Submission to the Review of the Australian Professional Standards for Teachers

Re: Explicit recognition of gifted, high-ability and twice-exceptional learners within Focus Area 1.5

Position

The review of the Australian Professional Standards for Teachers provides an important opportunity to strengthen the clarity and inclusivity of the Standards without unnecessarily expanding their scope or increasing the expectations placed upon teachers.

We recommend that **gifted, high-ability and twice-exceptional learners be explicitly identified within the language of Focus Area 1.5 and its associated guidance**, ensuring that the existing commitment to meeting the learning needs of students across the full range of abilities is visible, understood and consistently applied.

This recommendation does not seek to introduce a new Standard, create an additional professional obligation or fundamentally alter the intent of Focus Area 1.5. Rather, it seeks to clarify which learners are already encompassed by its existing language.

1. Explicit language creates visibility

The current Focus Area 1.5, *Differentiate teaching to meet the specific learning needs of students across the full range of abilities*, already establishes an expectation that teachers recognise and respond to learner variability.

However, while the phrase "full range of abilities" is inclusive in principle, its broad wording leaves considerable room for interpretation.

In educational practice, references to diverse learning needs, additional support and inclusive teaching can be interpreted primarily through the lens of students experiencing barriers to accessing curriculum, or those requiring adjustments to meet expected learning outcomes.

These are essential responsibilities. However, they represent only part of the continuum of learner variability.

Gifted and high-ability learners may require adjustments that provide greater cognitive challenge, increased complexity, depth of inquiry, curriculum acceleration or opportunities to engage with learning beyond age-based expectations. Twice-

exceptional learners may require both advanced learning opportunities and targeted support for co-occurring disabilities or learning differences.

Naming these learners does not create their educational needs; it makes those needs visible within an existing professional expectation.

Explicit language supports a shared understanding of the Standards and reduces the risk that particular learners are unintentionally overlooked because their educational needs do not align with commonly assumed interpretations of additional support.

2. Inclusion must encompass the full continuum of learning needs

An inclusive education system recognises that students require different forms of provision to participate, progress and thrive.

For some learners, this involves additional scaffolding, adjustments, explicit instruction or targeted intervention to access and engage meaningfully with curriculum.

For others, it involves increased complexity, depth, pace, challenge or opportunities for advanced learning to ensure their educational potential is appropriately developed.

For twice-exceptional learners, these requirements may coexist.

These approaches are not competing priorities. They are complementary expressions of responsive teaching.

A student who requires additional support to access curriculum and a student who requires greater challenge to progress beyond existing curriculum expectations are both learners whose educational needs must be recognised.

The distinction is not whether one group is more deserving of attention, but whether the teaching provided is appropriately responsive to the learner.

Equity does not require identical educational provision. It requires teaching that responds meaningfully to different learning needs.

Explicitly identifying gifted and high-ability learners within the Standards would reinforce this understanding without diminishing existing commitments to disability inclusion, learning support or educational equity.

3. The Discussion Paper already recognises these learners

The AITSL Discussion Paper acknowledges gifted and talented learners and twice-exceptional learners in Improvement Area 1, under the potential action to strengthen guidance materials (p. 21).

It also recognises, within Improvement Area 5, that gifted and talented learners may require greater challenge, complexity and opportunities for advanced learning (p. 43).

These references are welcome and demonstrate that the needs of gifted learners are already relevant to the evidence and professional considerations informing the review.

However, their inclusion primarily within explanatory discussion and potential guidance creates an opportunity for greater consistency between the paper's recognition of learner diversity and the language used to communicate professional expectations.

If gifted and high-ability learners are recognised as part of the population for whom teachers must plan and respond, their inclusion should not depend solely upon whether individual teachers access supplementary guidance or interpret broad terminology in a particular way.

The Standards themselves should provide sufficient clarity to communicate that these learners are included.

4. Clarification rather than additional obligation

We recognise the importance of ensuring that the Australian Professional Standards for Teachers remain concise, accessible and practical across educational settings.

Our recommendation is therefore intentionally modest.

We are not advocating for a separate gifted education Standard, nor suggesting that every teacher must become a specialist in gifted education.

Instead, we recommend a clarification of existing language to explicitly recognise that responsive teaching applies to learners who require additional support, learners who require advanced challenge, and learners whose educational profiles encompass both.

This approach would strengthen the interpretive clarity of Focus Area 1.5 while preserving its original purpose.

It would also provide a clearer foundation for initial teacher education, professional learning, curriculum planning and teacher reflection, ensuring that the full range of learner variability is considered when educators interpret and apply the Standards.

5. Recommended wording

We recommend retaining the intent and structure of Focus Area 1.5 while strengthening its language.

Current wording:

Differentiate teaching to meet the specific learning needs of students across the full range of abilities.

Proposed wording:

Differentiate teaching to meet the specific learning needs of students across the full range of abilities, including those requiring additional learning support, gifted and high-ability learners, and twice-exceptional learners.

This proposed wording maintains the existing professional expectation while making the breadth of learners explicitly visible.

Should the review favour replacing the term "differentiate" with "responsive teaching", as contemplated in the Discussion Paper, we recommend that the same explicit recognition be retained.

Alternative wording:

Respond to the diverse learning needs of students across the full range of abilities, including those requiring additional learning support, gifted and high-ability learners, and twice-exceptional learners.

Either approach would preserve the central expectation of effective teaching while reducing ambiguity about the learners to whom it applies.

Conclusion

The Australian Professional Standards for Teachers should communicate clearly that every learner is entitled to teaching that recognises their educational needs and supports their progress.

For some students, this means providing the support necessary to access learning and experience success. For others, it means providing sufficient challenge, complexity and opportunity to extend their learning. For twice-exceptional learners, it may mean both.

These learners are already encompassed by the existing expectation to teach across the full range of abilities.

We are not asking AITSL to change who the Standards serve. We are asking that the language makes visible all those whom the Standards already serve.

A small, intentional clarification within Focus Area 1.5 would strengthen the accessibility, consistency and inclusive intent of the Standards, while affirming that educational equity requires responsiveness to the full continuum of learner needs.