“They enter the room with trepidation, hearts full of anxious anticipation and minds ready to reach out in hopes of being allowed to stretch. The students of class 3B have been identified as having high cognitive potential and they come from some fifteen different school settings. Their cultural diversity is represented not only in ethnicity, but also in educational diversity of learning backgrounds. They enter Year 3 with their own unique talents and their own unique areas of challenge. For some there is almost an air of cynicism ... for they also come equipped with past disappointments and their sense of frustration with the formal learning process to date. For so many, the past three years of schooling have been an educational experience void of real rigor and challenge ... they don’t expect too much from school and yet they enter this new educational setting with hopes of being offered something different – in those first few weeks they wonder if they’re really going to get it!

Early weeks demand attention to integration and socialisation, as one would expect with any change. So what makes this class uniquely different? Their intensity of passion and emotional responses are more heightened and their quick wit and skill levels are evidence of their qualitative differences compared to mainstream children. Their ability to work at an accelerated pace, their agility to process learning content and to tackle abstract ideas is easily evident! Perhaps though, it is more often their heightened sensitivity and need for social identification with similar minded peers that sets them apart. They crave understanding, not only of their cognitive learning needs, but also of the aspects of their lives that clearly differentiate them socially and emotionally from same age peers.

Parents have chosen this change of schooling for many reasons, none the least being their desire to have the social and affective aspects of their children understood and catered for. These children are so often starved of a special friend to relate to, or of a teacher who truly appreciates their unique differences ... they need acknowledgment of their special needs. The Unit at St Ives North Public School not only identifies and acknowledges the qualitative differences of these children, but also responds to those needs with a differentiated curriculum, expanded learning experiences which challenge their cognitive levels while respecting the diversity of abilities and talents of individuals within the gifted range. The program seeks to truly match the child’s cognitive, social and emotional range to ensure a level of rigor that is significantly differentiates, making it unsuitable for mainstream students, yet highly appropriate for the learning styles of our special clients.

Teaching gifted and talented children requires the understanding, respect and the acknowledgment that these children deserve the qualitative curriculum differentiation and provision to allow their abstract, divergent and creative thinking processes to thrive in the learning environment.”