1. **How long has the Ku-ring-gai Unit for Gifted and Talented Students been operating?**

From our school’s Strategic Plan in 1991 emerged an ambitiously bold project. The Plan proposed that, as a first step, a full class of academically gifted students should be established at St Ives North Public School.

The Department of School Education expressed its delight at the school’s initiative and to show its support, arranged for the project to be launched by the then Minister of Youth Affairs, The Honourable Virginia Chadwick.

2. **What is meant by the terms gifted and talented?**

St Ives North Public School has used the Gagné Model to guide the direction of curriculum design and teaching pedagogy since the establishment of the Gifted Unit. In 2005 the Department of Education and Training in NSW adopted the Gagné Model as the central focus of their revised Gifted and Talented Policy. At St Ives North the Gifted Unit has adopted this model with an understanding that the following definitions apply:-

**GIFTED:** Aptitude, potential, innate, natural, promise, ease.

**TALENT:** Developed skills, achievement, learned, trained, performance, and effort.

3. **How many classes are there in the Unit?**

There are currently four full time gifted classes. One class each in Year 3, 4, 5 and 6.

4. **How is the Gifted Unit different to an OC class?**

Firstly the program is a 4-year journey. Students progress through the G&T Unit over the course of 4 years. This is advantageous as each child’s strengths and learning abilities can be tracked and monitored. Teachers regularly meet to discuss students in the Unit and develop long-term goals and strategies so that students reach their full potential.

Secondly, the teachers have post-graduate qualifications and are experienced educators. Working as a ‘team’, students benefit from the combined expertise of these teachers who understand how to build and mould students into healthy and effective learners. The program has been operating for over 24 years and this means that this long-standing culture is able to benefit all students within the whole school context. Our focus is as much on the socio-emotional needs of the students, understanding that when this aspect is addressed, students are more able to learn most effectively.
Thirdly, we have seen the need to cater for our exceptional mathematicians by employing a specialist mathematics teacher. We call this special maths program ‘Wondermaths’. The program means that class teachers can team-teach with the specialist maths teacher to better meet the needs of all students.

Lastly, we have a very unique program called Mentoring. Students are asked to nominate an area of interest or passion. Adult mentors, sourced from our community, guide students through their learning each week for a couple of terms in years 5 and 6.

5. What are the benefits of gifted children being in a full time gifted class?

Almost every internationally recognised authority on the education and psychology of the gifted, recommends that intellectually gifted children should be grouped together for a significant proportion of the day. Ideally like-minded students should be grouped together full-time.

6. Do the teachers have any special qualifications?

We ensure that all teachers teaching on our gifted classes have post graduate qualifications. The demands on teaching gifted students means that we ensure that our most experienced and celebrated teachers are chosen to educate these students. We ensure that the Coordinator of the Gifted Unit is specially trained in gifted education. The teachers combine their many years of experience to form a team that meets regularly to ensure the best learning outcomes for their students.

7. How are students selected for entry into the Gifted Unit?

We use a combination of objective and subjective measures to identify suitable candidates. Early in Term 4 we hold testing days for entry into the Year 3 class for the following year. Students are led through a series of assessments ranging from General Abilities, Comprehension, Writing, and Mathematics. Combined with an application form, reports, and checklists that address subjective means of identification forms the basis for selection of our student candidates. At times we may have limited places for entry into years other than year 3. Only 15 places for entry into Year 3 are made available for applicants who are out of area and do not currently attend our school. There are no places offered for out of area students for entry in other grades should a place become available.

We are keen to ensure that students are appropriately placed so that they can be in a learning environment that best suits their needs. We like to offer places to students who are enthusiastic learners, curious about their environment, creative thinkers, who will be able to cope with the rigour of the program. The students are not a homogenous group of students, but we find are individuals who have different strengths and abilities. They will have an ability to learn both quickly and easily.

8. How can I gain a place for my child into the Unit?

Applications become open in late July each year. Application forms can be downloaded from the school website under the link for the gifted unit. Testing is then administered in October.
9. **When is the Testing Day for entry into the Unit?**

Early in Term 4 we administer testing for entry into the Year 3 class for the following year for both in and out of area students. Our students in other years who wish to apply should a place become available will also be tested in October. However there may not be any places for entry into years other than year 3 and these places are reserved for St Ives North PS students only.

10. **What curriculum is followed and how is it differentiated?**

The focus in the Unit is on a differentiated curriculum. We ensure that the core mandatory curriculum is covered, however due to a routine of pre-testing, students are not expected to re-learn what they have already mastered. If students show competence, learning moves quickly so that students remain engaged with the learning process. Students are made aware of their learning style and preference and this is used to guide them so that they can be more effective and powerful learners. Thinking skills are explicitly taught and an expectation of the depth and rigour of reflection on a given topic or concept is considered a normal part of the learning process. Collaboration, resilience in learning and a conscious understanding of the way one best learns is encouraged. Independence of knowing how to learn is a feature of the program. Setting goals for learning and an understanding that learning is all about reaching ‘personal bests’ is a key focus for our students. The curriculum is more than just imparting knowledge, but rather about developing an attitude towards future success as a learner in the twenty-first century. Creativity is fostered and encouraged and an inbuilt understanding that often the most unique ideas are the ones where innovation occurs. Learning about oneself, and an understanding of the unique ways gifted students learn is openly discussed to ensure the best learning outcomes for our students. A mature sense of self is the outcome and a confidence of what is possible is the exciting consequence of such initiatives in our program.

11. **Are the students integrated in the school?**

Yes. The Gifted Unit is not a separate entity. The classrooms are spread across the physical space of the school. The classes are integrated across the grade and stage by dealing with similar topics, excursions, music, sport, assembly and learning opportunities. In Year 3, the first year within the Gifted Unit, a social skills program is shared across the whole grade to help all students integrate into the primary school experience.

12. **What opportunities are offered to the students in the Unit?**

Some of the opportunities include:

- Strings Orchestra
- Bands
- Choir
- Chess Club
- Interschool Sporting Competitions
- Debating and Public Speaking
- Dance Groups
- Environment Group
- Tournament of Minds
- UNSW Competitions
- Sydney Youth writing Competition
- Maths Olympiad Competition
- Wondermaths Mathematics program
- Robotics Program
- Mentoring Program
- Future Problem Solving
- Enrichment Workshops
- Stagecoach
- 1:1 Laptop Program

We encourage a balanced approach to academic learning and co-curricula opportunities. We acknowledge the benefits of a comprehensive education where children can enjoy many aspects of what school life can offer.
13. What High Schools do the students go to after Primary School?

Our students go on to a variety of learning environments for High School. Some enjoy attending their local comprehensive high school, many are offered places in a Selective High School, and many are offered scholarship positions at private schools. We find that students who have developed a love of learning and are intrinsically motivated will successfully achieve in any educational context if supported well in their home environment. Our students and parents give us positive feedback about how well their child has been prepared for their high school experience.

14. Who can I contact if I have any other questions about the Ku-ring-gai Unit for Gifted and Talented Students?

Contact our school office on 02 9449 3206 or 02 9144 7743. The Coordinator for the Ku-ring-gai Unit for Gifted and Talented Students, Carmela May, is on class teaching, but will call back if the administration staff cannot answer your questions.

(Prepared by Carmela May, Deputy Principal and Coordinator of the Ku-ring-gai Unit for Gifted and Talented Students. 2011)