.9th</td>
<td>Accelerate/group</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Exceptionally Gifted</td>
<td>&gt;99.9th</td>
<td>Accelerate/extend/mentor</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

When discussing test results, it is more informative to consider the percentile rank of the standard score obtained because this indicates how the child has performed relative to age peers in the norm-referenced population. For example, a child who has scored at the 99.9th percentile has performed equal to or higher than 99.9% of other children of the same age; in other words, their level of ability is usually seen in only 1 in 1000 age peers.
### Appendix B: Characteristics Checklist (Gross et al., 2001)

#### CHARACTERISTICS CHECKLIST

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Positive Characteristic</th>
<th>Negative Characteristic</th>
<th>Observations / Evidence</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Heightened levels of curiosity and a wide variety of interests</td>
<td>Takes on too many projects; poor participant in group tasks; asks questions at inappropriate times; is easily diverted from the task; does not follow through on projects.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Long attention span</td>
<td>Dislikes interruptions and disruptive routines</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ability to handle abstract ideas</td>
<td>Question others’ ideas and may be seen as disrespectful</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Flexibility in thinking</td>
<td>May be seen as disrespectful to authority: can be disruptive</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alert and subtle sense of humour</td>
<td>May use humour at others’ expense</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Advanced reading ability</td>
<td>Neglects other work and responsibilities; avoids interaction with peers.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fast learner</td>
<td>finishes quickly and becomes disruptive; ‘showing off’</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Excellent retention of knowledge</td>
<td>Attempts to control class</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>POSITIVE CHARACTERISTIC</td>
<td>NEGATIVE CHARACTERISTIC</td>
<td>OBSERVATIONS / EVIDENCE</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Independent</td>
<td>Avoids discussions and group work; dislikes working with others; is uncooperative</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>High level of personal responsibility and commitment</td>
<td>Frustration with personal performance-self critical; perfectionism; frustration when working with others who do not meet his or her expectations</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Strong feelings and opinions</td>
<td>Appears 'opinionated'; is argumentative; is overly sensitive to the opinions and behavior of others</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Advanced levels of moral judgment and sense of justice</td>
<td>Isolates self peer group; frustration when attempting 'reforms'</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Single minded; does not accept the status quo</td>
<td>Appears bossy, stubborn, rebellious, unmotivated, inattentive, tacless and often attention seeking; is often teased by others; can become depressed as adolescent</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A highly energy level; decreased need for sleep</td>
<td>Often difficult to live with; appears to be hyperactive; stimulus seekers; high need to explore the environment and seek new experiences; is easily bored without challenge</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Preference for unusual, original and creative responses</td>
<td>Asks impertinent questions; does not accept the status quo; dislikes working in groups; is unorganized and absent minded; finds decision-making difficult</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Immersion learner</td>
<td>Dislikes subject boundaries</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### Characteristics of Gifted Children

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Learn and understand material in much less time than peers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Have often learned to read before school age and enjoy reading</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Tend to remember what they have learned (making reviewing previously learned concepts a painful and boring experience for them)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Vocabulary is often much more extensive than peers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Perceive ideas and concepts at more abstract and complex levels than peers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Distinguish between relevant and irrelevant information</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>Become passionately interested in specific topics</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>Enjoy challenges and intellectual activities</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>Difficulty moving on to other learning tasks until they feel satisfied that they have learned as much as they possibly can about their current passionate interest</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>Able to operate on many levels of concentration simultaneously, so they can monitor classroom activities without paying direct or visual attention to them</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>Often mastered much of the year-level work previously, so they need opportunities to function at more advanced levels of complexity and depth</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td>Often have wide interests and like to tie their own passionate interests into their schoolwork</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13</td>
<td>Exhibit metacognitive understanding</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14</td>
<td>Rapid insight into cause-effect relationships; tries to discover the how and why of things; ask proactive questions; wants to know what makes things or people tick</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15</td>
<td>Displays a great deal of curiosity about many things; is constantly asking questions about anything and everything</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16</td>
<td>Generates a large number of ideas or solutions to problems or questions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17</td>
<td>Uninhibited in expression of opinion</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18</td>
<td>A high risk taker</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>19</td>
<td>Very alert, long attention span, advanced vocabulary, vivid imagination, more than one imaginary companion</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20</td>
<td>Achieves stages of literacy and numeracy earlier than age peers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>21</td>
<td>Taught themselves to read chapter books before entering school</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>22</td>
<td>Is introverted</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>23</td>
<td>Is emotionally intense</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Appendix D: Types of Acceleration (Colangelo et al., 2004b, p. 6)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Types of Acceleration</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1 Early admission to kindergarten (first year of school)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 Early admission to first grade (second year of school)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3 Grade-skipping</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4 Continuous progress</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5 Self-paced instruction</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6 Subject-matter acceleration/partial acceleration</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7 Combined classes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8 Curriculum compacting</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9 Telescoping curriculum</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10 Mentoring</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11 Extracurricular programs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12 Corresponding courses</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13 Early graduation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14 Concurrent/dual enrolment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15 Advanced placement</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16 Credit by examination</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17 Acceleration in college</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18 Early entrance into middle school, high school, or college</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Appendix E: Initial Letter to the Principal

Principal Information Letter

**Project Title:** Why are parents of highly academically gifted children choosing to stay or leave a Catholic schooling system?

**Principal Investigator:** Dr Elizabeth Labone

**Student Researcher:** Sherrol Gane

**Student’s Degree:** Doctor of Education

Dear Principal,

You are invited to participate in the research project described below.

I am currently enrolled in a Doctor of Education degree at the Australian Catholic University, Strathfield. Research conducted by Catholic Education Office (CEO) Sydney (Laughlin, 2010) shows significant numbers of students are leaving CEO Sydney primary schools at the end of Years 4, 6 (and 10). Many of these students are leaving to attend schools that provide for gifted and talented students, such as state selective schools, and independent schools that offer gifted and talented education programmes. CEO Sydney schools are having difficulties maintaining their enrolment and retention of gifted and talented students.

My research focuses on the choice parents make for the schooling of their academically gifted child. I am specifically concentrating on parents who already have their child enrolled in a Catholic Systemic school within the Archdiocese of Sydney. Further to this, the student must be identified as highly to profoundly academically gifted, that is, based on a psychometric test is placed in the top 1% of the population (>99th percentile). Typically a choice is made through Year 4, and/or Year 6, and/or Year 10 as to whether to continue with a Catholic education. Therefore the student must be in one of these

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1 Laughlin’s research did not include Year 10 however this research will, as this is a common time when students may consider a change of school.
years. I am writing to ask if you have a student who is currently enrolled at your school who fits the criteria outlined and secondly, if so I’m inviting you and selected staff to participate in this study as well as the student and their parent/s.

The main research question that focuses this research is:

Why are parents of highly academically gifted children choosing to stay or leave a Catholic schooling system?

With the following sub-questions:

I. What personal and contextual factors do parents consider when making a decision about the schooling of their highly academically gifted child?

II. Are there any consistencies of priorities in parents’ choices of school that are related to the school, both current and future, or family contexts?

III. To what extent do beliefs contribute to the decision-making process?

IV. To what extent does perceived consequences contribute to the decision?

V. Is there a link between the child’s experience at his/her current school and the choice of future schooling?

VI. To what extent does the alignment between the parent’s perception of their child’s school experience and what the school believes they are offering?

This case study of parents, students and educators is significant as it adds to the body of knowledge for system and school leaders in understanding why these students leave and what would attract (entice) them to stay. This study also aims to appreciate why some of these highly academically gifted students choose to stay with the system. The purpose of the research is to contribute to the literature about school choice, but more specifically for highly academically gifted students who start their schooling in a Catholic system, and then at deliberate times (at the end of Year 4, or Year 6, or Year 10) make a decision to stay or leave the Catholic system.
Following is an outline of the data gathering process of the research study.

**Stage 1:** Principals of 141 primary and secondary schools in the Archdiocese of Sydney will be emailed an information letter inviting them to be considered as a case study school for this research. NB. The researcher's school will be excluded from the study. The information letter will specify that only schools with highly academically gifted children, who meet the study criteria will be considered for participation in this research. If the Principal has students who meet this criteria and is willing for their school to be considered for a case study school they will return their consent via email.

**Stage 2:** Consenting Principals will be mailed the appropriate number of information packages, which include an information letter, parent permission and student assent, and stamped self-address envelope. If the family consents to participate they will return the consent forms to the researcher via mail.

**Stage 3:** The Principal of the schools of the consenting families will then be contacted via email requesting the email addresses of the consenting student’s class teacher or homeroom teacher (or teacher as nominated by the Principal) and the gifted education coordinator.

**Stage 4:** The Principal, gifted coordinator and nominated teacher will then receive via email an information letter and consent form inviting them to participate in the research. If they decide to participate they will then return the consent form to the researcher via email.

**Stage 5:** The researcher will then select 3 – 4 cases from each of the (3) year groups, (Yr4, Yr6 and Yr10). For each of these cases the following people will be interviewed: Principal, gifted education coordinator, nominated teacher, parent, and student. The interview will be a semi-structured interview of approximately 20 to 30 minutes and will be audio-recorded. These interviews will ideally take place in the school library. However, due to availability a parent interview may take place in their home.

**Stage 6:** School documents from participating schools will be examined to gain a deeper insight into the school’s philosophy and policy with regard to gifted education and will
provide background information and context of the school community. These may include: Five Year Strategic Plan, Annual Improvement Plan, Pedagogical or Teaching and Learning Policy, and Gifted Education Policy, as well as gathering information from the public school website. (This is to assist in answering sub-question VI)

Participation in this study is completely voluntary. Participants can choose to discontinue at any time without having to justify that decision, or give a reason. There will be no identifiable risks to participants who are involved in this study. In accepting the invitation to participate I would hope that your school community would benefit from the opportunity to reflect on areas of gifted education and develop further knowledge and insights. Individuals or schools will not be identified in any way in the reporting of this research. Both the Sydney Catholic Education Office and The Human Ethics Committee of Australian Catholic University have approved this research.

All information gathered through the study will be confidential and only used for the purpose of the research. Each participating school will receive feedback on the results of the research at the completion of the study. Each participant will be allocated a code. I will use these codes when working with the data. Aggregated data will be used in any publication arising from this research and participants will not be identified. All the data generated from the research will be securely stored at the University during the study and for 5 years after the completion of the research. After 5 years the data will be destroyed in accordance with University procedure.

If a participant has any questions about the study I can be contacted at OLMC Catholic College, Burraneer on 9544 1966, by email sherrol.gane@syd.catholic.edu.au or postal address, 62 Dominic St, Burraneer 2230. Alternatively, information can be sought from my Principal Supervisor, Dr Elizabeth Labone Director HDR, at the Australian Catholic
University on 9701 4130, by email elizabeth.labone@acu.edu.au or postal address,
Locked Bag 2002, Strathfield, 2135.

If during the course of this study you have a complaint or concern, or have a query that
the Principal Supervisor or myself has not been able to satisfy, you may contact the
Chair of the Human Research Ethics Committee.
NSW and ACT: Chair, HREC
C/- Research Services
Australian Catholic University
North Sydney Campus
PO Box 968
North Sydney NSW 2059
Tel: 02 9739 2105
Fax: 02 9739 2870

Any complaint or concern will be treated in confidence and fully investigated. The
participant will be informed of the outcome.

If you believe you have a student at your school that matches the criteria, and you are
willing to be involved in this study, please contact me so as I can forward you an
information package to send to the family inviting the parent/s and student to
participate.
Yours sincerely

Sherrol Gane
Student Researcher

Dr Elizabeth Labone
Principal Supervisor
Appendix F: Participant Information Letter and Consent Form

Participant Information Letter

**Project Title:** Why are parents of highly academically gifted children choosing to stay or leave a Catholic schooling system?

**Principal Investigator:** Dr Elizabeth Labone

**Student Researcher:** Sherrol Gane

**Student’s Degree:** Doctor of Education

Dear Participant,

You are invited to participate in the research project described below.

**What is the project about?**

The purpose of this research is to explore the experiences of highly academically gifted students, that is the top 1% of the population based on a psychometric test, and their families within a Catholic education system of schools, and the impact this has on the choice of future schooling. Typically a choice is made through Year 4, and/or Year 6, and/or Year 10 as to whether to continue with a Catholic education.

**Who is undertaking the project?**

This project is being conducted by Sherrol Gane and will form the basis for the degree of Doctor of Education at the Australian Catholic University under the supervision of Dr Elizabeth Labone.

**Are there any risks associated with participating in this project?**

There will be no identifiable risks to participants who are involved in this study. Individuals or schools will not be identified in any way in the reporting of this research. All information gathered through the study will be confidential and only used for the
purpose of the research. Each participant will be allocated a code. The code will be used when working with the data. All the data generated from the research will be securely stored at the University during the study and for 5 years after the completion of the research. After 5 years the data will be destroyed in accordance with University procedure.

**What will you be asked to do?**

I'm inviting you to participate in this research, which involves:

- Interviewing you, (the people to be interviewed are: Principal, classroom teacher or homeroom teacher of the nominated student, the teacher who gives leadership to gifted education within the school, and the nominated student and their parent/s). It is anticipated these interviews will take place at your school at negotiated times to minimise disruption. However, due to availability a parent interview may take place in their home. The interviews will be recorded using a digital audio recorder and transcribed to text, and should take approximately 20 to 30 minutes.

**How long will this take?**

Each interview should take approximately 20 to 30 minutes.

**What are the benefits of the research project?**

In accepting the invitation to participate I would hope that you and your school community would benefit from the opportunity to reflect on areas of gifted education and develop further knowledge and insights into providing opportunities for academically gifted students.

**Can you withdraw from the study?**

Participation in this study is completely voluntary. Participants can choose to discontinue at any time without having to justify that decision, or give a reason and this
will not affect the participant’s relationship with the school or employment with Sydney CEO in any way.

Will anyone else know the results of the project?
All information gathered through the study will be confidential and only used for the purpose of the research. Aggregated data will be used in any publication arising from this research and participants or schools will not be identified in any way.

Will you be able to find out the results of the project?
Each participant and participating school will receive feedback on the results of the research at the completion of the study.

Who do you contact if you have questions about the project?
If a participant has any questions about the study I can be contacted at OLMC Catholic College, Burraneer on 9544 1966, by email sherrol.gane@syd.catholic.edu.au or postal address, 62 Dominic St, Burraneer 2230. Alternatively, information can be sought from my Principal Supervisor, Dr Elizabeth Labone Director HDR, at the Australian Catholic University on 9701 4130, by email elizabeth.labone@acu.edu.au or postal address, Locked Bag 2002, Strathfield, 2135.

What if you have a complaint or any concerns?
The Sydney Catholic Education Office has approved this study as well as the Human Research Ethics Committee at Australian Catholic University, the approval number XXXXX. If during the course of this study you have a complaint or concern, or have a query that the Principal Supervisor or myself has not been able to satisfy, you may contact the Chair of the Human Research Ethics Committee.
NSW and ACT: Chair, HREC
C/- Research Services
Australian Catholic University
North Sydney Campus
PO Box 968
North Sydney NSW 2059
Tel: 02 9739 2105
Fax: 02 9739 2870

Any complaint or concern will be treated in confidence and fully investigated. The participant will be informed of the outcome.

**How do you sign up?**

To accept the invitation please complete the two copies of the consent form if over 18 years of age and the assent form if under 18 years of age. Both copies are to be returned to me in the enclosed stamped self addressed envelope. I will complete the form and return one copy to you and keep the second copy.

I would be most interested to have the benefit of your insight, as I want as complete a perspective as possible. I am hoping you can be involved in this study and would appreciate your advice at your earliest convenience.

Yours sincerely

Sherrol Gane
Student Researcher

Dr Elizabeth Labone
Principal Supervisor
Consent Form
(Researcher's copy - Principal)

Project Title: Why are parents of highly academically gifted children choosing to stay or leave a Catholic schooling system?
Principal Investigator: Dr Elizabeth Labone
Student Researcher: Sherrol Gane
Student's Degree: Doctor of Education

I ___________________________ (the participant) have read and understood the information in the Letter to Participants. Any questions I have asked have been answered to my satisfaction. I agree to participate in this study, realising I can choose to discontinue at any time without having to justify that decision, or give a reason. The data collection involves:

- One 30-minute digitally audio-recorded interview at a convenient time and location.
- Gathering a range of school documents. These include: Five Year Strategic Plan, Annual Improvement Plan, Pedagogical or Teaching and Learning Policy, and Gifted Education Policy, as well as collecting information from the public school website.

I agree that research data collected for the study may be published in a form that does not identify me, or the school where I am Principal.

NAME OF PARTICIPANT:

SIGNATURE: ___________________________ DATE: ______________

CONTACT PHONE NUMBER:

EMAIL ADDRESS:

SIGNATURE OF PRINCIPAL INVESTIGATOR: ___________________________ DATE: ______________

SIGNATURE OF STUDENT RESEARCHER: ___________________________ DATE: ______________
Parent/Guardian Consent Form
(Researcher's copy - Student)

Project Title: Why are parents of highly academically gifted children choosing to stay or leave a Catholic schooling system?

Principal Investigator: Dr Elizabeth Labone

Student Researcher: Sherrol Gane

Student's Degree: Doctor of Education

I ______________________________ (the parent/guardian) have read and understood the information in the Letter to Participants. Any questions I have asked have been answered to my satisfaction. I agree to participate in this study, realising I can choose to discontinue at any time without having to justify that decision, or give a reason. The data collection involves:

- One 30-minute digitally audio-recorded interview at a convenient time and location.

I agree that research data collected for the study may be published in a form that does not identify me, my child or the school that my child attends.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>NAME OF PARENT/GUARDIAN:</th>
<th>SIGNATURE:</th>
<th>DATE:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>CONTACT PHONE NUMBER:</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>EMAIL ADDRESS:</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NAME OF CHILD:</td>
<td>SIGNATURE OF PRINCIPAL INVESTIGATOR:</td>
<td>DATE:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SIGNATURE OF STUDENT RESEARCHER:</td>
<td>DATE:</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Assent Of Participants Aged Under 18 Years

I ____________________________ (the participant aged under 18 years) understand what the research project is designed to explore. What I will be asked to do has been explained to me. I agree to take part in one, 30-minute digitally audio-recorded interview at a convenient time and location by the researcher realising I can choose to discontinue at any time without having to justify that decision, or give a reason.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>NAME OF PARTICIPANT AGED UNDER 18:</th>
<th>SIGNATURE:</th>
<th>DATE:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>SIGNATURE OF PRINCIPAL INVESTIGATOR:</td>
<td>DATE:</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SIGNATURE OF STUDENT RESEARCHER:</td>
<td>DATE:</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Appendix G: Semi-Structured Interview Guide

Interview Guide
The main data-gathering strategy, semi-structured interviews, is going to determine the factors at a
school level and the factors at a family level that contribute to ‘school choice decision’. The interviews
will be digitally recorded with notes being taken to capture the nuances an oral recording would
miss. The recorded interviews will be transcribed.

Following is an outline, which describes the purpose of interviewing each group of participants; the
Principal, classroom teacher, gifted education coordinator, parent and student and how these data
relate to the research questions.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Concepts of the interview questions</th>
<th>Principal</th>
<th>Gifted Education Coordinator</th>
<th>Classroom Teacher</th>
<th>Parent</th>
<th>Student</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>19. The school’s Catholic ethos – use the elements from the Catholic Ethos framework (see Figure 3.3)</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20. Gifted education pre-service education/training</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>21. Gifted education qualifications/professional learning</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>22. The school culture pertaining to gifted education</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>23. Gifted education profile within the school – policy, leadership/teacher allocation, school website</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>24. System issues such as support and guidance with professional learning and resources both human and financial</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>25. Enrolment policy issues</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>26. Pedagogical practices checklist</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>27. Other provisions</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>28. Awareness of system documents – checklist of system documents (see Figure 3.5)</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>29. Identification of academically gifted students</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>30. An understanding of the characteristics of giftedness (See Appendix C) (including overexcitabilities see Appendix J)</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>31. Beliefs about giftedness and gifted education</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>32. School experience of the educators</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>33. School experience of the parent</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>34. Current school experiences of the student</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>35. Options for future schooling</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>36. Religiosity survey (see table 3.4)</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interview Themes</td>
<td>More detail on each theme</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>------------------</td>
<td>--------------------------</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>1.</strong> The school’s Catholic ethos - use the elements from the Catholic Ethos framework</td>
<td><strong>Documents</strong>&lt;br&gt;Church&lt;br&gt;System&lt;br&gt;School&lt;br&gt;&lt;br&gt;<strong>Charism</strong>&lt;br&gt;Building Relationships&lt;br&gt;Self&lt;br&gt;God&lt;br&gt;Others&lt;br&gt;Local and world community&lt;br&gt;Creation&lt;br&gt;&lt;br&gt;<strong>Inclusivity</strong>&lt;br&gt;Opportunities&lt;br&gt;Programs&lt;br&gt;&lt;br&gt;<strong>School structures</strong>&lt;br&gt;Leadership&lt;br&gt;School organisation&lt;br&gt;Physical environment&lt;br&gt;Behaviour of individuals&lt;br&gt;&lt;br&gt;<strong>Individual</strong>&lt;br&gt;Values and thoughts of each individual</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Whilst ‘ethos’ is difficult to define precisely and evaluate accurately, it is nevertheless an integral ingredient in the Catholic tradition (Canavan, 2007; Glover & Coleman, 2005). The framework which was developed based on the components of Catholic Ethos to which Donnelly (2000), Cook and Simonds (2011), and Canavan (2007) refer will be used to lead a conversation about Catholic Ethos. This framework indicates that each of these elements will be assessed in determining the Catholic ethos within the school context. These elements will guide the interview questions with the all participants regarding their perception of Catholic ethos within the school.

- What is your understanding of the term Catholic Ethos?
- How does this school display Catholic Ethos?
- What is your understanding of the term Charism?
- Is this school based on a Charism?
- If so what is the Charism? Is this Charism obvious in the school - if so how?
- Does this table help you define ethos/charism and how it is displayed in your school?
- How important is Catholic Ethos and Charism to you? Why?
- Does the Catholic Ethos or Charism of a school influence your decision on a particular school?
- Further comments?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>2. Gifted education preservice education/training</th>
<th>Preservice education has an impact on teacher beliefs about the understanding of gifted education and strategies to best meet the needs of academically gifted students (Adams &amp; Pierce, 2004; Bangel, Moon, &amp; Copobianco, 2010; Carrington &amp; Bailey, 2000).</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>(Educator only – Principal, Gifted Education Coordinator; Charism teacher)</td>
<td><strong>What Gifted Education instruction that was included in your teaching qualification?</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### 3. Gifted education qualifications/professional learning

[Educators only – Principal, Gifted Education Coordinator, Classroom Teacher]

The research suggests that once in schools ongoing professional learning impacts on teacher beliefs about the understanding of gifted students and meeting their needs. Teachers’ unconscious negative attitudes can be reduced through professional development courses in which teachers become more familiar with the characteristics of gifted students and their learning needs (Geake & Gross, 2008).

- Have you had any professional learning opportunities about Gifted Education? If so what are they?
- Have you done any postgraduate qualification in Gifted Education? If so what are they? When? University?

### 4. The school culture pertaining to gifted education

[All groups]

The school culture or climate is an integral component in establishing and developing beliefs about pedagogy (Sisk, 2009). Parental practices related to student achievement indicates that when an academic home climate is aligned with the school’s academic climate it generates positive behaviours, attitudes and beliefs which lead to students having higher levels of achievement (Reed Campbell & Verna, 2007).

- What is your understanding of Giftedness?
- What do you understand to be the difference between gifted and talent?
- (Show a copy of Gagne’s Model - below) – does this help to explain the difference? (Gagné, 2008)
- What is your understanding of Gifted Education?
- What do you perceive to be the school culture around academic success?
- What do you perceive to be the school culture around academically gifted students?
- What do you perceive to be the school culture around gifted education?
- For parents – how do you foster a culture of academic success in your home?

### 5. Gifted education profile within the school – policy, leadership/teacher allocation, school website

[Educators only – Principal, Gifted Education Coordinator, Classroom Teacher]

Lassig found that by creating a school culture that prioritises gifted education, the recognition and ability to provide for gifted students is improved. Advocacy for gifted education is a continual process (Robinson & Moon, 2003), which contributes to policymaking, and therefore the implementation of programmes, that lead to the creating of a school climate that supports the diverse needs of students.

- Ask interviewees to outline policy, leadership role and the teacher allocation, for gifted education as well as the profile of gifted education within the school.

### 6. System issues such as support and guidance with professional learning and resources both human and financial

[Principal only]

- Ask the Principal to comment on the system support for professional learning and financial support.

### 7. Enrolment policy issues

[Principal only]

- Ask the Principal to outline the how information is obtained and a child’s giftedness through the enrolment process.
8. Pedagogical practices checklist
   (All groups)

   The literature identified five pedagogical practices that should be addressed. They are ability grouping, acceleration, differentiated curriculum, personalised learning, and leaning technologies as listed in the following table. Data will be collected in two ways: using a Likert Scale, and gathering evidence of the pedagogical practice with examples (1: not at all, 2: to a small extent, 3: to some extent, 4: to a moderate extent, 5: extensively).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Pedagogical Practices</th>
<th>Likert Scale (1 not all) → 5 (extensively)</th>
<th>Evidence</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ability Grouping</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Acceleration</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Differentiated Curriculum</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Personalised Learning</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Learning Technologies</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

   * Ask each interviewee about the above table.

9. Other provisions
   (All groups)

   * All participants interviewed will be asked to describe other opportunities or experiences, which are provided.

10. Awareness of system documents – checklist of system documents
    (Educators only: Principal, Gifted Education Coordinator, Classroom teacher)

   * School personnel will be asked about their knowledge of specific CEO Sydney documents relevant to gifted education.
   * They will also be asked how these documents are being referred to when writing school policy and guidelines catering for the needs of gifted students.
   * The above below is the list of the system documents related to gifted education – each interviewee would be asked to complete comment.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>System Documents related to Gifted Education</th>
<th>Awareness</th>
<th>Explicit Use and How</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Vision and Mission Statement</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Building on Strength</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How Effective is our Catholic School</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Learning Framework</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gifted Education Position Paper</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gifted Education Framework</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Newman Stream Criteria/Program</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Enrolment Policy</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>System Website</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

11. Identification of academically gifted students
    (Educators only: Principal, Gifted Education Coordinator, Classroom teacher)

   * The school staff interviewed will be asked to outline the process of identifying academically gifted students.

12. An understanding of the characteristics of giftedness (including overexcitabilities)
    (All groups)

   * Use the Characteristics of Giftedness Checklist (see below) as a basis for discussion (Gross, Macleod, & Pretorius, 2001).
   * Use the Overexcitabilities Checklist (see below) as a basis for discussion (Piecieszek, 1986).

13. Beliefs about giftedness and gifted education – educators and parents
    (All groups except student: Principal, Gifted Education Coordinator, Classroom teacher, parents)

   There are three factors that influence educators' beliefs about giftedness and gifted education. They are preserve education in gifted education; ongoing professional learning; and the impact of school climate on gifted education.

   * What are your beliefs about recognition of any gift?
   * What are your beliefs about recognition of an academic gift?
   * What are your beliefs about importance gifted education?
   * Other comments?
14. School experience of the educators (Educators only - Principal, Gifted Education Coordinator, Classroom teacher)
   • Briefly describe your school experience?
   • Were you identified as gifted?
   • Do you perceive yourself as gifted?

15. School experience of the parent (Parent only)
   • Briefly describe your school experience?
   • Were you identified as gifted?
   • Do you perceive yourself as gifted?

16. Current school experiences of the student (Parent and student only)
   • Detail the current school experience of the student.

17. Options for future schooling (Parent and student only)
   • What are the options that are being considered for the future schooling of this student?

18. Religiosity → Catholicity (Parent only)
   Religiosity as defined by McDaniel and Burnett (1990), is a "person's relationship with a supreme being and how an individual expresses that relationship in society" (p. 101). As Vitell et al. (2005) did in their study, this researcher will adapt the intrinsic/extrinsic religiousness scales adopted from Allport and Ross (1967) (see below).
   • This adapted scale will form the basis of the questions about their Religiosity and their interpretation of Catholicity.
   • How does this affect school choice?

---

Why are parents of academically gifted children choosing to stay or leave a Catholic schooling system?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Research Questions</th>
<th>Semi-structured Interview</th>
<th>Additional Data</th>
<th>System and school document analysis</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Principal</td>
<td>Gifted Education Coordinator</td>
<td>Classroom teacher</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1. What personal and contextual factors do parents consider in making a decision about the schooling of their academically gifted child?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Is there a link between the child’s experience at their current school and the choice of future schooling?</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. What is the alignment between the parent's perception of their child's school experience and what the school believes they are offering?</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
## Appendix H: Data Findings Summary

### What the data says/Findings/Meaning

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Classroom Teacher</th>
<th>Teacher observation of gifted student</th>
<th>Negative characteristics:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Positive characteristics:</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Perfectionist (most are)</td>
<td></td>
<td>• Not a perfectionist</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Long attention span</td>
<td></td>
<td>• Does not like to fail or get anything wrong</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Independent</td>
<td></td>
<td>• Struggles at times</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Creative</td>
<td></td>
<td>• Can be unpredictable</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Abstract ideas</td>
<td></td>
<td>• Single minded</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Fast learner</td>
<td></td>
<td>• Capable but not interested</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Advanced reading age</td>
<td></td>
<td>• Attempts to control the class</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Strong sense of justice</td>
<td></td>
<td>• Head strong</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Compliant</td>
<td></td>
<td>• Challenging behaviour</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Confident</td>
<td></td>
<td>• Egocentric</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• High level of curiosity</td>
<td></td>
<td>• Can be offensive</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Immersion into learning</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Meaning:</strong></td>
<td>Classroom teachers observe more negative characteristics than parents do.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

| Gifted Education Coordinator |  | Meaning: Gifted Education Coordinators agreed with the observations from the classroom teachers. |
| Teacher pleaser |  |  |
| Gifting is about: |  |  |
| • How wired to learn |  |  |
| • Reaching potential |  |  |
| • Heightened level of curiosity |  |  |
| • Strong faith |  |  |
| • Compliant |  |  |
| • Not compliant |  |  |

| Principal | Meaning: Principals did not really comment on the individual characteristics of the gifted student. |
| Anxious |  |
| Very competitive |  |
| Parents are competitive as well |  |

| Environmental Factors (affecting the gifted student and family) |
|  |

| Parent | Opportunities offered at school |
|  |  |
| Extension |  |
| Enrichment |  |
| Varity of opportunities |  |
| Enjoyed system initiatives |  |

| School/class size |  |
| Resources limited in a small school |  |
| Small school – more personalised attention |  |
| Small school – supportive |  |
| Small school – not enough variety with social interactions |  |
| Large class sizes – can't attend to individual needs |  |
| Large school – can get lost |  |

<p>| School Personnel |  |
| Principal: +ve |  |
| Principal: -ve |  |
| Information not passed on each year to new teacher |  |
| Communication with class teachers |  |</p>
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>What the data says/Findings/meaning</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• Work in partnership with the school</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Principal passionate about ensuring the needs of students are met</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Accepted external support/advise</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Culture from the top down</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Giftedness</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Acknowledgement and recognition of giftedness</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• School is very supportive</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Lack of understanding of gifted education pedagogies by some teachers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Teachers fearful to extend beyond the curriculum</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Gifted education can be 'hit and miss'</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Recognition of sport more accepted than recognising academic success</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• The school has articulated a plan</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Enrichment part of everyday behaviour – not pull-out program</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Withdrawn from class – ad hoc</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Teachers don’t understand gifted students</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Meaning:**

The parents were able to give examples of different extension and enrichment opportunities that their child was offered at school. All the parents whose child had attended system-initiated programs were very positive about it. Comments like, ‘a shame the program couldn’t continue’, ‘it was the best part of the week when my child attended that program’, and ‘my child was challenged and mixed with like-minded students’.

There were mixed comments about the size of the school. For one family it was a great advantage that the school was small. They had experienced a larger school. With the school being small they believed their son received more specialised and individualised attention. They didn’t feel as lost as they did in the big school. Whereas for another family the small school was a negative. The parent was very keen to have her daughter attend a large secondary school so as she would have the opportunity to mix with a large number of people. The parent also believed that due to the small school the resources were limited. The system did not allocate as much to the small school as they did to a larger school. Also with the 1 steam, there is less chance to have other gifted students in the class. A number of parents commented about the large class sizes as being a disadvantage. For one parent that was the sole reason why she chose to send her youngest daughter to a state school. At the state school she was in a class of 16 whereas at the Catholic school she would have been in class of 34 children.

Parents had strong opinions about the leadership of the school. For some parents who had experienced a change of Principal they were able to compare and contrast the different leadership styles. The parents who had the most positive experience said that the Principal was proactive, supportive, and understanding of their gifted child. It made a difference to the culture of the school. Especially when academic success was celebrated as well as sporting achievements. Parents weren’t happy when they had to repeatedly give the same information to the classroom teacher year after year. Parents were keen to work in partnership with the school and wanted regular communication.

Parents wanted their child to be part of a gifted or extension or personalised...
What the data says/Findings/meaning

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Student</th>
<th>Outside of school interests</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Likes IT – laptop, iPad, iPod, phone</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Not on social media</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Like playing games</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Play musical instruments – guitar, piano, drums</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Play sport - variety</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Drama</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Dancing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Lego</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Attending church</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Homework +ve</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Homework can be a waste of time</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Reading</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Researching</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**About school**
- Like system gifted programs
- Made friends at the external programs
- Like extension maths
- Like learning something new each day
- Using the computer to research
- School is boring when lessons/work is repetitive
- Withdrawn to attend higher classes
- Opportunities to do other things eg ‘work’ on the IT counter fixing or troubleshooting issues on student laptops, create a radio channel
- Specific gifted program eg Newman
- School supportive and flexible in terms of Stage 6 subject choices
- Recognition at awards ceremony
- Don’t like he teased because I didn’t know something or made a mistake
- Like the school because it is small – can look after me – personalised
- I have choices
- Don’t like the school because it is small – not enough friends
- Being younger is ok

**Meaning:**
The interests the students have are varied. From playing musical instruments to playing sport to creative arts. Interestingly the older students said they are not part of the social media scene. For reasons like, ‘I can’t be bothered’, ‘I don’t see the point’, ‘none of my friends are’, and ‘it is a distraction’. However they do like technology to research, play games, or create apps. The younger students all want a smart phone; mostly they will get one when they go to secondary school. They too did like computers and iPads for research and playing games. A number of the students liked attending church and specifically stated they enjoyed the Homily. In general their faith and spirituality was important to them, for both the younger and older students. There was one exception, one of the older boys was very against the Catholic religion and was outspoken about religion in general.
What the data says/Findings/meaning

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Classroom Teacher</th>
<th>Positive</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Provide extra work – not repetition</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Ability group</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Independent research tasks</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• We must be aware of and recognised gifted students – otherwise won’t reach their potential and/or could be disengaged and behaviour problems</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Structured approach</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Group like minded students together</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Give student voice and choice to curriculum design</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Differentiate the curriculum</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Gifted education should be done in the classroom rather than withdrawal</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Use of IT</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Accelerated maths program – allows to HSC subject early – opportunity to do extension 2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Identified gifted students have their own IEP – discussed with parents</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Positive culture towards giftedness</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Pre-testing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• We have a responsibility to these students</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• A nurturing supportive culture</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Principal has ensured flexible learning spaces in each classroom</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Smaller classes and advantage</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Support of the gifted education coordinator is crucial</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Open-ended tasks for in class and homework</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Negative</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• More interaction with feeder Catholic secondary school</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Not going to ask feeder primary school – do own testing – level playing field</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• No structured gifted program at the school</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Very big class – over 30 – hard to get to know all students and hard to give</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### What the data says/Findings/ Meaning

- Individual attention and work
  - Took time to adjust to secondary school
  - Does not see the school counsellor
  - Been a tough battle
  - Concerned about HSC result
  - Teachers get frustrated with
    - Behaviour
    - Class size
    - Lack of support
    - Lack of time
    - Lack of knowledge around giftedness and how to challenge
  - Struggle to cater for the gifted student

#### External to school/classroom

- Awareness that gifted students may not achieve what they are capable of
- Parents organised for a psychometric test
- Good relationship and communication with parents
- Parents very active in their child’s education
- Academic success of school is driven by parents, students, school exec – all community

### Meaning:

The classroom teachers all believe they must recognise and provide challenging, stimulating work for all students and cater for the needs of diverse learners. There are a variety of strategies that are implemented to keep gifted student engaged in their learning. There is an expectation that the curriculum is differentiated and that teachers know the students in their classroom. Where possible and appropriate teachers include the student in the planning of their learning. The use of technology is widely used to assist with the differentiation process.

The frustrations that the teachers have include lack of professional learning in the area of gifted education. They lack knowledge about gifted education, and different strategies, which can be used for learning and behavioural situations. Both teachers in primary and secondary schools would like more interaction with the feeder school. Primary teachers would like the opportunity to access the facilities of the secondary school and have some input into the transition process from primary to secondary. Secondary school teachers would like to go to the primary school to assist with extension programs and the preparation for secondary school.

Teachers state that class sizes are too big. It is difficult to know each child and give personalised attention to all the different children in the class. They also get exasperated by the lack of time to prepare adequately for the diverse learners.

Teachers are conscious that they develop an amicable relationship and lines of communication with the parents. Many teachers noted that the parents are very active in their child’s education. They realise too, that gifted students may not achieve to the level they are capable of. At some schools it is the parent’s responsibility to organise for their child to have a psychometric test.
### What the data says/Findings/meaning

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Gifted Education Coordinator</th>
<th>System Related Comments</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Gifted Education should be acknowledged and funded the same as students who have a special learning need → Special Education</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• More programs and support in terms of funding and time needed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Greater links between primary feeders and local secondary schools</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Equity issue</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Newman program:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>o Positive feedback</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>o Newman program has necessitated a better understanding of Gifted Education policy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>o Due to Newman good PD which has had a 'flow on' effect</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>o Newman has made a difference to gifted philosophy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Paradox between the humble approach to Catholic education and the celebration of gifts</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Secondary GEC paid 2 point coordinator plus time allowance</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• No funding for Gifted Education Coordinator</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### School Related Comments

- Use a student tracker to track student data and progress
- Need to do more in classroom – not just pull out programs
- A lot of work to be done
- Identification process
- Cluster gifted students rather than spread over all classes
- All staff have an opportunity to do Mini COGE
- New Principal is about more than just identification → what happens once identified → greater focus on Gifted Education
- IEPs written for gifted students
- Do an 'ad hoc' job → no clear pathway
- Students like effective feedback
- Always evaluating the programs and processes
- Parents want to see their child achieve
- Believe we have to give gifted students opportunities
- Look to every student being different
- Provide alternate opportunities
- Be creative with options
- Had to address the 'tall poppy syndrome' → an equity issue → look at gifted education as a 'social justice issue'
- Used to only recognise sporting achievements → new Principal changed that → academic success now celebrated
- Up to the school to meet the needs of all individuals
- Always evolving as we learn more and more research is done into how the brain works
- Work closely with and communicate with parents

### Meaning:
The 6 Gifted Education Coordinators interviewed had a vast understanding of gifted education, various degrees of support from the school in terms of time and salary, and a wide variety of implementing initiatives, programs and processes. Most of the Coordinators said that they should receive the same funding and system support as Special Education. They are frustrated at the lack of time and money to implement
What the data says/Findings/meaning

Programs and complete identification procedures. The Gifted Education Coordinators who are at a school that has implemented the Newman Program spoke very favourably of that initiative. They believed as a result and due to the professional learning the teachers had a much better understanding of gifted students and gifted education. One of the Coordinators said, 'it’s interesting to consider the paradox between the humble approach to Catholic education and the celebration of gifts'.

Most Coordinators had a process of tracking the results and progress of gifted students. It was recognised that the best strategy is to keep these identified students in the classroom rather withdraw them spasmodically for programs. Where possible cluster like-minded learners rather spread these students over a number of classes. Professional learning makes a big difference. The schools where the Principal has committed to giving the staff the opportunity to a significant training course in gifted education it has been accepted well. A couple of the Coordinators who have had a change of Principal have noticed that the new Principal has a greater focus on gifted education. The writing of Individual Education Plans (IEPs) is interesting. The two schools where this was done in consultation with the parents and class teacher, neither parent mentioned it.

The Coordinators work very hard in keeping up to date with the identification process, implementing programs, and providing opportunities for gifted students. It is a constant cycle of evaluation and change.

There is the constant battle with the 'tall poppy syndrome'. Some teachers can have the misconception that these children will achieve regardless with what the school provides. Putting forward the fact that gifted education is a social justice issue can be difficult at times.

The Coordinators, with the classroom teacher communicates with the parents and is involved in the overall implementation of a learning plan.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Principal</th>
<th>System related comments</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Newman:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>o Made us honest to gifted education</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>o Improved identification</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>o Doing more in the classroom</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>o More authentic process</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>o PD \rightarrow excellent \rightarrow big advantage</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>o Funding \rightarrow excellent</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>o 'Lifted the bar' for all students</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>o Am more confident we are meeting the needs of gifted students</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Would fund gifted education even if not have Newman funding</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Haven’t applied for Newman – would be too much – no staff with gifted qualifications</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Handover process to secondary school for gifted students like there is for Special Needs students</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• School completely funds G &amp; T \rightarrow no system support</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Funding from system uncertain</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Access to system opportunities \rightarrow good</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
## What the data says/Findings/meaning

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>• Conversation with feeder Catholic secondary school to transition smoothly gifted students</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>School related comments</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Changing culture more than just scores and 'good handwriting' → identification and meeting the needs of diverse learners</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Funding teachers to have access to Mini COGE</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Project Based Learning</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Working on a culture that raises expectations for staff and students</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Promote and celebrate excellent results</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Parents used to pay big money to have child tested → parents used to be competitive → promote school as an exclusive school → seems to have balanced out now</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Expectations aren’t high enough</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Need to do better with ability grouping</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Implement an identification continuum</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Encourage for pre-testing to be done better</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Large class sizes are a challenge for teachers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Want students to achieve to their potential</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Provide a comprehensive education</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• When interview new students to the school gather as much information and documentation as possible</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Speak to feeder schools and pre-schools</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Meet regularly with Gifted Education Coordinator – part of Teaching and Learning Team</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• School funds specific gifted program that students must apply for</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• We have increased number applying to the school</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Write to students who get accepted into selective school and offer them automatic entry into Newman stream</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• A challenge is giftedness and Creative Arts</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Moving beyond a happy school now → challenging learning students to reach potential</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Use data to support diverse learners</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• A privilege to work with the parents of gifted students</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Must be a team approach</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Often success of any program comes down to funding</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• High expectation for teachers to differentiate the curriculum</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Meaning:

All 9 Principals interviewed were very definite about their responsibility of implementing opportunities to engage students in their learning. The Principals of the schools that have the Newman Program believed it supported their ability to be able to implement gifted education strategies. Albeit these Principals had a commitment to gifted education and would fund significantly from the school budget for gifted education if they didn’t get funding from the system. The funding from the system is uncertain. A couple of the Principals would like a stronger link with the feeder school and have a stronger input into the transition process for gifted students.

Some of the Principals are hoping for an embedded culture, for the understanding
What the data says/Findings/meaning

and implementation of gifted education. The hope is that it raises the academic expectation for all staff and students, not only gifted students. Some Principals have committed considerably financially to ensuring that all teachers complete a gifted education course. All the Principals spoke about the promotion and celebration of academic results and achievements. The Principals remarked about the privilege of working with interested parents who are committed to the education of their children. It is a continual challenge to provide the required environment for these gifted students. Class sizes, the school budget, and appropriate learning spaces always create tension for the Principals to manage.

A number of Principals spoke of approaches and plans to improve the prospects for gifted students. For example, clearer criteria for ability grouping, a continuum of identification, more explicit pre-testing, and implementation of truly differentiated programs, assessment and reporting to the parents. Most of the Principals expressed that they had high expectations of their teachers to take responsibility for the implementation of such strategies. It must be a team approach.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>School Choice Considerations</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Parent</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Catholic system</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Catholic</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Pastoral care/wellbeing very important</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Siblings already at school</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• A Newman school</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Educate the whole person</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Not just about academics</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Want a school so as they learn about the Catholic religion</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Like the school with the new Principal</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Selective school</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Like minded students</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Doing RE as a Stage 6 subject</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Private school</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Expensive fees</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Want a school that educates my child academically</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Scholarship to private school</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Not sure</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• School that best suit needs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Distance from home</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Ethnicity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• &quot;What can you offer our child?&quot;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Doesn’t have to go to the same school as siblings</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Girls school</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Expensive fees</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Scholarship</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Meaning:**
The parents fall into 3 categories:
1. Will only attend a Catholic school:
   For these parents it is essential that their child have a Catholic education. The
What the data says/Findings/meaning

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Student</th>
<th>Catholic system</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Catholic</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Won't do the selective school test</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Going to a Selective school**

- Be with like-minded students
- Will do selective school test
- Why be in a selective class when I can be a selective school

**Private school**

- IB instead of HSC

**Not sure**

- Girls school

**Meaning:**
The students fall into the same 3 categories as their parents.

Some of the students state most definitely they will only attend a Catholic school and won't be doing the selective test.

The students who are at or will attend a selective school want to be with like-minded peers. 'Why be in a selective class when I can be in a selective school'. The academic environment is very important.

The students who aren't sure are considering all options with their parents. They will attend a many Open Days and apply to a number of schools.

**Classroom Teacher**

- Local secondary Catholic school doesn't communicate enough with primary school
- Support the choice of a particular student to go to a selective school

**Meaning:**
Some primary classroom teachers commented that the local Catholic secondary school does not communicate enough with the Year 5 and 6 students about what the school has to offer. One of the teachers supported the choice for their student to go to
What the data says/Findings/meaning

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Gifted Education Coordinator</th>
<th>the selective school. She believes the student has the personality that will allow her to thrive in that more competitive environment.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Meaning:</strong></td>
<td>Same comments as for classroom teachers.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| **Principal**               | • Boys leave to start Private school in Yr4 or Yr5  
• Students apply to do selective test  
• Girls have a choice of 3 catholic system schools  
• Challenge class at local secondary school more a 'hard workers' class  
• Need a handover process for gifted students  
• Input into Challenge class  
• Parents are wanting a broad education → pastoral care, faith life, social justice and strong academics → develop their child wholly → nurture and develop in all areas → want them to engage in their learning |
| **Meaning:**                | The Principals in regard to parent choice made the following comments:  
1. In the Eastern Suburbs boys leave the primary school before the end of Year 6 for a place in the local Catholic and non-Catholic Private schools. Enrolment for these schools begins in Year 3.  
2. In the Eastern Suburbs girls have a number of schools that are, systemic, private, Catholic and non-Catholic. However no systemic Catholic girls school implements the Newman Program. The boy's systemic Catholic school is a Newman school.  
3. All primary school Principals have students applying to do the selective schools test. The applications are made in Year 5; they sit the test at the start of Year 6, and are offered a position in the middle of Year 6. Varying numbers accept the position if offered. This did not seem to be such an issue for secondary Principals. However one of the students that was interviewed started at the selective school in Year 11, that is she left the Catholic school after Year 10.  
4. The primary Principals would like to be more involved with the transition process to secondary school. This includes having input into the placement of students into the Challenge, Extension of Newman class. One secondary Principal writes to students who have been offered a place at a selective school for Year 7, and offers them automatic entry to the Newman stream at the secondary Catholic school. There has been a positive uptake of this offer from one of the feeder schools but not the other.  
The impression Principals feel is that parents are wanting a broad education, that offers a proactive pastoral care program, nurtures faith life, has a strong sense of social justice and high academic expectations, which engage students in learning. |
| **Additional Data**         | All people interviewed were very positive about the obvious Catholic ethos and identity of the schools. Comments were made about how the school environment was unmistakably Catholic and displayed a welcoming atmosphere. Catholicism was displayed in a number of ways; the way people treated each other, the expectation of behaviour, and within the classroom through prayer and the curriculum. |
What the data says/Findings/Meaning

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Professional Learning</th>
<th>See separate document</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Pedagogical Practices</td>
<td>See separate document</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School Experience</td>
<td>See separate document</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parent Religiosity</td>
<td>See separate document</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Survey</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>System Documents</td>
<td>Have the documents but need to be analysed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School Documents</td>
<td>Have the documents but need to be analysed further – initial comments have been made.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Other thoughts, observations, comments (in no particular order)

**Parent**
- Parents are very passionate about wanting the best education and opportunities for their child
- For some parents whilst they weren’t completely happy with the Catholic system they were adamant about a Catholic education for their child
- Some other parents believed the Catholic system could not cater for the needs of their child
- For a couple of parents, it didn’t matter what the Catholic school offered they were still choosing an alternative for their child
- One parent had a sense of frustration with the Catholic school but was still going to keep her son in the Catholic system – she said things like, ‘I’m not a pushy parent’, ‘I should have contacted the school more’, ‘I’m so disappointed I have to explain my son’s situation every year to the new teacher’, ‘the school tries it’s best’
- Another parent made the comment ‘the school does it’s best with limited resources’
- For another parent the only reason she had her 2 children still attending the Catholic school was that she couldn’t afford to send them to the non-Catholic private school – the private school has an extensive gifted program that understands and caters for gifted students
- Not one parent mentioned that their child was on an Individual Education Plan (IAP) – even though some schools said they implemented IAPs for gifted students that involved the parent having a conversation with the school and signing it
- Some parents believed the Catholic system was better for nurturing and supporting the wellbeing of their child
- Another mother with 3 boys who have a range of complex needs was very satisfied with the schooling her boys were receiving and was keen to stay in the Catholic system → she strongly attributed this to the Principal → she had an experience of another Catholic school and felt she could make that statement
- Two parents did not want to send their daughters to the local selective school (so did not apply) due to the high Asian population → typically the Asian population is all about academic achievement rather than a well-rounded education – was the reason – (2 different geographical areas)

**Student**
- The students typically:
  - All liked school
  - Wanted to learn
  - Achieve their best
  - Be accepted as normal
### What the data says/Findings/Meaning

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>Classroom Teacher</strong></th>
<th>Classroom teachers acknowledge the recognition of gifted students and believe their needs should be provided for.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Class size seemed to be an issue in terms of being able to know each child, personalise the learning and give individual attention.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>One teacher in particular was quite disturbed that she could not challenge the gifted boy she had in her class and provide a stimulating and appropriate learning opportunities for him → she hoped he got a 'better teacher next year' → she had not received any gifted education professional learning.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>One classroom teacher who identified himself as gifted, believed he had an advantage in being able to relate to the gifted student, and it was this reason that the teacher was not experiencing the behavioural issues that previous teachers had</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Not one teacher mentioned that their Principal was providing the opportunity for them to complete a gifted education qualification</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Not one teacher mentioned the Newman Program.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

| **Gifted Education Coordinator** | The 6 Gifted Education Coordinators interviewed had a vast understanding of gifted education, various degrees of support from the school in terms of time and pay, and a wide variety of implementing initiatives, programs and processes. |

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>Principal</strong></th>
<th>All the Principals believed it was their responsibility to provide opportunities and suitable learning pathways for identified gifted students.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>The amount of Professional Learning which they had completed was limited</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>The lack of system support in terms of funding was a big issue</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>The Newman Program was seen as positive both in terms of funding and professional learning opportunities</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Not one person interviewed mentioned that the School Counsellor provided support or was an option for guidance</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>There wasn’t a great understanding of:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>The difference between extension and enrichment programs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Gifted and talent, and the difference between the two</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Criteria for ability grouping for a challenge or extension class</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>The different options for acceleration and when acceleration should be considered</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Appendix I: Ethics Clearance Letters and Working with Children Check

2013 151N Ethics application approved!
1 message
Res Ethics <Res.Ethics@acu.edu.au> 23 December 2013 at 10:44
To: Sherrol Gane <sagane001@myacu.edu.au>, Elizabeth Labone <Elizabeth.Labone@acu.edu.au>

Dear Applicant,

Principal Investigator: Dr Elizabeth Mary Labone
Student Researcher: Ms Sherrol Gane
Ethics Register Number: 2013 151N
Project Title: Why are parents of highly academically gifted children choosing to stay or leave a Catholic schooling system?
Risk Level: Low Risk 2
Date Approved: 23/12/2013
Ethics Clearance End Date: 31/12/2014

This email is to advise that your application has been reviewed by the Australian Catholic University’s Human Research Ethics Committee and confirmed as meeting the requirements of the National Statement on Ethical Conduct in Human Research.

This project has been awarded ethical clearance until 31/12/2014. In order to comply with the National Statement on Ethical Conduct in Human Research, progress reports are to be submitted on an annual basis. If an extension of time is required researchers must submit a progress report.

Whilst the data collection of your project has received ethical clearance, the decision and authority to commence may be dependent on factors beyond the remit of the ethics review process. The Chief Investigator is responsible for ensuring that appropriate permission letters are obtained, if relevant, and a copy forwarded to ACU HREC before any data collection can occur at the specified organisation. Failure to provide permission letters to ACU HREC before data collection commences is in breach of the National Statement on Ethical Conduct in Human Research and the Australian Code for the Responsible Conduct of Research.

If you require a formal approval certificate, please respond via reply email and one will be issued.

Decisions related to low risk ethical review are subject to ratification at the next available Committee meeting. You will only be contacted again in relation to this matter if the Committee raises any additional questions or concerns.

Researchers who fail to submit an appropriate progress report may have their ethical clearance revoked and/or the ethical clearances of other projects suspended. When your project has been completed please complete and submit a progress/final report form and advise us by email at your earliest convenience. The information researchers provide on the security of records, compliance with approval consent procedures and documentation and responses to special conditions is reported to the NHMRC on an annual basis. In accordance with NHMRC the ACU HREC may undertake annual audits of any projects considered to be of more than low risk.

It is the Principal Investigators / Supervisors responsibility to ensure that:
1. All serious and unexpected adverse events should be reported to the HREC with 72 hours.
2. Any changes to the protocol must be approved by the HREC by submitting a Modification Form prior to the research commencing or continuing.
3. All research participants are to be provided with a Participant Information Letter and consent form, unless otherwise agreed by the Committee.

For progress and/or final reports, please complete and submit a Progress / Final Report form:
www.acu.edu.au/465013

For modifications to your project, please complete and submit a Modification form:
www.acu.edu.au/465013

Researchers must immediately report to HREC any matter that might affect the ethical acceptability of the protocol eg: changes to protocols or unforeseen circumstances or adverse effects on participants.

Please do not hesitate to contact the office if you have any queries.

https://mail.google.com/mail/u/0?ui=2&ik=022d232171&jv=11739130&v=w1&sa=t&source=spanish-325&cd=1&hl=en&gl=US#v=sp&attid=022d232171&disp=emb&pid=sg&att=14313c280af... 1/2
Kind regards,
Kylie Pashley
on behalf of ACU HREC Chair, Professor John Ozolins

Ethics Officer | Research Services
Office of the Deputy Vice Chancellor (Research)
Australian Catholic University

THIS IS AN AUTOMATICALLY GENERATED RESEARCHMASTER EMAIL
21 February 2014

Sherrol Gane
6/121-123 Gannons Road
CARINGBAH 2229

Dear Sherrol

RE: RESEARCH APPLICATION REF: 842 - LETTER OF APPROVAL

Thank you for the submission of your application to conduct research in Archdiocesan Catholic Schools under the jurisdiction of the Catholic Education Office (CEO) Sydney. Approval is given by CEO Sydney to conduct this study. This approval is granted subject to full compliance with NSW Child Protection and Commonwealth Privacy Act legislation. It is the prerogative of any Principal or staff member whom you might approach to decline your invitation to be involved in this study or to withdraw from involvement at any time. Any study involving the participation of students will require written, informed consent by parents/guardians.

COMMONWEALTH PRIVACY ACT
The privacy of the school and that of any school personnel or students involved in your study must, of course, be preserved at all times and comply with requirements under the Commonwealth Privacy Amendment (Private Sector) Act 2000. In complying with this legislation, the CEO Sydney has decided that individual research participants should not be identified in the report.

FURTHER REQUIREMENTS
When you have established your participating schools, please complete the attached form and return it to this office.

The initial contact with Principals should only use the signatures of the researcher and supervisor. It would be inappropriate if it were signed by the Director of Teaching and Learning.

It is a condition of approval that when your research has been completed you will forward a summary report of the findings and/or recommendations to this office as soon as results are to hand.

All correspondence relating to this Research should note ‘Ref: Research Application 842’.

38 Redwick Street, PO Box 217, Leichhardt NSW 2040 • Phone (02) 9569 6111 • Fax (02) 9560 0092
Eastern Region 33 Banks Avenue, Dee Why NSW 2099 • Phone (02) 8344 3000 • Fax (02) 8344 3097
Inner Western Region, 3 Leacing Street, Lakemba NSW 2141 (Locked Bag 83, 1925) • Phone (02) 9643 3600 • Fax (02) 9643 3609
Southern Region, 300 The River Road, Revesby Heights NSW 2212 • Phone (02) 9772 7000 • Fax (02) 9772 7009
Please contact me at this office if there is any further information you require. I wish you well in this undertaking and look forward to learning about your findings.

Yours sincerely,

[Signature]

Dr Michael Bezzina
Director of Teaching and Learning
Email: research.centre@syd.catholic.edu.au

[Handwritten note: Sorry this was delayed. - [Signature]]
Dear Mrs Gane

You have been cleared to work with children in both volunteer and paid roles.

Your Working With Children Check number is WWC0016573E
Your clearance is valid from 04/07/2013 to 04/07/2018

Please store your Working With Children Check number securely as you must provide it to any employer engaging you in a child-related role. You will also need it when you renew your Working With Children Check or change personal details in the Working With Children Check records.

Please check that the details for your Working With Children Check are correct:

Name: Sherrol Audrey Gane
Gender: Female
Date of birth: 07/09/1956

If any of these details are incorrect, contact the Working With Children Check office immediately on 02 9286 7219.

When you start a new child-related role, your employer will verify that your Working With Children Check number is current. Your employer may also ask to see your personal identification.

If you are the subject of any relevant new employer misconduct findings or criminal records, your clearance will be reviewed and may be withdrawn.

Yours sincerely

Director
Working With Children Check
04/07/2013
Dabrowski’s *Theory of Emotional Development*, describes emotional development as an interaction between developmental potential and the environment. He called this intensity ‘overexcitability’ and identified five types (Sisk, 2009a). Following in table 11 is a checklist for identifying these overexcitabilities that is adapted from Piechowski (1986, p. 192).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Overexcitabilities</th>
<th>Characteristics</th>
<th>Evidence</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Psychomotor</strong></td>
<td>Surplus of energy – rapid speech, marked enthusiasm, fast games and sports, pressure for action, delinquent behaviour</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Psychomotor expression of emotional tension – compulsive talking and chattering, impulsive actions, delinquent behaviour, workaholism, nervous habits (tics, nailbiting)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Sensual</strong></td>
<td>Sensory pleasures – seeing, smelling, tasting, touching, hearing</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Sensual expressions of emotional tension – overeating, sexual awareness, buying sprees</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Intellectual</strong></td>
<td>Probing questions</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Problem solving</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Learning – curiosity, concentration, capacity for sustained intellectual effort, extensive reading</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Theoretical thinking – thinking about thinking, introspection, preoccupation with certain problems, moral thinking and development of a hierarchy of values, conceptual and intuitive integration</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Imaginational</strong></td>
<td>Free play of the imagination – illusions, animistic and magical thinking, image and metaphor, inventions and fantasy, poetic and dramatic perception</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Spontaneous imagery as an expression of emotional tension – animistic imagery, mixing of truth and fiction, dreams, visual recall, visualisation of events, fears of the unknown</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Emotional</strong></td>
<td>Somatic expressions – tense stomach, sinking heart, flushing</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Intensity of feeling – positive feelings, negative feelings, extremes of feeling, complex feelings, identification with others’ feelings</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Inhibition – timidity, shyness</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Affective memory</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Concern with death</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Fear and anxiety</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Feeling of guilt</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Depressive and suicidal moods</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Relationship feelings – need for protection, attachment to animals, significant others, perceptions of relationships, emotional ties and attachments, difficulty of adjustment to new environments, loneliness, concern for others (empathy), conflict with others</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Feelings toward self – self-evaluation and self-judgment, feelings of inadequacy and inferiority</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Appendix K: Sydney Catholic School’s Vision and Mission Statement

**Vision** for Sydney Catholic Schools

As partners in Catholic education, we commit ourselves to developing authentic Catholic schools which:

- are founded on the person of Jesus Christ and enlivened by Gospel values
- highlight the relevance of our faith to life and contemporary culture
- are embedded within the community of believers, and share in the evangelising mission of the Church
- are committed to the development of the whole person.

**The Mission** for Sydney Catholic Schools

As partners in Catholic education, we commit ourselves to our students by:

**Celebrating being Catholic in Australia**

- Recognising that Jesus Christ is central to our lives
- Imparting Catholic beliefs, values, practices and traditions within a faith-filled community
- Working with those who experience disadvantage
- Rejoicing in our cultural diversity.

**Ensuring Quality Teaching and Learning**

- Providing a stimulating and challenging curriculum which links faith and culture
- Promoting our schools as places of learning and excellence
- Embracing the privilege and the challenge of teaching in Catholic schools
- Promoting an active partnership between home, parish, school and community
- Making creative use of available resources.

**Making a Difference in our World**

- Fostering the dignity, self-esteem and integrity of each person
- Collaborating with others for the good of all
- Inspiring hope and a positive vision for the future
- Continuing the rich tradition of Catholic education in Sydney.
## Appendix L: The System Document Analysis Summary

### The System Document Analysis Summary

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Catholic System Document</th>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Key elements of study focus</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Archbishop's Charter for Catholic Schools (2012)</td>
<td>Our Catholic Schools are called to: (2/11)</td>
<td>2. Nurture students’ love of learning through a Catholic pedagogy that fosters the development of the intellect, moral knowledge, understanding and reasoning in a relational, social and cultural context 6. Implement policies and practices for pastoral care, student wellbeing and an inclusive curriculum that are consistent with the mission of the Catholic school</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vision and Mission</td>
<td>Vision (1/4)</td>
<td>Are committed to the development of the whole person</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
|                                                               | Mission (4/13)                                                         | • Rejoicing in our cultural diversity  
• Providing a stimulating and challenging curriculum which links faith and culture  
• Promoting our schools are places of learning and excellence  
• Fostering the dignity, self-esteem and integrity of each person |
| Building on Strength – Strategic Improvement Plan 2011-2015 (2/8) | Key Area 2: Students and their learning (2/5)                         | 2.1 Strengthened student engagement in learning through the provision personalised pathways tailored to meet individual need and abilities: (Key indicators: 3/5)  
• Centre for gifted education  
• Personalised learning  
• Centre for excellence |
|                                                               |                                                                        | 2.5 Increased enrolment, retention and sustainable provision for all gifted and talented students: (Key indicators: 5/5)  
• A clear framework exists for the identification and acceleration of gifted students  
• And agreed process is in place for supporting gifted students across all schools in the system  
• A Blended Learning Centre has been established to support gifted students  
• The number of gifted students in systemic schools has increased  
• Newman Centre for Gifted and Talented Students – the establishment at Lewisham of a new Centre to provide physical, virtual and blended learning support for gifted and talented students across all systemic schools |
| Key Area 3: Pedagogy (1/5)                                     | 3.1 Teaching practices K-12 informed and characterized by the principles of |                                                                                                                                                                                                                           |
| How Effective is our Catholic School (2011) (2/8) | Key Area 2: Students and their learning (1/5) | 2.1 Education Potential – this component addresses the effectiveness of our Catholic school in providing for a high quality student learning (Key indicators: 4/4)  
1. a. Valid knowledge of each learner  
b. Extend, enrich and develop students’ gifts and talents  
2. Highly effective structures, programs and practices that are informed and underpinned by contemporary educational research and the CEO Sydney Learning Framework and Position Papers  
3. Motivate and actively engage students as independent and interdependent learners, critical and creative thinkers and effective problem solvers  
4. Gathering, analysing and interpreting data to systematically track and reliably monitor student progress, to inform educational programs and practices, and to accurately identify students’ learning needs and potential. |
| Key Area 3: Pedagogy (2/7) | 3.1 Curriculum – this component addresses the effectiveness of our Catholic school in designing and implementing a contemporary and engaging curriculum (Key indicators: 2/4)  
1. Love of learning  
2. a. Develop successful learners, creative individuals and responsible citizens  
b. Learning is stimulating, challenging and enjoyable  
3.2 Diversity of Learners – this component addresses the effectiveness of our Catholic school in identifying and providing for the diversity of learners (Key indicators: 4/4)  
1. a. Cater for the needs of diverse learners  
b. processes exist to identify and respond to student diversity  
c. inclusive practices are embedded in all areas of school life  
d. transition processes and pathways are highly innovative and flexible with a clear |
### The System Document Analysis Summary

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>New Horizons - Strategic Improvement Plan 2016-2018 (1/5) + Principles for strategic planning + Looking Forward</th>
<th>Principles for strategic planning</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Strategic Plans will:</strong> (2/9)</td>
<td><strong>2. Be student-centred and focused on the formation of the whole child</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>3. Be inclusive and characterized by high expectations so that students will achieve their potential</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Looking Forward (2/6)</th>
<th>1. <strong>Our Students (2/5)</strong></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>a. A personalised and inclusive approach to student learning through diversification of teaching practice</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>b. Broadening the measures of learning success</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2. <strong>Our Schools (1/4)</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>a. A commitment to innovation in response to the changing needs of students</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Strategic Priority 2: Learning and Teaching (2/5)</th>
<th>2.1 Provide experiences of learning which engage, challenge, extend and empower students with the principles of Authentic Learning. (3/7)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1. Support for students across the range of diverse learning needs is enhanced</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2. There is a focus on guiding able students into academically challenging activities including, but not limited to, extension HSC courses</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>3. Parents/carers perceive that learning is challenging, engaging and meeting the needs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>APPENDICES</td>
<td>335</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>---</td>
<td>---</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### The System Document Analysis Summary

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Principals of Authentic Learning (2015) (5/5)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Introduction</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>It is rigorous and empowering</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>It enables them to become lifelong learners</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>It respects the dignity of learners and builds on their prior experience, personal interests and innate potential</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>It fosters critical thinking and the application of the skills and knowledge</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>It promotes the continual growth</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Students learn authentically when (3/7)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Engage in work that is rigorous and challenging</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Exercise choice as they pursue their own passions and interests</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Believe that they are capable learners and have high expectations of themselves</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Teachers enable authentic learning when they (7/12)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Create relevant and significant learning experiences, tailored to individual student difference</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>By providing challenge in an environment of high expectation and explicit teaching</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Foster creativity and imagination through open-ended tasks that stimulate curiosity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Provide challenges that require higher-order thinking and the application of learning in a variety of settings</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Encourage student ownership and responsibility for their own learning</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Demonstrate a commitment to both excellence and equity in learning</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Having high expectations of their own performance</td>
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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>School leaders enable authentic learning when they (2/6)</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Promote evidence-based experimentation in the development of authentic learning practices in curriculum, pedagogy and assessment</td>
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<tr>
<td>Strategically support learning-focused collaborative practice through the management of priorities and the provision of time, space and appropriate resources</td>
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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>System leaders enable authentic learning when they</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Strategically plan and resource the system's commitment to authentic learning</td>
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<tr>
<td>Work closely with individual schools,</td>
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<tr>
<td>Section</td>
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<tr>
<td>------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Introduction</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>For students (4/4)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>For school leaders (3/8)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>For teachers (3/8)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Principles of assessment (4/7)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Learning Framework (2005)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>All learners (4/11)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What do effective teachers do? (7/9)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### The System Document Analysis Summary

<p>| | | |</p>
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>a.</td>
<td>Design flexible learning experiences that enable all students to experience success</td>
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<tr>
<td>b.</td>
<td>Provide opportunities for students to exercise some discretion over the selection of activities related to their learning and the means and manner by which these activities will be done</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>c.</td>
<td>Adjust the content, process and product to meet the learning needs and interests of the student</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>d.</td>
<td>Utilise the virtual learning environment and promote confident use of a range of learning technologies</td>
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<tr>
<td>3.</td>
<td>Create a quality learning environment (2/5)</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>a.</td>
<td>Promote mutual respect that makes risk-taking safe</td>
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<tr>
<td>b.</td>
<td>Engage students in decisions about their learning</td>
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<tr>
<td>4.</td>
<td>Maintain high expectations (2/4)</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>a.</td>
<td>Communicate their high expectations to all students</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>b.</td>
<td>Provide learning experiences which appropriately challenge each student</td>
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<tr>
<td>5.</td>
<td>Use assessment to inform teaching and learning (1/4)</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>a.</td>
<td>Modify teaching and learning activities in response to formal and informal assessment information</td>
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<tr>
<td>6.</td>
<td>Enhance capacity to learn (2/6)</td>
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<tr>
<td>a.</td>
<td>Build students’ understanding of themselves as learners</td>
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<tr>
<td>b.</td>
<td>Build students’ resilience by understanding risk-taking as a path of learning</td>
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<tr>
<td>7.</td>
<td>Promote intellectual quality (2/6)</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>a.</td>
<td>Demonstrate passionate engagement with, and deep knowledge of, the subject</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>b.</td>
<td>Plan experiences and questions which engage students in higher order thinking</td>
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</table>

| eLearning with the iLe@rn Model (2008) | How do I learn best? (1/1) | Teachers and students learn best when they are engaged and challenged to learn, when they are equipped with the necessary skills |
and resources, and when they receive timely feedback to assist them to make a valued contribution to physical and virtual learning communities.

| What skills do I need to develop? (6/6) | • Questioning Skills  
• Communication and Collaboration Skills  
• Creative Thinking Skills  
• Reflective Skills  
• Critical Thinking and Problem Solving Skills  
• Multimodal Literacy Skills |

| Enrolment Policy (2012) | Rationale | Sydney Catholic schools to strive to respond to the needs of all students, within the constraints of the available teaching and material resources. They recognise the entitlement of all students to access educational opportunities that nurture the Catholic faith, expected life choices, cater for the disadvantaged, and challenge all students to reach their full potential. |

| Guiding Principles (1/11) | 2.7 Sydney Catholic schools are committed to the inclusion of children with special needs and will observe all relevant State and Federal legislation. |

| Explanatory Notes and Definitions (1/7) | 6.3 Special Needs: A student may be deemed as having special needs if, in endeavouring to offer the student equitable access to educational opportunities, modifications need to be made to curricula, assessment procedures, school premises or modes of course delivery, or if the provision of special equipment or suitably trained staff is required. |

| Enrolment Policy - Parent Brochure (2012) | Same information as above |

| Application to enrol at Sydney Catholic Schools (2016) | Page 6 out of 13 – a section title: Diverse Learning Needs |

| | Is your child a young person with (please tick as applicable) Note if you answer yes supporting documentation MUST be provided: 8/11 options: 'Exceptional abilities (giftedness in any domain)  
What was provided for you child in his/her previous school/preschool/educational setting?  
5/10: Adjusted teaching and learning strategies |
### Questions frequently asked by parents about Catholic education in Sydney (2015)

What provisions are made for students with diverse learning needs? (3 paragraphs – 3 sentences in 1st paragraph – mostly spoke about special needs)

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### Parent Charter for Sydney Catholic Schools (2015)

A document about parents and schools working in partnership, respectively and honestly. Encouragement of two-way communication.

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### Gifted Education policy (2015)

Based on:
- Archbishop’s Charter for Catholic Schools
- Melbourne Declaration on Educational Goals for Young People
- Australian Professional Standards for Teachers
- Gifted Education K-12 Position Paper
- Gagne’s Differentiated Model of Giftedness and Talent

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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1.</td>
<td>Rationale</td>
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<tr>
<td>2.</td>
<td>Guiding Principles (10)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.</td>
<td>Policy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>a.</td>
<td>Responsive to the needs of gifted students, schools have the responsibility to (9)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>b.</td>
<td>Responsive to the needs of gifted students, teachers have the responsibility to (10)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>c.</td>
<td>Responsive to the needs of gifted students, SCS regional offices have the responsibility to (5)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>d.</td>
<td>Responsive to the needs of gifted students, the SCS Teaching and Learning Team has the responsibility to (4)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.</td>
<td>Procedures</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.</td>
<td>Bases of Discretion</td>
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<tr>
<td>6.</td>
<td>Explanatory Notes and Definitions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7.</td>
<td>Supporting Documents</td>
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</table>
- Guidelines for identification  
- Characteristics of gifted students  
- Teaching and learning strategies  
- Assessment and reporting  
- Evaluation of programs and provisions  
- Support for schools | The Position Paper sets out the fundamental principles governing the education of gifted and talented students in the Catholic systemic schools of Sydney. It is intended to be a resource for Principals and school communities in responding to the educational needs of students identified as gifted. Its purpose is:  
- To set out some basic principles to inform schools' policies and practices  
- To establish a common language and shared understanding relating to gifted education  
- To provide direction for future action  
- To build upon the strong principles that underpin education in Catholic systemic schools |
| Gifted Education Glossary (2007) | Definition of terms commonly used in Gifted Education and supports the Gifted Education K-12 Position Paper |
| Gifted Education Framework (2009) | This Framework sets out guidelines and standards governing the education of gifted and talented students in Catholic systemic schools in Sydney. It is intended to provide a structure for Principals to lead their school communities in creating a culture of continuous improvement, with gifted and talented students as their focus. | 5 headings:  
A. Effective Teacher and Learning Strategies  
1. Identification  
2. Effective Provision in the Classroom  
3. Standards  
B. Enabling Curriculum Entitlement and Choice  
4. Enabling Curriculum Entitlement and Choice  
C. Assessment for Learning  
5. Assessment for Learning  
6. Transfer and Transition  
D. School Organisation  
7. Leadership  
8. Policy  
9. School Ethos and Pastoral Care  
10. Staff Development  
11. Resources  
12. Monitoring and Evaluation  
E. Strong Partnership beyond the school  
13. Engaging with the Community, Families and Beyond  
14. Learning beyond the Classroom  |
| Newman Gifted Program | The Newman Gifted Program commenced in 2012. The aim of the program is to | Documents:  
- Expression of Interest for Inclusion in Newman Program  
- Accreditation as a Newman School - |
The System Document Analysis Summary

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>improve provision for gifted and talented students by the systematic development of a whole school program in gifted education and thus provide a Kindergarten to Year 12 pathway for gifted and talented students. In achieving this, it is hoped that the second aim of increasing enrolment and retention of gifted students is achieved.</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Document submission</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Gifted and Talented Program Evaluation Tool K-10</td>
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<tr>
<td>o Differentiated Curriculum Options</td>
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<tr>
<td>▪ Identification and Needs Analysis</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>▪ Assessment for/as/of</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>▪ Curriculum Strategies</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>o Grouping Program Options</td>
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<tr>
<td>o Acceleration Program Options</td>
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<tr>
<td>o Social &amp; Emotional Program Options</td>
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