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**HOUSE OF  
REPRESENTATIVES**

STANDING COMMITTEE ON EDUCATION AND TRAINING

**Reference: Education of boys**

THURSDAY, 11 APRIL 2002

GRIFFITH

PUBLIC HEARING AND SCHOOL FORUM

BY AUTHORITY OF THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

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**HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES  
STANDING COMMITTEE ON EDUCATION AND TRAINING**

**Thursday, 11 April 2002**

**Members:** Mr Bartlett (*Chair*), Mr Cox, Mrs Elson, Ms Gambaro, Mr Johnson, Mrs May, Mr Pearce, Ms Plibersek, Mr Sawford and Mr Sidebottom

**Supplementary members (Education of Boys Inquiry):** Mr Cadman, Mr Wilkie

**Members in attendance:** Mr Bartlett, Mr Cox, Mr Pearce, Mr Sawford and Mr Wilkie

**Terms of reference for the inquiry:**

To inquire into and report on:

- the social, cultural and educational factors affecting the education of boys in Australian schools, particularly in relation to their literacy needs and socialisation skills in the early and middle years of schooling; and
- the strategies which schools have adopted to help address these factors, those strategies which have been successful and scope for their broader implementation or increased effectiveness.

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**Committee met at 9.41 a.m.****EVERETT, Mr Mark, District Superintendent, Griffith, New South Wales Department of Education and Training****SUTTON, Mr John, Assistant Director-General, New South Wales Department of Education and Training**

**CHAIR**—Thank you for inviting us into your school today. I declare open this public hearing of the inquiry into the education of boys. Thank you to the Principal of Yenda Public School, Mr Andrew Hooper, for agreeing to host the committee's visit today. I also thank Mark Everett, John Sutton and everyone else for their assistance this morning.

Although we are guests of Yenda Public School today and we greatly appreciate that, I am obliged to remind you that the proceedings here today are legal proceedings of the parliament and warrant the same respect as proceedings in the House. The deliberate misleading of the committee may be regarded as contempt of parliament. It seems a bit superfluous to have to say that, but it is part of the system. The committee prefers that all evidence be given in public but if at any stage you should wish to give evidence in private please ask to do so and the committee will consider your request. Perhaps each of you might like to make some introductory comments and then we will throw it open to questions.

**Mr Everett**—Would you like me to give an overview of the Griffith district?

**CHAIR**—That would be very helpful.

**Mr Everett**—The Griffith district takes in 49 schools across an area of 40,000 square kilometres. Griffith is central to that district. The other schools within the district would be within about 150 kilometre radius of Griffith. The district services the main towns of West Wyalong, Lake Cargelligo, Hillston, Leeton, Narrandera, Griffith and Coleambally and, surrounding those centres, a number of smaller villages. Within the district we have 25 schools which are of a P5, P6 classification, which means that they have a teaching principal as we do here in Yenda. The schools range in size from eight students at Naradhan up to, in the primary sector, 500 students at Griffith Public School and in the high school area we range in size from around about 270 at Yanco Agricultural High School, which is a fully residential high school, up to 740 students at Wade High School.

Within the district there are some 8,500 students, of whom 4,900 are in the primary sector and 3,600 are in the secondary area. The enrolment balance between male and female is roughly fifty-fifty. Within the district we have an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander population of seven per cent. We have a non-English speaking background of 8.5 per cent, which is quite unusual for a country district. That does reflect the multicultural nature of particularly Griffith and Leeton. Within the district about 810 teachers serve the 8,500 students. Of those 810 teachers we do have a very significant number of beginning teachers. In excess of 100 of those 810 are in their first two years of teaching.

In terms of the particular regions within the district, the socioeconomic situation within Griffith ranges from the well-to-do down to quite low socioeconomic status. There is a similar

situation in Leeton. Across the other country towns, the average income would be significantly below the national average income for most families. We are in a situation within the Griffith district where we are experiencing the decline in rural population. That is certainly occurring outside the centres of Griffith and Leeton, although we are seeing some increases in some of our public schools in other locations, such as Lake Cargelligo, West Wyalong and Hillston, as a result of the decline of other educational systems within those towns.

Let me talk a little about the performance of boys and girls. I will focus on literacy and numeracy in the primary school where we get a clear breakdown of the various gender performances. The district is performing at slightly below the state average in both literacy and numeracy. In 1990 we were right on the state average in the district and we slipped a little bit in 1991. Our performance of girls and boys are within a couple of percentage points of each other, with boys performing slightly more poorly than our girls.

Within ELLA and SNAP, the English Language and Literacy Assessment and the Secondary Numeracy Assessment Program, which apply to year 7 and year 8, similar situations occur. We are slightly below state average in overall performance. Our boys are performing slightly more poorly than girls in numeracy and in literacy. The performance of boys in numeracy is closer to that of girls than is the case with literacy.

At the School Certificate and Higher School Certificate level we do not actually get a breakdown or a gender comparison in those performances. Anecdotally I would say that of the top performing students that we have had within the district in recent times, girls are more predominant than are boys. If you are happy with that, that gives you a bit of a snapshot of the district.

**CHAIR**—Thank you, Mark. That is very helpful. John, would you like to add anything?

**Mr Sutton**—I have just a couple of comments as to why I am here. Your focus today will be more on the district and schools in Mark's district than on the state level that I represent. My position with the department is one of Assistant Director-General. I have specific responsibilities for distance education across New South Wales and for rural education matters across New South Wales. Predominantly, my job is an operational one relating to 12 districts west of the Great Dividing Range, ranging across Armidale, Tamworth, Moree, Dubbo, Orange, Bathurst, Wagga, Albury, Deniliquin and Griffith. Hence, I work with Mark and the other 11 district superintendents in a managerial sense. My interest with them is, of course, in the outcomes produced in schools. We spend a lot of our time focusing on just what is happening at basic skills testing levels across the districts and what are the improvements and deficits et cetera.

I am aware that the department has made a formal submission to you in terms of boys education and gender equity, and I do not intend to go over that. I have been provided with some very brief comments, in terms of trends in literacy over the last five or six years, which I will just quickly read into the record. It indicates that in year 3 literacy, as measured by the basic skills testing program, the mean scores for both boys and girls in New South Wales have risen between 1997 and 2001. While the girls continue to outperform boys, the gap has fluctuated and is now smaller than it was in 1997. In terms of national benchmark outcomes in year 3 reading, 89.6 per cent of boys reached the benchmark in 1999 compared with 92.7 per cent of girls. This

result for New South Wales boys was 5.1 per cent above the national average, compared with 2.9 per cent for girls. In year 5 reading, in terms of national benchmark, 88.6 per cent of boys in 1999 reached the benchmark, compared with 92 per cent of girls. The result for New South Wales boys was 5.2 per cent, again above the national average, compared with 3.6 per cent for girls. Obviously, there is progress being made in closing the gap. The reasons for that progress still need a considerable amount of investigation before we can come up with any conclusive statement on why that is happening, but it is happening.

**CHAIR**—Thank you. That is an encouraging thing. Perhaps I will start the questioning, and then hand over to my colleagues. Mark, could you outline some of the programs that are being undertaken in the area to address gender differences? I am particularly interested in the peer leader and middle school program at West Wyalong. Perhaps you could explain how it works and the effectiveness with which it addresses the disengagement that often occurs with boys at middle school level.

**Mr Everett**—I will be happy to do that. West Wyalong High School and the relationship that exists across all of the West Wyalong schools through the middle schooling program is quite an outstanding example of a series of schools that are responding to particular issues that they have. The peer leadership program of which you speak is one that I have been particularly interested in for what it is actually achieving. What West Wyalong High School actually did was identify that boys are avoiding certain engagements within the school, whether they be in leadership, in school performance or in putting themselves forward for all sorts of particular roles within the school. The school then identified a number of young males from year 7 through to year 10 who were seen as peer leaders and who were identified as young people who obviously had some real potential to perform at high levels in a variety of things, whether it be academic, sporting, cultural or whatever. They identified these young fellows and they teamed them up with mentors. I am not absolutely sure whether they were male mentors or whether female teachers were also involved. In meetings with these young fellows every three weeks, they would talk to them about the sorts of behaviours and the sorts of achievements that they were capable of and they would provide encouragement to these young people to actually achieve at personal best.

It is interesting that the students, when selected, were actually given the option of bailing out if they did not want to participate. Not one student bailed out. It was put to them in terms of, 'We have a responsibility here to be doing something for males within this school. You have been selected to support us in that.' Each of those young people took on that responsibility willingly.

What we saw were these young people who were seen as peer leaders in classrooms, achieving personal best, asking questions of the teacher and performing as we would want our young men to perform in a classroom. They were also encouraged to participate in a similar way in the playground, on the sporting field, in the school choir or in the school band or whatever other pursuit that the particular student had a talent in. The reports back on that particular program have been very encouraging. Certainly parents have commented very favourably on the difference that they have seen in their young men. Also, it has had an impact within classrooms. We have students sitting in classrooms saying, 'If young John can participate like that, then it must be okay for me to participate like that.' So that program has been particularly effective.

The thing that appeals to me most of all about that is that it is a program that could be put in place very easily anywhere. There is nothing special in terms of resourcing. I suppose you do need to find a number of teachers who are prepared to mentor it. But in terms of outcome it is really quite a program.

**CHAIR**—Mark, what about any measurable outcomes in terms of, say, reduced suspension rates or increased retention rates and those sorts of things amongst boys from middle school on to year 11?

**Mr Everett**—In West Wyalong High School, we have a school that has quite a number of practices, as I indicated at the outset. They really do identify the issues that they have within the school and they go about finding initiatives and putting in place strategies to address those. They are very proactive. So the suspension rates and the discipline issues within that school, as a result of that attitude, are at a very low level, anyway. I certainly do not have any data in terms of the impact of that particular program, but I feel very confident in saying that that program, in combination with the other things that are happening there, have that school in a situation where there is very little disengagement that leads to suspension in other similar—

**CHAIR**—Are your retention rates at West Wyalong higher than in comparable high schools?

**Mr Everett**—West Wyalong has gone up in enrolment significantly this year. That is as a result of an exodus from the local Catholic school to West Wyalong High School. I think that is a reflection of the absolute confidence that the community have in that particular school.

**Mr Sutton**—There is a very interesting history to that particular structure in West Wyalong. It is unique in New South Wales. There is no other structure where we have effectively brought the primary school and the high school together as well as we have there. But it was a program that grew out of those two schools 10 years ago. They wanted to do that. It was not an imposed structure that went to them. Each teacher in both schools supported it very strongly. The teachers union opposed it just as fiercely, but the two staff said, ‘We are going to do this.’ They have since brought in the smaller schools surrounding, such as Tallimba and Wyalong.

**Mr Everett**—And Burcher.

**Mr Sutton**—Those two and Burcher are all now part of that structure. They have made it work with two outstanding principals. One of them has been there since the inception and the other one now in the primary school is a really outstanding woman who knows a lot about education. It has been a process that just begs someone to write it up in terms of what it has done for country kids.

**Mr Everett**—Just to give you an outline of that particular structure, every Thursday the Burcher, Tallimba, Wyalong and West Wyalong students in years 5 and 6 attend the high school and are taught within the high school environment. There have been some concerns for quite some time about that transition period in terms of the continuity of academic development, in particular across years 5 to 8. The particular structure that has been put in place in West Wyalong is actually having quite an impact in terms of continuity of learning and the whole issue of transition from a primary environment into a secondary environment.



**CHAIR**—Is there a summary available? Has someone written a report on this? Perhaps you could make it available to the committee.

**Mr Sutton**—I think there is a summary available—we will hunt it out—because 18 months ago both principals gave a presentation to the Isolated Children’s Parents Association. It was somewhat of a sales job, but it gave a very good overview of the whole program.

**CHAIR**—That would be helpful, thank you.

**Mr SAWFORD**—John, since you are here, it is an opportunity to ask a bureaucrat a question that I have asked all bureaucrats, in both the public and the private systems in Australia, and also every union representative. I noticed your reference to the teachers union just a moment ago. In 1997, in all Australian schools, it was agreed to introduce the policy of a gender equity framework. The question I asked everyone is: why was that introduced when there is no quantitative evidence whatsoever to back it up?

**Mr Sutton**—I think it is in response to impressions that people have of the system. Those impressions can come from a wide variety of sources. They can be coming from basic skills testing programs, from other testing programs—

**Mr SAWFORD**—But they did not come from that.

**Mr Sutton**—No. Really, I cannot answer your question. I do not know the yes or no answer to it. It seems to me that there was quite a head of steam, though, in dealing with gender equity. Of course, that goes back to our girls education strategy, which was put in place in 1984-85. I cannot answer why. How many other bureaucrats could?

**Mr SAWFORD**—None. It is a bit of a worry that a policy has been introduced into Australian schools, for which there is no quantitative evidence to support its introduction. I find that quite amazing. I could also ask a question, which is really off the topic, about the national goals in schooling, which were introduced in 1998. As an educator, I find the incoherence of the philosophy, the processes supported, the strategies supported and the outcomes absolutely amazing. I have seen year 7 kids write better things. I sometimes wonder, in terms of general policies, whether—and this school is another example—in some ways you trust the teachers and the principals a lot more than you do the system, in the sense that at least the successful ones are balanced.

People’s responses to those policies in schools are interesting as well, in the sense that the good schools never seem to mention them. If you question them on the structure of their educational program, they do fulfil the aim that education is the balancing of differences. In some institutions—particularly teachers unions and with all the bureaucrats who did strong presentations on gender equity—it was always a one-sided view. For example, learning theories of nature were rejected—the differences between boys and girls were totally rejected. Nurture was the ‘in’ theory. Qualitative research was the only research referred to. No reference was made to quantitative research. Presentation skills were highly praised, but organisational skills were diminished; gross motor skills diminished, fine motor skills promoted; continuous assessment promoted, examination testing systems diminished; expression promoted, stoicism

and retention diminished; collaboration promoted, competition diminished; and structure not as promoted, unstructured lessons promoted—in other words, learning at your own pace.

It seems to me that, if you wanted to deliberately set up an education system in favour of girls, you could do it very easily. If you wanted to set up an education system in favour of boys, you could do that very easily, too, by simply drawing a line between both. In New South Wales the differential rates are the best in the country. Is that because there is a more balanced view in this state, and why is that so? Is it because it is more traditional? What is the key thing in New South Wales that makes New South Wales different from all the other states?

**Mr Sutton**—Before I respond to that, may I just go back to the question about why there is a gender equity policy. When I began teaching, female teachers were paid considerably less than I was paid. Gender equity has been an issue in Australian society for the last 40 years, to my knowledge, and I think it is an issue in society worldwide. I would be surprised if schools in Australian society did not reflect that interest in gender equity. Possibly that is the reason for the programs that we are seeing come forth at the present time.

**Mr SAWFORD**—But equal pay for women was achieved in the mid-1960s.

**Mr Sutton**—Yes, but has gender equity not been an ongoing theme in Australian society?

**Mr SAWFORD**—Yes.

**Mr COX**—It was achieved in 1974.

**Mr SAWFORD**—Was it 1974?

**Mr Sutton**—I simply make that point that that has been an ongoing issue in Australian society and one you would expect Australian schools to have an interest in and a policy on.

**Mr SAWFORD**—It still does not justify the introduction of a program where no-one can justify why it has been introduced.

**Mr Everett**—In terms of where New South Wales is at, my observation would be that the basic skills testing program and the follow-up materials behind that—

**Mr SAWFORD**—When was that introduced?

**Mr Sutton**—In 1991.

**Mr Everett**—There is very strong gender awareness within that particular program in the stimulus material that is tested, and in the gender balance in the phrasing and so on.

**Mr WILKIE**—Sorry, what was this testing?

**Mr Everett**—Basic skills testing. I feel that that would be having some impact on reducing the gap.

**Mr SAWFORD**—A librarian said to me in New Zealand that the choice of literature that she was aware of that was available for boys in schools was much narrower than it was for girls. Is that a problem here in New South Wales schools?

**Mr Everett**—You will see a lot of schools addressing that, in terms of the material they are putting on their shelves and in terms of the purchase of materials. Andrew said this morning that, in restocking this library, they were issues for him and for his staff.

**Mr SAWFORD**—Has that been a changed emphasis?

**Mr Everett**—That is a discussion that has been around in schools for quite some time. I have been aware of people wanting to address the issue for quite some time, not only in the primary environment but also in the environment I come from—the secondary environment—as well. The material on the shelves needs to be gender balanced or, as far as is possible, gender neutral.

**Mr SAWFORD**—Just one last question, to put on the record what we heard outside. Would you repeat what was said outside about the influence of Charles Sturt University on teacher training?

**Mr Sutton**—I made the comment outside that I felt that, in my travels around western New South Wales, the Charles Sturt University graduates were some of the best prepared young people I have seen come into teaching in many, many years. In some respects I attributed that to the program which was initiated by Charles Sturt University some eight or nine years ago, whereby, when they moved to a four-year degree course, all of their fourth year students did an internship as part of their final year of training. That internship was for a term in a school. I did mention also the benefits of that in terms of getting those young people into country schools, and achieving a willingness on their part to come back and work in country schools. I also pointed out the flow-on effect while they are in the school of having another teacher who is class free. This allows for a lot of training and development activities, or planning and policy development activities, to go on. I think that the Charles Sturt University is turning out outstanding graduates for us at the present time.

**Mr SAWFORD**—Are there any particular attributes of the Faculty of Education that you would like to put on the record?

**Mr Sutton**—I think that the leadership of the Faculty of Education is very soundly based. I think it is a very pragmatic approach and one that understands education well. I attribute that to the work of Professor Bob Meyenn, who has been in charge of Charles Sturt education faculty for quite some time now. He seems to have achieved a very good process of reviewing the courses and tailoring them to meet the needs of young people entering the teaching profession.

I think there is also a mix—and I talk predominantly about the Bathurst campus—of young teachers in there, working with established academics. We have also had a process in place between the department and the university now for some 10 years, whereby we nominate particular practising teachers to go in and lecture. We might have an exchange of staff over a 12-month, 18-month or two-year period, whereby someone from the university will come out and work in our schools and one of our outstanding practising teachers—usually at middle

management level—will go in and actually lecture. We are getting great spin-offs from that as well.

**Mr PEARCE**—Mark, I think you mentioned that your particular region covers 49 schools. I would like to know two things. When those teachers from the 49 schools get together for in-service or training sessions, does the issue of education of boys—and the differentials in relation to that, and the social and cultural types of impacts—surface much? If so, what types of programs or strategies have you deployed in this particular region, in terms of training, that might assist teachers?

**Mr Everett**—It does not surface. Those agendas are very full of all sorts of things. To be honest with you, when a group of principals comes together for a meeting, we do not get into a real lot of depth on issues such as that. What we do do is take a team of people from district office around the schools each year on a follow-up program. We have done that on School Certificate and Higher School Certificate performance. During those meetings we definitely do look at the performance of boys and the performance of girls; we look at the enrolment of boys in particular subjects and girls in particular subjects so that we get a feel for what is actually occurring there. We have done a similar thing with the basic skills testing. The district office team go around so that they are more in touch with the issues that are there in schools, such that they are then more responsive to the needs of schools. Schools also get an opportunity to highlight for us some of the more effective practices that they have within the school, and then we are in a position where we can write that up and provide it to all schools, so that good ideas are being disseminated out there.

This year—actually, right at the moment—we are in the middle of the English Language Literacy Assessment Program and the Secondary Numeracy Assessment Program follow-up. This afternoon we are at West Wyalong, with all of the feeder primary schools and the high school and the district office team, reviewing what ELLA and SNAP data is providing to us—in terms of the power of it—to provide some intervention where it is needed. Once again, we will be talking there about the sorts of good practices that are occurring in that school for both boys and girls. We will be documenting that and providing it back to schools. That is the approach that is taken within this district to discussing the issues and disseminating the good ideas.

**Mr PEARCE**—In your experience, is that similar for other districts within New South Wales?

**Mr Everett**—Different districts will take different approaches, depending on geography and depending on the expertise of the leadership of the school. That is an approach that I have adopted in my time in this district, because I have felt that that is the way that I need to address the particular patch that I look after.

**Mr Sutton**—It is a fairly general practice that Mark is describing, certainly in the districts that I have responsibility for—and, until the end of last year, that was the entire country area other than Sydney and Newcastle. That approach, of taking the data we have—and we have a much richer supply of data now than we have ever had on outcomes—and sitting down with schools and their teaching staff, is having a tremendous impact and bringing about quite considerable change. We are now able to pinpoint, at the secondary level, a faculty within a school that is not performing. Mark's discussions this afternoon could well be, for sake of

example, taking English and saying, 'In terms of value added, maths and science are all up here, but the English faculty is here. What are the practices that are operating in the school to cause that?' or, 'In terms of outcomes, the boys' outcomes are here and the girls' outcomes are here. What are the factors that are influencing this?'

**Mr PEARCE**—We come back to an earlier question from my colleague here. Do you think that that is one component that is a factor in the difference in New South Wales performance to the rest of the country?

**Mr Sutton**—The data available to us has never been better. The treatment of it has never been more rigorous. You could well expect that that is having an impact on outcomes for kids.

**Mr Everett**—For me, it is an issue of increasing awareness. If people are aware of the impact of their teaching and their programs then they are going to be more inclined to adjust their practice. We are putting it on the table, and not just with the principal but with staff who are supervising programs and so on, such that they are fully aware of where they are in the full scheme of things, where their students are performing, where there might be some gaps and what they would need to do about it.

**Mr Sutton**—If we end up with resistance to that approach—in other words, teachers saying, 'I am not going to sit down with the district superintendent and go through this at half-past three; it is my time off'—where we are finding significant cause for concern, we then have three other approaches we can put into the school. We can put in a curriculum development team, we can put in a review of a particular faculty or practice within the school, or we can put in a full management review where we think the school is dysfunctional. What Mark is doing is a first step in saying to the school, 'This is what you are achieving. These are the areas of strength within your school and the areas of weakness. Let us sort them out to see what is causing all of that.' We will try to work with them to develop and, if not, we can go into other practices.

**Mr WILKIE**—How many times would you actually do that?

**Mr Sutton**—In terms of dysfunctional schools, I have approved about four full management reviews in the last two years. They are the exception but, in terms of a curriculum development team, we would put in hundreds across the state. That is not to say that every time we do that there is a significant problem, but we know that a school is asking for and needs advice and support in a particular area.

**Mr WILKIE**—That is all right. The reason I asked that is that a lot of places say they have something in place to deal with problems, but if you actually ask if they have actually implemented anything you find they have not done it. It is good to see that it is happening.

**Mr Sutton**—I regularly get the numbers of each that we are putting in place. The program support teams are the most frequent, and there are hundreds of those across New South Wales annually. The curriculum review is next, but it is still in the hundreds when the program is done. The full management review is less likely to happen.

**Mr Everett**—With the school program review, it is worthy of note that a lot of schools are actually putting up their hands to say, ‘We would like to have one of those in our school. We identify we have an issue and we have applied whatever resources and thinking we possibly can to it and we have not come up with an answer. We would appreciate some external input into this.’ The school program review team is an external team that comes into the school and reviews the practice, procedure, policy or whatever and then makes some recommendations on that. Where schools are struggling to find an answer, the school program review can provide for them some additional expertise that can assist them. In this district I had two schools last year who put up their hands for reviews, and the likelihood of a couple more this year.

**Mr Sutton**—Can I read to you the types of things that we are doing in program reviews and curriculum support teams. In the Albury district, gifted and talented students; in Armidale, student welfare and teaching and learning in two separate schools; student welfare and special education in Bathurst in a number of schools; teaching and learning in Deniliquin; student welfare in Dubbo and Griffith; in Maitland there was a whole run of reviews of teaching science and maths; in Tamworth, school community relations; in Farrer Memorial Agricultural High School we looked at boarding house welfare and student welfare. So they cover a whole range of issues once the school has either put up its hand or we have said there is need for some support.

**Mr WILKIE**—The schools obviously do not see it as a threat?

**Mr Sutton**—No.

**Mr Everett**—They might see the management review as a threat.

**Mr Sutton**—Once you get to that stage the relationships have generally broken down entirely within a school.

**Mr COX**—With the full management review, in how many of those four cases has the principal been replaced?

**Mr Sutton**—One at the moment, and that is a dogfight.

**Mr COX**—So that is difficult to do because of the—

**Mr Sutton**—It is very difficult to do because the management reviews are not a means of assessing the competence of the principal. Indeed, once they get into that level, once we find that there is something that is reportable or the efficiency of the principal comes under question, then we stop the management review and we go down a disciplinary line rather than a review line. In one that was aborted we have now moved the principal out of the school involved. They can be dysfunctional without it being entirely the principal’s fault.

**Mr COX**—What sorts of things would make them dysfunctional without the principal being responsible for it?

**Mr Sutton**—Generally there is a de facto leadership group within the staff that is not pulling along with the principal. You often see it in schools where there are long-established staff

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members. In one such review we had a group of head teachers who were completely managing the school to their own advantage. In that case we moved out each of the head teachers. The principal moved of his own accord and we recruited a new principal.

**Mr COX**—When you say ‘running the school to the their own advantage’, what do you mean by that?

**Mr Sutton**—They were restricting choice to the subjects that they wanted to teach. They were intimidating younger teachers who wanted to move into non-traditional areas as far as that school was concerned. They were restricting the options of teachers in terms of what they would teach within a subject. It was, ‘We have always done it this way and we will continue to do it this way. We will intimidate you if you are new and you come here and want to change things. What is more, we will make sure that we get rid of successive principals who do not let us do what we want.’

**Mr COX**—Charming.

**Mr Sutton**—No, not charming.

**Mr COX**—I have seen one of those.

**Mr Sutton**—So the review was well worth doing.

**Mr COX**—Earlier in your introductory remarks you said that there had not been enough work done to identify what were the reasons for closing the gender gap. Was there a point at which a process was started with a view to closing the gender gap?

**Mr Sutton**—I cannot be specific about that. I cannot answer that. I think Tom Alegounarias from the department spoke to you about those issues, did he not?

**CHAIR**—Was that in Sydney?

**Mr Sutton**—Yes.

**CHAIR**—It was in more general terms.

**Mr Sutton**—I cannot be more specific about it.

**Mr COX**—So you cannot tell us whether specific problems were identified at that point apart from just the raw figures.

**Mr Sutton**—Certainly coming out of our basic skills work, that is where the identification of the issue came from.

**Mr COX**—But there was no other work done at that point that identified the causes.

**Mr Sutton**—There might well have been work done that I am not aware of. I just cannot comment on it.

**Mr COX**—Over that period of time has there been an increase in the real per capita funding per student?

**Mr Sutton**—I cannot answer that question.

**Mr WILKIE**—I am going on to a totally different tack, so if anyone has any questions relating to this I am quite happy to wait.

**Mr SAWFORD**—It is all yours.

**Mr WILKIE**—It is more directed at Mark because it is more a senior school issue. We have had a lot of evidence to suggest that the way the curriculum is actually measured often favours girls as opposed to boys. For example, with end of year examinations there is often a lot more essay work rather than straight maths, physics or chemistry-type assessment. Boys often use computers very well during the year but are not allowed to use them in their exams. Has there been anything done to address those sorts of issues in New South Wales? I know this is a very broad question.

**Mr Everett**—I can speak a little from experience as a secondary school principal, and not too long ago. There has been a significant change occurring in curriculum to now include particularly the vocational education and training subjects. My observation would certainly be that that has provided another avenue in which boys can be very successful that was not there before.

I believe that that particular introduction to the curriculum has put a lot of our boys back on track. I can think of many examples where it has motivated male students to stay on at school and complete their Higher School Certificate. Boys who had become pretty disengaged in junior school and to a large extent were difficult to manage saw a great deal of value in the vocational education subjects and performed very strongly in them. Similarly, though, I have seen boys in those traditional academic areas where there has been a lot of essay writing and a lot of theoretical work who have been very successful as well. Similarly, girls have been very successful in vocational education, but I do tend to feel that the vocational education subjects have provided more to male students than perhaps to female students in terms of that re-engagement in the senior end of high school.

**Mr WILKIE**—I suppose the question is more related to assessment of the traditional curriculum where in the past, for example, boys might be given a maths problem to do in an exam situation at the end of the year and they would sit down, work out that problem and come up with an answer. It would be very clear-cut—sit down, da-da-da-da, there is the answer—whereas there has been a suggestion that often in the assessment process now there is far more involved in an essay type situation. It would be, ‘Write an essay around a problem,’ rather than just have the problem itself that you would solve. The suggestion has been made that often boys have difficulty trying to do that in an exam situation because they are very good at doing a problem but not at putting it into an essay type context. That was one thing.



**Mr Everett**—I understand what you are saying. I also feel that there is a general trend with boys that they want to get in there and get it over and done with. They want to know where they are going. That is something that they find easier to do, whereas with girls there does tend to be a characteristic that would suggest that they are prepared to take more time, more care and give greater consideration particularly to a written task.

**Mr SAWFORD**—You may be aware of the research project that Professor Faith Trent and her researcher Malcolm Slade did at Flinders University. They interviewed 1,800 secondary boys. The result was exactly how you answered that question then: the boys want to answer the question and they do not see the purpose of it. In fact, they resent having to do the essay type answer when they see a different way of meeting the end.

**Mr Everett**—I am always a little cautious about generalising there, though, because from my experience in secondary schools there are many males who also do the considered thought and there are also girls who want to get the job done quickly and they want to know exactly where they are going and so on.

**Mr SAWFORD**—You need both. A good education has both, doesn't it?

**Mr Everett**—Yes.

**Mr WILKIE**—The other question was that—I am from Western Australia so I cannot really quote New South Wales—we have done very well in getting people educated using computers. Evidence given to us has suggested that, traditionally, boys pick up computers far better than girls in their application. During the year they are using the computers, but come the end-of-year examination they are not allowed to take them in; they do not have access to them in an exam environment. So at one level they have learnt how to use them and they know how to operate them properly, but when it comes to an assessment they cannot actually use them and so that could be skewing their results.

**Mr Everett**—I just do not feel that I have enough experience to provide you with any sort of answer to that.

**Mr SAWFORD**—I have one last question. We have had the comprehensive high schools introduced in Australia through the Karmel report. That is not a pure system but it was interesting that on this inquiry we spoke to two of the principals of significant private schools in Victoria with 3,000 plus enrolments. Both of them said that you either make a choice in secondary education, as far as boys are concerned, to teach a vocational program or to teach an academic program. It was their view that you do not do both successfully on the same campus. What is your view? Do you think we have lost something in terms of having a more diverse secondary system? Some people argue that we had a more diverse secondary public system prior to the elimination of the old technical school and that in a sense public secondary education is in some sort of crisis, not only in Australia but around the world. It is interesting that in the UK Blair came out on an election promise, basically, stating that he would get rid of the comprehensive school system in the UK and that he would bring back diversity within the public secondary system. Is there a similar problem in Australia?

**Mr Sutton**—My own view—and I will talk about New South Wales—is that within the comprehensive system there is sufficient diversity to meet the needs of all of the students who front up there. I think the great success of the vocational education and training programs that are now operating are a very good indicator of that. I think that if there is a criticism to be made it is that over the years the comprehensive high schools have always held out the carrot of ‘get to year 12 and you’ll get an HSC and a good job’. But, in effect, that has really only been for about 30 per cent of the kids because the final year curriculum had nothing for those kids who were not destined for university. The broadening of the curriculum that has happened in the last two to three years has had an enormous effect on meeting the needs of a much wider range of boys and girls without getting to the situation of labelling them as a bronze kid, a silver kid or a gold kid. I think that would be a step backwards for us to go back to that stage. I am not suggesting that we do not need specific responses to boys and girls.

**Mr SAWFORD**—I am not suggesting that. You cannot go back even if you want to, but you can go forward in a different way.

**Mr Sutton**—Yes, sure. And I think to some extent we have acknowledged that that is a need as well in the specialist schools that we have got running now.

**Mr SAWFORD**—What is your view of the comments of the two principals? I do not want to name them on the record, they are on our inquiries. But both are from very significant schools and they actually came out and said you make your mind up—you have one sort of program or you have the other, you do not have both. And both of them were very strongly of the view that you cannot mix them.

**Mr Sutton**—I do not agree with that.

**Mr Everett**—I would endorse everything that John has said and similarly do not agree with that. I think that when you talk to year 11 and 12 students at Wade High School this afternoon, you will find some very strong academic students there who are also doing a vocational course. The skills are quite different and yet, in terms of producing a holistic person, it is just a wonderful curriculum that is offered in our comprehensive secondary schools right now.

**CHAIR**—I will just change tack as we need to wrap up this section of questioning. Mark, I think you said earlier that the gender difference in literacy levels in this region is less than the state average. Did you say one per cent?

**Mr Everett**—I have the figures here. The state average in literacy is 50.6 and the district average is 49.2.

**CHAIR**—But the gender difference is the same here as state-wide? I thought you said it was lower here.

**Mr Everett**—The boys are two points below the state average overall and our girls are 0.7 below the state average in literacy. Two percentage points on state average is not something that you go out and slit your wrists over but it shows that boys are performing at a slightly lower level than girls. We are making people very aware of that and, as I indicated before, I think

awareness is where we are at in terms of people looking at their practice and determining whether their practice is making some sort of a contribution to that.

**CHAIR**—But the differential in this region does seem to be less than it is state-wide.

**Mr Everett**—It is about where the state is.

**CHAIR**—Thank you very much for your time and your very valuable contribution.

[10.43 a.m.]

**BOURNE, Miss Susan Leslie, Executive Teacher, Yenda Public School**

**HOOPER, Mr Andrew Rex, Principal, Yenda Public School**

**CHAIR**—Andrew, thank you for your hospitality today and for allowing us to invade your wonderful school.

**Mr Hooper**—No worries.

**CHAIR**—Andrew, you might outline for us what you see as the particular issues affecting education generally, but specifically with respect to boys, in country areas in schools such as this. For instance, do you see any disadvantage or advantage in a school such as this compared with one in a bigger regional centre, such as Griffith itself?

**Mr Hooper**—It is hard to compare between schools but, as a community school, we basically treat boys—or any children—that come to school here as individuals. We have things set up to cater for every child's different needs. We give a lot of opportunities for all students here—boys in particular—with different sporting things and cultural activities, as well as academic activities. It is hard to compare in a bigger school. I have been in a number of bigger schools, and every school is different, but we try to give every opportunity we can to students so they can achieve in all sorts of areas, not just academically. The things that we have in our school allow for that achievement and for recognition and development of heaps of different types of skills.

**CHAIR**—We are finding in most schools an issue of differences in achievements in literacy. Are you seeing that here?

**Mr Hooper**—We are. It is something that I suppose is state-wide, but it is reflected in our school. Our girls perform better at literacy than our boys do, and that is just a fact.

**CHAIR**—Perhaps you could just outline for us what approaches you are taking to try and address those gender differences?

**Mr Hooper**—One approach that we have within the school, and which seems to be having a very good effect with our assessment and the results that students are achieving, is the stage based literacy and maths groups. Also, a lot more of our STLD—support teacher learning difficulties—goes into a lot of the boys, especially when students are tested for basic skills results. Some of the students that fall in the lower bands for basic skills from our school have been boys. They are targeted for extra support. The support is provided from the STLD teacher. Also, individual programs are developed for students for the particular needs that they have. We work with classroom teachers so as that is integrated into the classroom teacher's programs as well.

As well as the support that we give to help build up base skills, we use our district office support staff—our district maths consultant or our district literacy consultant or whatever area a child needs development in. Every child is different. They might need emphasis in particular areas, but literacy is an area where a lot of students, and boys in particular, are a little bit behind. That is probably one reason why we have a very structured literacy session, which we discussed this morning. The boys respond very well to the structure—actually, all of the children to. It is very explicit teaching. We do a lot of explicit and systematic teaching so that the improvement can occur from that. Our results have improved over last few years through doing that.

**Mr SAWFORD**—Are there any aspects of literacy where the boys do better?

**Mr Hooper**—In literacy?

**Mr SAWFORD**—Within the literacy framework, are there some aspects where boys in fact do better than the girls? Are they better at comprehension?

**Mr Hooper**—It is funny to say that from a whole school perspective—are you talking about our school, or are you talking about schools in general?

**Mr SAWFORD**—No, your own school—your own experience, basically.

**Mr Hooper**—I would say it depends on the particular child. I have got a stage three literacy group at the moment, and I have got some boys who are probably very strong in the comprehension side of things—probably stronger than the girls. I have got some boys who are stronger than the girls in oral reading, interpreting text and things like that. It really depends on the level of interest in what you are doing. Boys really like to be interested in what they are learning about. That is probably our key focus. If you are researching a particular novel or something like that, and it is not of interest to them, sometimes they do not put their full effort and attention into it. So I make a conscious effort to make sure that the material that we are doing in class is of interest.

**Mr SAWFORD**—In the 10 years of basic skills testing in New South Wales, has there been any difference in the structure and the framework of those tests? Have you noticed any difference?

**Mr Hooper**—I think there has been over time. There has been a change over time with the testing. I think the basic skills are very valid, and they are a great thing.

**Mr SAWFORD**—Can you tell us what has changed?

**Mr Hooper**—I suppose just the way that they ask questions.

**Mr SAWFORD**—Are they more explicit?

**Mr Hooper**—I think they are. In a lot of the basic skills tests they have a few hands-on activities which they did not have the past, and those come with the resources. They make it

more real-life. For example, last year they were talking about the Dubbo zoo. They make it more real-life, instead of using fictional kinds of things.

**Mr SAWFORD**—Would you describe it as being more balanced now than it was 10 years ago?

**Mr Hooper**—Yes, I probably would. I think it is a lot better.

**Mr SAWFORD**—Is that one of the reasons why the boys are doing perhaps a little better?

**Mr Hooper**—I don't know. There is a fair structure to the basic skills tests. I think that the basic skills tests are very valuable but they are not the be-all and end-all—they are not all we use. They are valuable tools, and they are good tools for teachers because they can work on areas that students have difficulty with. I think that probably the literacy sessions are pretty full-on in the basic skills tests, and I think sometimes that is where a lot of the boys struggle. Looking at tests from the students that I have had over the last few years, it seems that sometimes it is not always about what the students know—sometimes the boys do not get things finished in the tests. Sometimes their results are a reflection of the fact that the boys are not even completing the tests, which is another interesting fact as well. It is not the fact that they did not get everything right—it is that they did not get the test completed. That is sometimes reflected in some of their marks as well.

**Mr SAWFORD**—Susan, a question to you. It is very difficult to come into a school and get a feeling about the place, but when we wandered around those three classrooms, we got the feeling that there is a very structured educational program in this school, particularly in literacy. Is that correct? In terms of you as a teacher, does the school offer a deliberately balanced educational program? What sorts of processes do you go through to draw up the school's educational program?

**Miss Bourne**—In literacy?

**Mr SAWFORD**—Yes, that will do.

**Miss Bourne**—It is well balanced, we think. It basically follows the syllabus. You know you have to do a certain amount of things—you have to have guided reading groups, modelled writing, modelled reading and independent writing. When you do all of that in your week of literacy, it has to be structured so you are covering everything. With kindergarten, they know when they come in that every morning we do the roll and we do the weather, and they respond to that. If we have a slight change, I have to explain to them that we are doing the news first, that we are not doing the roll first because something has happened. They like having structure. They like knowing what is happening next—

**Mr SAWFORD**—Boys more than girls or just the same?

**Miss Bourne**—I think they both like it. In general, they both like having the structure.

**Mr SAWFORD**—Have you ever taught in an unstructured situation?

**Miss Bourne**—As a casual I did. You walked in and you did not know the teacher's structure, and you had to really make your own structure for the day and say, 'This is what we are doing, not what you normally do, and that is just it.' It is better having the structure and the kids like it that way.

**Mr SAWFORD**—What sorts of things happen when you do not have a structure?

**Miss Bourne**—When you are casual and you walk in for a day, it takes you a while to work out. If you have been called in late, you do not know what is happening. You have to make your own structure—you know that you do a certain thing. You start off with something very structured for the kids. It might not be what they normally do but they settle down and they do the work a lot quicker. Trying to do group work with kids you do not know does not work.

**Mr Hooper**—Some kids can handle not having a structure, but every child can handle having a structure, and you get your best results from having the structure set up. There are always going to be kids that achieve in an unstructured situation, but there are going to be children who cannot handle that situation, and other problems develop. You get behaviour problems.

**Mr SAWFORD**—It is a problem for teachers, too?

**Mr Hooper**—Probably for teachers, too. We have a very structured situation and we work together as a team, as a staff. If you just let people go off and do their own thing without having a structure, the whole network within the school or the district or departmentally is made very difficult because people are running their own race. They might not be teaching the things that they need to be teaching in the classroom. You need that structure also for the support that comes with that structure. The year 5 and 6 kids that I teach love having the structure, and if you do not have it they are asking why. They like it, but you also have to give them the opportunities where the structure is not there as well because, in life and in every other situation, structure is not always there. It is important to have them able to handle that as well. But to get the best results out of the children in a learning situation, the structure is very important to them. You have to gradually give them less of it as you go along.

**Mr PEARCE**—Susan, as you know, we are particularly interested in and looking at the differences that might exist with boys' education. From when you did your training as a teacher, can you recall any aspects of that training that focused on differences between boys and girls. Secondly, has there been any sort of training provided to you on an ongoing basis that touches on this particular area?

**Miss Bourne**—When I was at university nothing was discussed about boys' education, and I have had no training about boys' education really. We have had departmental papers given to us to read. That would be about all, I would say. We have not had too much training, have we?

**Mr Hooper**—No. We talk about things, and we have the gender equity policy within the school.

**Miss Bourne**—But no training and development.

**Mr Hooper**—We develop things as our own school plan and things like that to help counter any aspects that might come up to do with boys' education. We look at a lot of strategies within our teaching programs and the structure of our school set up to cater for any areas in that way.

**Mr PEARCE**—So, Susan, in a practical sense, if you were in a school and you were teaching a class and you observed on a daily basis that there was some difference in some particular curriculum area between girls and boys, would it be largely up to you to do some research about that? If you were interested, would you have to go and do some of your own research to try and understand that?

**Miss Bourne**—Yes. There are departmental documents that have been issued to the school which we would have to read and make our policies on. But if you had an extra interest in it you would more or less have to do your own thing. I do not think we are getting the training and development on it.

**Mr Hooper**—If we are having problems with boys, either academic or behavioural—whatever it is—we might see that as a staff need within our school. So we would get together and plan sessions within our staff meetings, get support in from outside areas and do things on staff development days and things like that. If we see the need there then we attack it that way.

**Mr PEARCE**—Clearly that has not happened here; because maybe there has not been such a need for it in your experience here?

**Miss Bourne**—Not really. Our boys are pretty on much on a par with the girls behaviour wise.

**Mr Hooper**—Behaviour wise the boys are pretty good here.

**Miss Bourne**—We do not have major behaviour problems.

**Mr Hooper**—Behaviour is different.

**Miss Bourne**—Behaviour problems are different to academic problems.

**Mr Hooper**—Yes, it is totally different. Boys are going to do different things to girls. It is the same thing: different girls will do different things to other girls. It is individual. Susan has only been at the school a bit over two years and I have only been here for a year. So it is difficult setting up those things within the school. It has been a learning curve over the last year to get to know the kids and to look at the structures that you need to set up. We have made little changes with different things.

You talk about boys education strategies. An interesting statistic in our school in something we looked at at the end of last year was that we had more boys going on detention than girls, basically for behaviour things that were happening in the playground. So we looked at it and thought, 'What can we do in that area to help improve that?' To do that we had the one teacher going on detention duty but we did not just have kids going to detention. We started to teach those kids skills that they could use on the playground and look at why they were put on detention. If it was for throwing sand from an argument or hitting another child, we then



grabbed those kids in the situation—because the kids that go on detention are usually the same ones—and we looked at trying to give those kids skills to deal with the situations in the playground. So we did not take it in a negative aspect; we tried to turn it around into a positive.

Last year we put in a Positive Anti Teasing and Bullying Program within the school, and it is not that we have a problem with bullying here. The program deals with a lot of social skills, a lot of hands-on role-plays teaching the kids how to react to different situations. For example, if a kid came up to you and said, ‘You are not playing in my game,’ or, ‘You’re out, take it,’ or different things like that, we taught them how to respond in different situations: if you did not agree with a decision, how you would go about dealing with that situation. So we did it as a positive thing. We got a very good response with the kids and the parents, and the teachers enjoyed doing it as well. We are looking at a new program at the moment that some schools have trialled—it is called an APEEL program. It looks at social skills with younger students and gets parents involved. Susan, you can probably speak a bit more about that. It is something we are looking at.

**Miss Bourne**—We are going to probably take it on next term. It is looking at social issues—how to play fairly, taking turns and those type of things—and it is done from kindergarten to year 2. Parents come in and do workshops and learn the way we are teaching the children so they can do it at home as well. So that it is done at school and at home.

**Mr SAWFORD**—I am just watching the kids out there playing. They do not seem any different to any other school. The boys are in organised games and the girls are sitting around talking.

**Miss Bourne**—Yes.

**Mr Hooper**—It is funny, we have kids who play soccer at lunchtime and the girls will get in and play with the boys and the boys will play with the girls. The boys even love playing netball with the girls. They do like to do their different things. We started an SRC—Student Representative Council—with the senior kids and I have really tried to get the senior kids, both boys and girls, taking different roles and trying to have a bit more leadership and ownership within the school. I think that is very important for your senior kids within schools. The boys and the girls have responded very well to that in running activities and being role models to the younger students. They really respond to positive feedback, and I think boys probably more than girls. Boys love the recognition; we all do, but the boys really like it if you recognise the great achievements that they are making. Girls do too, but the boys—they do not like to let on—do like that positive recognition.

**Mr COX**—Andrew, you were saying earlier, when we were outside, that when you went to Charles Sturt University you were one of three males out of a class of 90. What were your reasons for wanting to be a primary teacher?

**Mr Hooper**—It is an interesting thing. I have always liked working with kids, and being a primary teacher was something I had my heart set on for a long time. When I did the HSC I got a lot more marks than I needed to be a primary teacher. People were saying, ‘Change your preference now. You don’t need to be a primary teacher; go and do something else.’ I said, ‘No, I want to do teaching.’ I suppose I had a lot of young children around me at the time, within my

family and set-up, and I had had a couple of work experience placements in some classrooms, and I really wanted to do it. I had my heart set on it.

I talked to different people, and everyone encouraged me. They said, 'Look, we need more male teachers in the primary system.' People encouraged me; there was nothing but encouragement. It was something I wanted to do. I wanted to stick at it and I wanted to get in there, because I felt that we needed more males in primary teaching. I enjoy the time. It was disappointing that only three males out of my class went through. I do not know what it was like with yours, Susan.

**Miss Bourne**—There were very few males.

**Mr Hooper**—But I think it is starting to turn around now. The other day at the internship meeting that I talked about—I have an intern coming here next year—out of people who graduate from Charles Sturt University, they told me that it was 25 per cent of boys to 75 per cent of girls. That is a big turnaround—but it needs to keep turning around, too.

**Mr COX**—If the historical position is that very few males want to be primary teachers, what is the situation at the top of the profession? What proportion of primary principals and executive teachers are male?

**Mr Hooper**—In this district, I think it would be nearly half-half, principal wise. When we go to principal meetings, it is pretty well half males, half females. Susan, you have been going to a lot of executive meetings.

**Miss Bourne**—There are more females—probably 75 per cent.

**Mr Hooper**—There are more females in the executive role.

**CHAIR**—What else do you think we can do, Andrew, to encourage more men into teaching?

**Mr Hooper**—Probably one of the biggest things is that people see a lot of negative things in the media. One thing people look at—I know a lot of my friends did when they went off to teaching—is the salary for a teacher when they come out. They looked at other avenues that were going to be more attractive to them. Money was a big thing to start with. They looked at marketing, they looked at accounting—they looked at all these other things that were going to pay better. That was the crux of the thing, to start with.

Money is not the be-all and end-all, but I suppose the media over the last few years a lot of the time hit on the negative things in education, instead of spelling out the good things that are going on. There are so many good things going on. Teaching offers so many rewards. The great thing I love about teaching and coming to school every day is that you do not know what you are going to get. You are not going through the same thing all the time. Things change. The kids are just so enthusiastic and keen, and I get a great reward out of seeing learning happening. I think these are the types of things we should be spelling out to people: how rich teaching is besides just the money side of things. When people go to the profession to start with, I think a lot of males see that there are other attractive occupations out there because there is more scope

and more monetary value. I think that is the crux of it when people do come out. That is what people tell me. Whether it is right or wrong, I do not know.

**Mr COX**—Whether the people who chase the money would be the best teachers is another matter.

**Mr Hooper**—I have been in Goulburn for the last four years. We were talking about the statistics of male teachers coming through. It is interesting that in one of the Goulburn high schools something like 80 students—and this is overall—were going to university or finishing year 12 and not one of them wanted to go and be a teacher. Why? There is a lot of negativity. I do not know what it is, but none of them wanted to go and be a teacher, which is very sad.

**Mr COX**—When I was at uni, almost everybody from a country area who went to uni wanted be a teacher.

**CHAIR**—That was a long time ago!

**Mr COX**—It was a very long time ago!

**Mr Hooper**—Take Cobar for example. They have been in the news a lot over the last couple of years because they have been trying to get teachers to go out to that community. They have been looking at incentives and things like that. The biggest way to get teachers to go to Cobar is to encourage people who live in Cobar to go away and train to be a teacher, because you are more likely to get those people wanting to come back to the town.

**Mr SAWFORD**—That is right.

**Mr Hooper**—You offer someone in Sydney an incentive of an extra \$15,000 to go to Cobar to teach for three years, and they will go for three years but will they stay there? Some might, but I do not think most of them would. They will take the money and go back. But if you encourage someone from Cobar—who has got roots and family and things like, because that is what makes you want to be in an area—to go away and do teaching they will then come back.

**CHAIR**—Do you think the reintroduction of some sort of scholarship system based on area would help?

**Mr Hooper**—Yes. I think that would be a great idea. I think when the HECS came in that turned a lot of people off teaching because they had to pay back for their education. We are trying to encourage people to go and be teachers, we want to get the best people in there and I think the fewer negatives we have for people wanting to go and become a teacher, the better. I finished university the year after HECS came in. Susan, what did you have to pay back after going to university?

**Miss Bourne**—I do not remember.

**Mr Hooper**—It would be \$20,000-\$30,000, would that be right?

**Miss Bourne**—Yes, it would be something like that.

**Mr Hooper**—I know you do not have to pay it back straight away, but that is a lot of money to then have to pay back. I see education as one of the top priorities within the state and I think we need to have the best teachers in there because basically that is our future. We do not need to discourage people to do teaching because they have to pay a huge HECS bill. Fair enough it is over a few years but when you are getting on your feet and you start teaching I do not think you need that burden on you. We need to encourage people to go and do teaching, and I think that is a negative aspect. I know it has got to be paid for somehow but we would get more benefit out of the department paying the HECS bill than giving someone incentives to go out and teach in another area. Offering people mobiles to get into certain areas has probably helped in some ways to get people into hard-to-staff areas.

**Mr WILKIE**—From your perspective—and obviously you would see some of the relationships between the staff and the students—how important is a really good relationship between the teacher and students, and in particular with boys?

**Mr Hooper**—I think it is very important to develop a relationship with the students. The first thing I did when I came to the school at the start of last year was to get to know every student's name and you try to talk to the kids. The kids love it if you interact with them. It is not just important to know the kids in your own class but to get to know the kids across the whole school. In my role, and in Susan's role of executive teacher, I think it is very important to do that. It is also very important to get to know the parents as well—and to make yourself approachable. If a student has problem they can then come to you, and if a parent has got a problem they come to you too. It is a great climate that we have got here; if we have problems they are usually sorted out because a student will come and let us know if there is a problem, and I think that is a great advantage. And parents will come and talk to us as well. We have an open door policy here and I do not mind if they are very minor things that parents want to complain or talk about. We listen and we try to do something about it. The teachers take an interest in the welfare of students. They will help students if they are having difficulties in a certain area—there may be difficulties at home or they may be having difficulties at school mixing with friends and so forth. It is very important for teachers to develop a relationship not just with the students but with their parents as well.

**Mr WILKIE**—It has been suggested in some previous schools that often where the teacher does not get on with the boys the boys tend to not want to learn as punishment to the teacher, whereas often the girls will get on and learn regardless. Has that been your experience?

**Mr Hooper**—It can happen in some situations, for sure. Sometimes you might have personality clashes with some students and some teachers but that is where you can use other staff within the school to overcome that. That is what is special about teaching: you have got other people there that you can rely on. Not everyone is going to get on with everyone and that is with anything in life, I suppose. Some students are not going to respond to you or the things you teach or the things you are saying, and bringing in another staff member who knows that child can be helpful. That is the good thing about developing relationships, you can bring someone else in to help sort the situation out and I think that is where it becomes very valuable. It is probably harder in bigger schools but here is the ideal situation in which to do that.

**CHAIR**—You mentioned earlier that you had a lot of parent involvement.

**Mr Hooper**—Yes.

**CHAIR**—To what do you attribute the success of that? How do you go about attracting parents? You have a number of fathers coming in to help, as well as mothers.

**Mr Hooper**—I suppose by making it attractive here for them. We invite them in for a lot of things that we are doing. In the newsletter, we publicise things that we are doing and we invite parents in all the time. We make it comfortable for them; we make it easy for them. If they want to come into the classrooms, we make it inviting to them. So we invite them in to start with. There is also word of mouth. If people come in and start doing things in here and are enjoying that, they then talk to other people and they are more comfortable coming in.

**Mr SAWFORD**—What is the context in which you invite them in? Is it open slather or do you have morning teas? What do you do?

**Mr Hooper**—We basically make the invitation at P&C meetings and put it in the agenda, but our school is open at any time for people to come in. But we have specific times. For example, we encourage people to come to primary assemblies. If a child is getting an award, we send home a slip to a parents and say: 'Your child is getting an award at this assembly. It would be great if someone could come to see your child get an award.' That gets people coming into the school to start with. We get parents who help out by coaching sporting teams and we get parents who want to come in and help in the classroom; Susan has a lot coming in to kindergarten to help with reading. It seems the younger kids love having their parents in the classrooms, but in my class—years 5 and 6—they are not so keen to have their parents into the classroom. They are happy to have them come and help with sport or things like that, but they do not like them coming into the classroom as such.

**Mr WILKIE**—It is probably important to get on the record something which was said outside earlier, and that is that here you have a situation where a lot of parents can get involved in the school.

**Mr Hooper**—They can get involved, yes. We have a lot of situations where the parents can get involved in the school, as I said, such as with sport and classroom activities. We have a big P&C committee, school council representation and a canteen committee, and we have males and females involved in all of them.

**Mr WILKIE**—A lot of that is because of the nature of the community itself.

**Mr Hooper**—It is; it is the nature of the community. It is a farming community, I suppose, in a lot of senses, and we have a lot of flexibility in some cases with both mothers and fathers. A lot of mothers come in here because they are not working. We have a lot of cases like that so they can come in, and they enjoy being in the school. We also have fathers with the flexibility to come in when they are not busy, as well. Rice harvesting is big here at the moment, so we will not see many fathers around at this stage—but a lot of the mothers will come into the school and help out—whereas later on down the track when the fathers have a bit more time, they will come in.

**CHAIR**—You mentioned earlier you have a training program for those parents who are involved in helping with reading.

**Mr Hooper**—Yes, we do.

**CHAIR**—Could you quickly outline—as we are almost out of time—that for us?

**Mr Hooper**—We have just introduced the Count Me In Too program—which is a mass program—into the classroom, and we want parent helpers to come in and help with it because it makes it easier for the teachers and easier for that students. Also, parents can reinforce what is going on at home. We hold an information evening and explain how the games and the programs work, and they can ask us questions and we can explain what we want them to do in the classroom. We hold information sessions for those parents who want to learn and know what we are doing in the classroom so they can best help the kids. But if they cannot help in the classroom at all, they can come along and learn and know how to help at home as well.

We hold a lot of information sessions in that way to show parents the ways different things are done. We have done it with reading, maths and with the Positive Anti-Teasing and Bullying program. We got parents in and said, ‘This is the program we are going to do.’ With anything we try that is new, to get the support of the parents—so that they support anything we are doing—I take it to the P&C meeting and say, ‘This is something we want to do.’ With the APEEL program, I said: ‘We want to run this APEEL program. This is what it’s all about. Are you happy for us to do it in the classrooms?’ If they are happy to do it, we get support from them because they take ownership of it and they help us implement the policies into the classroom. If we just say, ‘We’re doing this,’ then they think, ‘They’re doing it.’ You have to invite them on board. You have to get them involved in the partnership, and they are happy to become involved.

Sometimes they come to us and say: ‘We’d like this done. Can we have an information session on this? Can you do this?’ We say, ‘Yes, no problems.’ Something that came up recently was that the parents wanted a little bit more sex education for the senior kids. I said, ‘Okay, we’ll look at running a program.’ They said, ‘Can we have parent information sessions as well as having some things done in class?’ I said, ‘Yes, not a problem.’ So we are doing things like that. It goes both ways. We have such a good working relationship between the community and the school that we can do those things.

**Mr WILKIE**—I am just wondering what the general demographics would be for the parents in the school. Is this a fairly affluent area? Not being from this state, I would not know. What would be the demographics for the school itself?

**Mr Hooper**—What do you mean by demographics?

**Mr COX**—Average income.

**Mr WILKIE**—In terms of average income.

**Mr Hooper**—I tell you what, that would be a hard thing for me. As I said, I have only been here for a year. I am not sure what a rice farmer or—

**Miss Bourne**—Who knows?

**Mr WILKIE**—Would you classify it as relatively affluent or is there a great mixture?

**Mr Hooper**—Yes, probably a good mixture. We have some wealthy families here that would probably run and own wineries and things like that.

**Mr SAWFORD**—Maybe the question should be: how many have you got on the School Card? What is the percentage of your kids on School Card, who do not pay their own fees?

**Mr Hooper**—We do not have fees.

**Mr SAWFORD**—You do not have any?

**Mr Hooper**—No. We have voluntary contributions and the voluntary contribution that we set for the year is basically \$20 per student. That is voluntary and that helps pay for any texts or anything like that that we are using. But we do not have fees. It is voluntary. We do not have fees as such.

**Mr SAWFORD**—Do you get a 100 per cent response to that?

**Mr Hooper**—No.

**Mr SAWFORD**—What is the percentage response?

**Mr Hooper**—Last year 70 per cent of people paid that. We do not make a big issue of it. But it is something the parents want. The parents asked to have a voluntary contribution scheme. We have a good mixture of families here. We have some struggling families that live here, like any community, and we have some very wealthy ones. I would say it is fairly average. Most people are fairly comfortable, I would say.

**Miss Bourne**—I would say they are comfortable, yes.

**Mr Hooper**—But they are very hard workers. If you cannot get work in this area, you are not trying. There are always people advertising for casual workers: like for working on the farms around here. There is no need for someone who is looking for work to be unemployed. That is why we get a lot of people come to this area and we get a lot of change over in students here. We got to 160 students at one stage last year and we are 150 the moment. Out of that 160 we had last year we had a turnover of 80 students who came here for work, and they will stay here for a certain period of time and then move on.

**Mr WILKIE**—Does that create problems for the kids?

**Mr Hooper**—Not really, no. I suppose, because of the atmosphere we have here, kids fit in pretty easily. We have our nucleus of families—we would have 100 kids, from kindergarten right through to year 6, who will not move. But there would probably be 40 to 50 in the change over. The kids here are very accepting of other students and new students who come in because

they are used to it. They accept it and handle it very well. We have just had a couple of very difficult students come into our school who have had problems in a lot of other schools that they have been in. They have come here and they have settled in pretty well because, I suppose, of the nature of the set-up here—plus, the kids are very caring and look after each other and look out for each other. It is a very positive climate here.

**CHAIR**—Thank you very much. We will have to leave it there. We will be late to our next stop. Thank you for your very valuable contribution and having us in your school today.

Resolved (on motion by **Mr Sawford**):

That this committee authorises publication, including publication on the parliamentary database, of the proof transcript of the evidence given before it at public hearing this day.

**Proceedings suspended from 11.19 a.m. to 12.29 a.m.**



**COX, Mrs Patricia Clare, Deputy Principal, Griffith Public School**

**CROSSINGHAM, Mrs Cheryl, Classroom Teacher, Griffith Public School**

**DEBUS, Mr Brian William, Principal, Griffith Public School**

**HOPKINS, Miss Tracey Lee, Classroom Teacher, Griffith Public School**

**WILLETTS, Mr Bobby, Executive Teacher, Griffith Public School**

**CHAIR**—Thank you for having us here today and for giving your time. We are looking forward to what you have got to say to us here in addition to what you have just shown us. I thank the principal of Griffith Public School, Mr Brian Debus, for agreeing to host the committee's visit today. I also thank everyone else involved in today's visit and those who are about to give evidence. While we appreciate that we are your guests today, I am obliged to remind you that the proceedings here today are legal proceedings of the parliament and warrant the same respect as proceedings of the House. The deliberate misleading of the committee may be regarded as a contempt of parliament. It is always a bit uncomfortable having to remind people of that. The committee prefers that all evidence be given in public but, if at any stage you wish to give evidence in private, please ask to do so and the committee will consider your request. I invite each of you to make some introductory remarks and then we might throw it open to questions. Thank you very much.

**Mr Debus**—Thank you, Kerry. Welcome to Griffith Public School and welcome to the great hall of Griffith Public School and Kalinda Special School. This hall is the symbol of the commitment of our school and the community to provide the very best for our students. Recently opened by the Hon. John Watkins, Minister for Education and Training, this building was built by donations from parent bodies and the \$74,000 saved from the school budget over two years. An equal amount was given by the New South Wales government.

The school is a declared priority school. It has a multicultural community with many different cultural backgrounds. Among the largest groupings are students from India, Tonga, Turkey, Fiji and Samoa. Thirty-nine per cent of our students are NESB—that is, non English speaking children. Twenty-two per cent of students are Koori. The school has achieved recognition with the award of a Director-General's award in 1988 for meeting local needs; in 1989 for its Carnivale, a multicultural focus; in 1993 for integration programs in conjunction with Kalinda SSP; and, in 1995, for quality Aboriginal programs. In 2001 this school received a further award for the production of a book, *Being there. That is what it is all about*, which is a special association between this school and the returned servicemen of the city.

The school has two special classes, a senior and a junior IM class. The school is supported by additional resources supplied by the PSP as well as a variety of specialist support staff and programs. The school is supported by the P&C Association and has a functioning school council. It is well resourced through parental efforts as well as money from the PSP program. In 2002 the school received approximately \$50,000 from the PSP program.

The school is closely involved with Kalinda SSP which was moved into the grounds in 1991. Integration opportunities for these students with Griffith Public School students is a high priority. This year is the second year of a combined mainstream and Kalinda class. The school emphasises high outcomes in literacy and numeracy and provides for this by a large variety of strategies. It provides integrated facilities and programs with Kalinda SSP, maintains a high standard of discipline based on an assertive discipline program, provides a variety of exemplary student welfare programs, provides reading recovery for students in need in year 1, provides computer and Internet access in all rooms, provides English as a second language program for students with ethnic programs and provides programs for gifted and talented students including an established academic extension class. That is not operating at the moment because of our special commitment to our boys and girls class.

The above qualities of our school, together with the balanced blend of experienced and beginning teachers, provide an environment of creativity and commitment. I support and believe in the issues and directions of the New South Wales government thrust in their submission to this inquiry. In particular I stress that achievement is a complex issue that it is influenced mainly by Aboriginality, low socioeconomic status, geographic location and non-English speaking background. We have all of those factors present here at the school. I personally believe that early success is essential for successful outcomes. Support for families from birth to preschool is most important and is essential. Appropriate preschooling experiences are necessary to develop social and cooperative skills that will assist students to communicate freely and solve problems collaboratively. Currently, less than 30 per cent of our students ever experience a preschool opportunity.

Increased resource provision is essential at the primary level. Currently the states and Commonwealth are conducting inquiries into this matter. The imbalance is as great as a primary teacher having on average 10 additional students to secondary teachers. Physical resources and ancillary staff are similarly directed towards the secondary. The argument is not that secondary resources are not needed; it is that primary lacks sufficient resources to meet their needs. I refer you also to the document *Our Futures* which was presented to all members of parliament and is the basis of the MCEETYA and DEETYA inquiries.

Professional development is essential for leaders as well as teachers. Currently, the school receives \$25 per teacher. Competition is not a tool for learning. Competition produces winners and losers and everything in between. Motivated and focused students who are receiving a relevant and interesting curriculum taught by well-trained teachers where students are sensitively, respectfully and individually catered for will guarantee more equal outcomes. Equal outcomes are what we strive for. Inputs need to differ according to need. To achieve this our school this year is providing for all students from kindergarten to year 3 in classes of less than 20 for literacy and numeracy. Each afternoon they re-form into classes up to 30-plus. Specifically, we are looking at outcomes of a single-sex class of boys and a single-sex class of girls in a control group over two years from year 4 to year 5. We will measure our successes through basic school results from year 3 to year 5. We have developed a partnership with the Charles Sturt University to properly evaluate this initiative. We have a copy of that research, which has been approved by the department, and we will have a student from Charles Sturt who will actually be conducting that research, and her outcomes will be published early next year.

**CHAIR**—Thank you. Does anyone else wish to make an introductory statement? If not, we will proceed to questioning then. Brian, I am particularly interested in the single-sex classes for literacy and numeracy. Could you perhaps outline for us what prompted this initiative and what the difference is in approach in teaching literacy particularly in the boys class compared to the girls class?

**Mr Debus**—Each year when we look at our BST results and the other data we have, we actually work with the staff to look at the priorities we want for the next year. We are also mindful that outcomes are based, and should be based, on research or ideas. We picked up a newspaper article which indicated that speech patterns of boys and girls and teachers can be different. Therefore we resolved to trial this, and that was our basis. Yes, there is a different approach, and I think that both Bobby and Tracey, being teachers, could outline that far better than I could, and also Pat who is very experienced in gender equity questions.

**CHAIR**—Perhaps you could outline for us the approaches in your classroom.

**Miss Hopkins**—I have the girls all through the week up until lunchtime and we integrate with the boys in the afternoons. There is a difference in the way students respond to things, I think. From my experience—I have not seen research to back this up at all—girls at that age, and they are in year 5, tend to have more of a preference to please the teacher. Whereas I find that the boys have more of a preference to please their peers. There is a greater social issue with boys, I think, to be part of a group. Whereas a lot of girls seem to act, and can act, more independently and can work generally more independently. That is not in all cases, but that is just what I have seen. I do not know about you, Bobby—

**Mr Willetts**—I would definitely agree with that.

**Miss Hopkins**—Yes, I think boys have this great desire to be a part of the group, but girls have a great desire to please through results and through good behaviour—sitting up for the teacher, things like that. A teacher is a very important part of both boys' and girls' lives, but specifically girls seem to find a teacher a very important part of their life. Boys seem to find their friends very important at that age; that is what I am finding.

**CHAIR**—In terms of their enthusiasm or motivation for literacy, particularly for reading and writing, is that higher now that the classes are segregated?

**Mr Willetts**—What I have been finding with the boys, and part of the reason I have really enjoyed teaching the boys, is exactly that. I do not think that I have changed my teaching strategies, because all of the learning styles that can occur still occur in my classroom. I have to be able to cater for all those learning styles. What I think is easier for me as a teacher is being able to pitch content to the boys which they find interesting and relevant and, therefore, once they are finding the discussions as a class interesting and relevant, the relevance to them comes out through their writing.

**CHAIR**—Is the approach to literacy different in the two classes? Is one more structured, is one more phonetically based or are the approaches the same and it is just the context of the classroom that is different?

**Mr Willetts**—I can honestly say that I would not have changed much of how I am going about the literacy program or the maths program other than a few things that I have noticed, like the fact that the boys prefer working to a time limit rather than in the way of ‘Let’s work this for as long as it takes to get it to look pretty and presentable’. They would rather just work through it to a time limit, get it done and move on, instead of having to take them back all the time and say, ‘That’s great but let’s go back and revisit it over and over again.’

**Miss Hopkins**—Yes, boys will come in and see when something is finished, whereas girls could spend two weeks finishing something and you have to have a cut-off time. With a lot of the boys, I do not particularly hone in on things in literacy like their handwriting—if the work is done, I can read it, it is legible, they are happy and it is done well, then it is fine. Again, I am generalising, and this is not backed up by research, but the boys do not seem to have that attention to have everything—and there are exceptions—

**Mrs Crossingham**—In detail.

**Miss Hopkins**—Yes, they like to see it finished and then it is done.

**CHAIR**—Are the girls benefiting from the single sex classes?

**Miss Hopkins**—Again, we will have to see from the BST results next term, but I am finding that I am doing a lot more quality teaching and, as the research suggests, boys do have these behaviours that are problematic—they are there. I find I am doing a lot more teaching, even with literacy, this term because the girls seem to be able to keep on task better with things, and they have that desire, that motivation, to get things done. Is it different to boys? I do not know; I cannot explain.

**Mrs Crossingham**—It is interesting what Tracey said before about the boys and girls reacting differently to one another. I work in both classrooms each week for a period of time and, while the learning styles are definitely different—and I have found that I have had to change my teaching style to some degree with the boys’ class—you still have the dominant personality in each room and, whether they were in separate sex classes or not, those personalities would still be the dominant personalities. The boys who are, for want of a better term, ‘into’ literature remain into literature, and they are bringing some of the other boys on board with them. For the boys, I find it is a lot more oral. The girls are very happy to do written work and work that involves copying things off blackboards. For the boys, it is very much a verbal, interactive style of learning and I know there are boys in that room whom, the minute I say, ‘We are going to have to write something down’, I lose. If I say, ‘I want you to illustrate it’, I get a different response again. But while it is verbal and they can interact as a group and bounce ideas off each other, a lot more learning seems to take place than if we are just giving them a book and saying, ‘We’re going to read from this book and then we’re going to do an activity based on that book.’

**Mr COX**—What is the definition of a boy being into literature?

**Mrs Crossingham**—For me, it means any boy who is willing to pick up any piece of writing and read it, whether it be the rugby league results from the weekend, a novel, a motorbike magazine, farm machinery magazine or a *Trading Post*—anything that will get them to look at a

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piece of writing, think about what is being written and think about the purpose of that piece of writing, why someone has taken the time to put it on paper and to actually respond to it. If that response is verbal that is great, as long as they are responding to the literature, not just letting it happen around them.

**Mrs Cox**—We did some action research the year before we began these boys and girls classes, where we withdrew from years 5 and 6 boys who were not making appropriate progress in literacy. They were doing quite well at maths but they were just not interested in reading or writing, so we decided to withdraw some of those boys. I took them in a class for an hour and a half a day for a six-week period. In that period of time we looked at different literature. We looked at flyers, posters, rugby league, newspapers, other journals and magazines, some novels and some school readers. The aim was to attract the interest of the boys so that they could see that there was a place in their lives for reading—that it would give them information, it could be interesting and they could enjoy it. Some of the material that is presented in a mainstream class did not tap in to some of the environmental print that they saw around them that they were interested in. From that action research and from working with those boys where they did appear to be turned on and they were interested, where they bought newspapers and we read through those, did criticisms of them and critical literacy and looked at a wide variety and they found that was interesting, we saw that they could be turned on but that we perhaps needed to make a change to be able to do that. That was a year 5 and 6 group. We then decided that we would begin with a year 4 group and take them through boys and girls classes in year 4 and year 5 and we are now into the year 5 period.

**Mr Willetts**—I want to go back and pick up on what Cheryl was just saying about the boys writing and when you go to write something. I definitely agree with that and I have got a real concern about basing a lot of the success or failure of what we have done and what we have achieved around how they go on the basic skills test. An example I would like to give is picking up on that point about whether or not they are writing or whether it is a discussion. Last year Brian happened to come down into the room when I had just finished doing a whole class reading activity around a big book. The boys task was to role play some scenes out of that big book and delve a bit deeper into the comprehension of what was going on in different aspects of the book. They all did that in groups and did it very, very well and were asked to discuss what was happening in that scene and who was involved and what it led to et cetera. They had no problems articulating that. But when I sat down to do a comprehension test with those boys they could not get down on paper anywhere near the same amount that they had articulated earlier.

**Mrs Crossingham**—Even the same quality.

**Mr Willetts**—The same quality of response, exactly. It just was not there.

**Mr WILKIE**—Could they do it on the computer though?

**Mrs Crossingham**—Some will.

**Mr WILKIE**—We have had some evidence that suggests that if they have to write something down with a pen they struggle but often if they are given the opportunity to use the computer, which they have often been using in class, they can use it and do it quite well.

**Mr Willetts**—I have found with the computers—and those of you who went into this computer room today will have seen this—that the one thing with the boys that the computer does do is increase the length of time they will spend on a task, especially when they know there are bells and whistles at the end of it. For example, we have been working with *FrontPage* and they have been designing their own web pages. When they know that they can add things and do those little creative bits that they would not do if it was a pen and paper, the quality—

**Mr WILKIE**—It makes the quality of that work better—

**Mr Willetts**—Exactly. The quality that we get is much better. I want to go back to talk about peer pressure because the peer pressure is there for the boys. It is definitely like Tracey said: the girls are there to please the teacher and, in the majority, the influence of peers is far greater for the boys. Again, I am generalising because there are a few in my class who, as soon as you start to speak, are right there and switched on. What I found is that when you utilise that for your own means you can have a lot of success as well, particularly in the area of developing their social skills. The whole class has the idea of, ‘This is the way we do it around here. This is our expectation. This person is going to bring our whole class down.’ When we talk about that, then the feeling that they do not want to let their mates down is very important to them. That pulls them into line as well. It really has helped their behaviour and their social skills as well.

**Miss Hopkins**—I think boys really need to have a clear idea of what your expectations are. They really need to know those guidelines. When the boys come in during the afternoon, they have a very good understanding of what my expectations are and, when they understand that, they can work with it. If they know there are consequences, they can deal with it, as long as they know what is happening. Boys are more likely to challenge you as a teacher, which is great. Girls do not maintain the status quo, but they are more prone to step into line. Boys will challenge me. They will say, ‘Why, Miss? Why do we have to do that?’ They need to know why, and they need to know what you require of them.

I also find that as soon as the boys come into the room in the afternoon my style of communication with the class changes because I automatically use humour a lot more. I was talking to someone who came into the room—I cannot remember who it was—and I said that boys’ personalities develop sooner than girls’ personalities at that age. My opinion is that as girls get older they tend to develop that sense of fun and having fun with a group, whereas boys really use that a lot more at a younger age. That is one way that a teacher can really get through to them, if you show them that you are a normal person and that you can have fun, but you do also need to set those guidelines for them.

**CHAIR**—You have a real cultural mix in this school, and you say generally that it appears to be due to the attitude and the approach that the single sex classes are working better. Is that improvement any more marked for any cultural group than it is for the group generally?

**Mr Debus**—I would doubt it.

**Mr Willetts**—I would say—

**Mrs Crossingham**—Do you think the boys' class works better for the Koori students because they are, by nature, oral and they are given more opportunities to speak out in the boys' classroom than they would be given in a mainstream classroom?

**Mr Willetts**—Again, I would say yes, but it depends on the teaching strategies and the opportunities that they are given in that class. I do not think putting the boys together in a boys' class is what makes a boys' class or a girls' class successful; it is the strategies that you use. If I put all those boys into the boys' class and said that it would be pen and pencil work all day every day, that would not make a difference.

**Mr Debus**—One thing that I mentioned to you before is that we did those videos—one of which you saw. We asked the boys and the girls, 'Is it making a difference to you?' Both the boys and the girls were emphatic that it was. Both the boys and the girls believed that by being in this group they were able to learn. They both gave the same answer: if they were in the boys' class, the girls always interrupted them and vice versa. The perception from the children has actually lifted some performance.

**Mrs Cox**—We have a large number of Pacific Islanders, and the girls and boys actually follow quite different paths in their families. From a Pacific Island point of view, the boys are allowed a lot more freedom than the girls. For the girls' personalities and individuality to be allowed to grow in a girls' classroom, it gives them an opportunity which they may not have in a mixed group at that stage, because the boys are certainly handled differently by their parents and given different freedoms from the girls. Time will tell whether their literacy learning and their total growth is continuing, but it does give room for that because of differences in family cultures from girls to boys.

**Mr SAWFORD**—I often wonder whether we are undervaluing, or undermeasuring, the achievements of boys by sometimes overestimating the achievements of girls. I go back to a point that Brian made about competition. Basically, you said that competition was about winners and losers and, I would imagine, frowned upon as a viable strategy. Is that correct?

**Mr Debus**—I do not think there is any evidence that shows that there is improvement through competition. I believe very emphatically that if children are treated individually and their needs are met individually, then that is far more powerful than any competition. As I said, necessarily there are winners, losers and those in between. Whereas if children are taught and respected and their needs are met individually, then that is where you are going to have learning occurring.

**Mr SAWFORD**—So you do not see any positive aspects of competition at all?

**Mr Debus**—Do you?

**Mr SAWFORD**—Yes, I do. A lot of research amply suggests it, and the boys themselves suggest it, too. They recognise that there is a negative aspect; there is a negative aspect to everything we do in life. There are certainly negative aspects about competition, as you have spelt out, but a lot of boys see the positive aspects of it. They see it as a personal challenge; a challenge to perform at a higher level. Sometimes I think we are a little too accepting of cooperation or—the word you used—'collaboration'. Sometimes that can reduce what you do to

the lowest common denominator—accepting mediocrity. There needs to be a balance. Life is about everything. To me, education is a balance between the degree of cooperation and the degree of competition. There are very positive things about cooperation in terms of team play, et cetera, but there are negative things about it as well. And there are positive and negative things about competition. We are getting a lot of evidence from some of the schools which are very successful with boys' programs, and this thread about balancing differences comes through. Boys respond to the range.

Tracey, you were saying that girls like to please teachers. That is a common finding of this inquiry as well. Boys like to please boys, but they also like to please teachers. There are lots of contradictions in everything. There are five times as many adolescent girls admitted to our hospitals for depression than boys. Sometimes we overestimate the pluses for girls and maybe underestimate the negatives for boys. Boys are being admitted for depression as well, at a rate of 20 per cent to the rest. Just one last bark, and then I will ask you to respond. I am being provocative. You have used the term 'equal outcomes'. I am always perplexed about equal outcomes. How can you have equal outcomes for someone who has an IQ of 70 and someone who has an IQ of 270?

**Mrs Crossingham**—The competition issue comes back to individual learning styles. Some children thrive on competition where it is competition with themselves. We have students across the school who cannot wait to get one more spelling word right than they got last week. They are competing with themselves. If the teacher is putting that somewhere where they can see it and map it, they find that very rewarding. Other students enjoy competing with one another and they really push each other up and along. Some students do not, and they prefer to learn in cooperative styles.

One of the problems with this sort of inquiry is that it is based on generalisations. We can look at what is happening in our boys' class and in our girls' class, and talk about the main group in each room, but there are groups in both rooms that the situation is affecting in different ways. They are not the mainstream of the groups. They are finding other events happening. Whether they were in a single sex class or a mainstream class, their learning styles and difficulties would still be apparent. It is not necessarily gender based; it is about learning styles.

As Bobby, Tracey and I have said, you walk into the boys' room and you approach it one way because you are making an assumption about boys' learning styles. You walk into the girls' room and you approach it a different way because you are making an assumption about girls' learning styles. When you have a class that has two sexes in it, you are immediately focusing on one learning style or another and you tend to go back to your most comfortable teaching style. Unfortunately, personally I believe that most of our teaching styles suit the majority of female students. What teachers need to learn is how to recognise learning styles and how to change their teaching styles, and that is a big ask.

**Mr SAWFORD**—Have we forgotten how to teach boys?

**Mrs Crossingham**—I do not think we have. The teaching profession has changed, even in the short time I have been in the teaching profession. There are a lot fewer male teachers. I can remember when I was at school that the senior primary teachers were always men and the women did the junior school and the nurturing. That has changed, but society has changed too.



It is very difficult to find for the boys the role models that we keep talking about. We need to give these boys role models. It is not something a teacher can just pull out the sky; it is a resource that needs to be given to us on the ground. Someone needs to say, 'If you're looking for a really good role model for boys, here is an example. This is what this person is modelling and this is how you can utilise that,' whether it be a local community member, someone in parliament or someone in sport. The masculinity that you take from that person is great but, as we have said for years, that is what it focuses on—a type of masculinity. We are saying that we are trying to improve literacy skills, and then we are saying that literacy skills are feminine skills. It is a contradiction.

**Mr Debus**—Let me just come back to two points. The first one is equal outcomes. I want an equal outcome for a child who has a 70 IQ, who is Aboriginal, who is NESB, whether it is a boy or a girl. I would not expect the same outcome from a student with a 140 IQ, but I believe social justice demands that all children should have that equal outcome. Of course there are going to be differences, but the thing is that if we accept that the winners take all, then our whole society loses.

**Mr SAWFORD**—I am not suggesting that at all. I am just saying that sometimes when you use the term 'equal outcomes' and you do not qualify it, you draw different conclusions.

**Mr Debus**—That is my answer to the question that you posed. The other thing, too, is that I have never seen that in 41 years, nor do I believe that I have seen any research which says that competition per se is going to improve. What I do know is that learning will improve when it is centred on the child's needs, when it is taught by a teacher who is properly prepared and properly trained in an environment where there are resources to meet those individual needs. I believe the whole inquiry would not be necessary if our society did not concentrate so much on the successes—for example, those people who will win tomorrow night in the rugby league, the AFL. Our society is based on this belief that success is the only measure.

**Mr Willetts**—I want to go back for a minute to that point about competition. I will tell you something that is not a generalisation, that is a fact. If a team or an individual goes once a week to a grade and gets thumped and absolutely demoralised week in and week out, they will not continue to play that game.

**Mr SAWFORD**—It is also not competition either.

**Mr Willetts**—That is exactly right.

**Mr SAWFORD**—Competition means that there is some unpredictability of a result.

**Mr Willetts**—That is exactly right. I would say that there is positive and negative but it has to be at an appropriate level. I have boys in a class who compete and who like to compete against each other, but they are at a level where that is useful because the competition drives them forward. Even twin brothers compete in things like spelling tests. It is more useful for them as a personal achievement, to say that they have done better than they did in their last test, and I encourage them to beat their personal best. For me to write up every week who gets 20 out of 20 in their spelling test or who does the best in a state standardised spelling test or a basic

skills test is absolutely counterproductive because the first will come first every time and the last will come last every time.

There needs to be a way where you focus on the improvement, the competition with the self, and the self-improvement, not on 'I beat you and I'll beat you every time.' If you turned up to play me at squash every week and you did not get a point every week you turned up, you would not continue to play the game. When you are talking about learning as playing a game, we want these children to be motivated to learn. They will only be learning if they are playing the game. If you set up a fully competitive environment within your classroom, that will immediately switch off and disengage a huge number of students in your room.

**Mr SAWFORD**—But there are other people who will argue the opposite—that you can use competition in a positive way.

**Mr Willetts**—They can argue as much they like—

**Mr SAWFORD**—Some of those people are doing very well at teaching boys.

**Miss Hopkins**—Sorry to interject but, even in the girls' class, if you have students with learning difficulties—and there are a considerable amount in all classes in this school—then regardless of the competition, these kids cannot cope. They are struggling. No matter how much competition you instil in that classroom, they need more than competition.

**Mr SAWFORD**—Competition is when you have an unpredictable result. It is not about putting out unequal things. What I am arguing is that there is a lack of balance, that sometimes in education you go through trends and suddenly things become out of favour. Structured learning was out of favour; it is now back in favour. There is a whole range of differences. Sometimes maybe the boys need a little more balance in everything. That is the only point I am making.

**Mr WILKIE**—I would like to change the focus slightly and go back to some of the other things that were said previously. Whilst someone said that girls tend to try and please the teacher—there has been evidence given to us before that that might be the case—but, where the teachers are not pleasing the boys, the boys will not perform for the teachers. So teachers are very important in a relationship with boys. If the boys do not feel that they can be respected or heard by the teacher, they just do not perform. Has that been your experience?

**Mr Willetts**—Girls learn subjects; boys learn teachers.

**Miss Hopkins**—That is exactly right.

**Mr WILKIE**—Yes, girls tend to put it aside and get on with it, but boys, if they do not feel that they get on with the teachers, it is sort of 'death day' for them. They just try and punish the teacher.

**Miss Hopkins**—I had a student last year who had difficulties with behaviour. I felt that we related really well. I got him working really well. I can tell you now that the majority of the reason for that was because he respected me and he came to school. He did not need a mate; he

needed someone that cared about him, because at home things were tough. I was probably the best thing in the day that he came in contact with. Some of those kids come to school with huge problems and they need someone—be it male or female; it is not necessarily a big male that is going to stand there and scare them or frighten them—that they can respect, and that will certainly help them to work. I think that the teacher is so important. Some kids are not compatible with some teachers and that is just the way it is.

**Mr WILKIE**—Do you think that is taught enough to teachers as they are going through their training or through any professional development? Do you think that is acknowledged?

**Miss Hopkins**—No. I think it has got a lot to do with the teacher's personality as well. If you are a compassionate person and you can see kids coming to school with difficulties, it is whether you are willing to go the extra mile. It is not something that can be taught. I think it depends on the person as well. Sure, there could be professional development put into it, but I think a lot of it depends on the teacher's personality.

**Mr Debus**—Could I also point out that it is the culture of the school. The teachers here, without exception, are really into making sure that they make an individual difference with every child. A couple of years ago, some policemen picked up a couple of our kids out in the street and brought them in and criticised the way they looked. We have kids here that we dress every day because we believe that they have that dignity to be here. The culture of the school is so important. Of course, that flows through to the teachers and the whole philosophy of what is happening.

**Mr WILKIE**—I agree. I think it is very important. But how would you assess a teacher's performance in that area and, if you saw a need, how would you deal with it?

**Mrs Cox**—Within the school structure we have teaching support teams. A teacher does not work in isolation. There are teams across grades and we have had a range of different team structures. An executive supervises, mentors and looks after the teachers in that team. We try and encourage a process where there is someone who may be supervising and mentoring but is a friend as well. If things are not going really well, we hope that we have teachers on the staff who are attuned to other teachers and can see that this was a bad day and that someone needs a debriefing time and a support person. Most of the staff have a buddy to whom they are attached. If there is a problem in the class, they can discuss that and take a child from one class to another.

As a person involved with placing teachers and children in classes, I like to think that we are aware of teacher strengths as individuals along with personalities and teaching styles. I know that some teachers will feel threatened by a particular child whose behaviour may be difficult or who may have a particular manner of learning that is going to be a problem. We would choose the children and the class very carefully. It is not a case of saying all the children from A to B go with this teacher. It is a matter of: this is the teacher and these are the teacher's strengths from a personality, experience and cultural background point of view. We know that a teacher will be able to handle particular children's behaviour and cultural background and learning styles. We do it this way. If it does not work the first time, we may make a change.

Teachers who are coming into the school initially will find it quite a difficult school. It is a large school with a cultural mix with a low socioeconomic status. Many of us come from middle-class backgrounds. We are not familiar as we come through university with many of the problems we experience in an everyday school like this. It is really hard for many teachers to come to terms with that and accept the fact that children may still learn even if their home background is very different. They are not wearing what we expect them to wear and they do not address you the way we would necessarily like them to address you. They are still at primary school and they are having to learn those facets, be it the address or what they are wearing or how they stand or how they carry themselves.

Many teachers come and find it quite threatening. We need to work with them to provide them with background to lower socioeconomic and rural students and different cultures and children with an intellectual disability. We need to educate them with that and we hope that the support pattern does that. But it does take time. We need to be there for beginning teachers as they come out as enthusiastic professionals if they find the mix of Griffith Public School a threat. Suddenly a child says, 'I do not know you and I will do what I feel like doing at this moment.' Those teachers feel really threatened. We have executive teachers and teachers who have been teaching for many years having difficulties because the children do not know that they should respect the teachers. Some of the parents do not know that there is an expectation of respect and a manner in doing things—a certain decorum, a certain procedure—in dealing with students and teachers within the school situation. Teachers can find that very threatening.

We have to be sure that, as a staff, we support each other, that we use the department, the district office and other officers of the department to provide support for each person so that we do not lose teachers. We are working through their education as well as through the education of the students, be it male or female, lower socioeconomic, Pacific Island or Koori. We come as individuals and we need to deal with individual teachers.

**Mr WILKIE**—This comment relates to what Cheryl said earlier about the need for different teaching styles for boys and girls. I understand that is what you were saying. It is actually the first time in the history of this inquiry that someone has stated it in that plain language. That question has been put to senior bureaucrats across the country and they have said that it is rubbish and that there is no need to have different teaching styles for boys and girls and that a teacher will just deal with that. In response to the question that has been asked of them of whether you need people to have different styles they have said no.

I appreciate your comment. There were two issues that you raised. One was that the teaching styles may need to be different, and the other related to the possible need for more male role models in primary school, particularly at the higher end. I am more interested in people's views as to whether they believe that teaching styles should be different for boys versus girls, so that we have them on the record.

**Miss Hopkins**—I believe that it comes back to the teacher, and Cheryl, I know, would agree. Having a male teacher does not mean that the problems will be solved, and I know that you are aware of that.

**Mr WILKIE**—I am not suggesting that.

**Miss Hopkins**—As I said before, you can have a male teacher with a room full of boys, but you can have a tiny female and the respect can be just as great.

**Mrs Crossingham**—With boys it is to a large degree about achieving justice. If you treat boys in a way that they feel is just and fair, you tend to earn their respect very early in the piece and that is what they are seeking. As Tracey said, the girls tend to accept that a teacher is the person at the front of the classroom—again it is a generalisation, there are definitely those who challenge us—but with the boys there is this great feeling of justice. If you can set up a system that they perceive to be fair—and you have to do that in negotiation with them; they will not accept your imposing it upon them—and then you actually work that system in the way it has been negotiated and in the way you have discussed, you win points very early in the piece from those boys. If you continue to maintain that system, then, even if a child steps outside the system, the others tend to say, ‘Hang on, that’s how it is; we’ve agreed. You’ve let yourself down and you’ve walked outside the line. The line was drawn, now you cop the consequences.’ But if you suddenly change and do something different, they will all let you know very quickly.

**Mr Willetts**—Definitely. Cheryl has a lot of success in my class, but there are other teachers who do struggle. It is because of the way Cheryl does exactly that within the class that she has success. There is a class structure, there are class rules and there is a system. If you go by that system and you are consistent with that system, everything is fine. It is once the system is not utilised by someone else who comes into the room that things break down very quickly.

After doing some of the readings the other day, and I did it a while ago—I did it at the start when I first got the boys. I looked at the people they admire and the people they like, and all those types of things. At the start it was friends and trying to get us all together as a friendly group. The other day I talked about people they admire and got them to draw pictures and write about the people they admired. Inevitably, they were sportspeople and they all fitted the masculine role model. There was one out of the whole class who wrote that he admired his mother for the things that she provided for him, basically. Some of them had problems differentiating between like and admire. For the ones that really understood admiration, it was all the alpha male type of behaviour, and they are their role models.

What I think the male role model, my being in that class, achieves—because I take them for sport and I take them out, we do all the enjoyable things: we have all the laughs and make the relationships. But I also say to them that, while that is all important and that is all great, learning is important and reading is important. The lady who works in the canteen came to me and said, ‘Can you speak to my child about eating breakfast, because he’s stopped eating breakfast.’ I said that I could do that. She asked me to do that because when I say it, it is law. When he comes home and says, ‘Mr Willetts said today that we’ve got to eat breakfast because breakfast provides this and breakfast provides that,’ it is because he sees the value. If I can go along with them and make the relationships in other areas—make the link with them and connect with them in other ways—you can use that for their learning. They can see I value learning.

They need to see more male role models who value learning. If you asked any of them who won the grand final last year they would all tell you but if you asked who won the art or literature prizes they would not know. It is about what our society values, what we see on the television. Our top role models are the beautiful people who strut on the television every night. What are they giving us and what are they providing?—not much. It is getting back to values.

Let us value learning. Having a male there to say, 'Yes, I am male and I value learning,' or a parent or another male role model to say, 'We value learning' is what gets them.

**Mr PEARCE**—Brian, when you were first approached about being involved in this research project what was the reaction of parents, teachers and students to this idea? Was there a concern? Did you have to sell the concept to any one of those three groups? If you did, how did you go about that?

**Mr Debus**—Research was based on the evaluations from the year before. We saw an idea, and we ran with that. We asked parents if they would be happy for their children to go into the classes, and they made that formal agreement. At the end of last year we also went through that process because whenever you go down a line unintended outcomes or feelings always occur. Again, we surveyed parents. Two girls went out of the class and two, presumably, came into it. There were some concerns, and that is why we are having this research done through the Charles Sturt University. We are too close to it to come to something very definitive. There are lots of other factors too that we cannot control, but at least we have a few things.

**Mr PEARCE**—Did the boys and girls go, 'Terrific! Hooray! This is going to be great'? What was the response from the students?

**Mr Debus**—They accepted it; it was just part of the organisation. They saw it as novel to start off with, and it was very exciting. The boys, as Bobby said, even when we were going through the assertive discipline, had goals which were quite different to the assertive discipline goals or rewards that the girls were putting. It has been fairly well accepted. There have been some problems. I am sure that Cheryl could even indicate some of them.

**Mr PEARCE**—Without going too far, I am interested in the broad acceptance. Basically, you think it was quite positive?

**Mr Debus**—At the end of last year only two children were moved from the girls' class and one from the boys' class.

**Mr PEARCE**—Tracey, you talked about how you—quite consciously, by the sound of it—in the afternoon change your style and introduce humour. What is the experience of the students themselves? How different are they once they go back to integrated classes? In other words, when you start in the morning I presume the girls are of one sort of mindset. Are they dramatically different? And the boys as well?

**Miss Hopkins**—The first time we integrated, the boys all lined up and came in like a herd of beasts, you could say. They were saying, 'We are here, girls.' That is what they wanted to do. They were saying, 'Miss Hopkins, we are here. Girls, we are here.' It was a bit of this and a bit of that and a bit of mucking around. We sat down and I said, 'We need to work out some rules,' and we did. We all sat down together, and we came up with the rules together. We had consequences and we had expectations. When they come into the room, having said that I will change my style, they know that they are just like anybody else in the room—girls or boys. They are all equal and they are all students. It is like Cheryl said, boys are more oral. A few kids spring to mind. If you have a discussion, their first instinct is to rush in—not put up their hands or things like that.

**Mr PEARCE**—I was particularly interested in the behavioural characteristics. For example, is there any trend that would suggest that in the morning there are several of the boys, for example, who are very vocal, very ego driven and always asking questions but, in the afternoon, they get in amongst the integrated class and, all of a sudden, they are very quiet? Are there any dramatic shifts like that?

**Miss Hopkins**—There are personalities that you cannot change, and that are vocal personalities. But they will follow rules when they are in the room. I think that the boys come in and tend to have more sarcasm—more of an attitude. As I said before, they are trying to earn respect with their peers rather than with me. Having said that, though, I feel that I have their respect and we operate very well in the afternoons. But even the way that I teach, whilst I would not use sarcasm, you have to understand—you have to be with it, to tell you the truth. You have to know what they are thinking. Yelling at them is not going to help. Something subtle in front of their mates will help. They see themselves in front of their peers.

**Mr SAWFORD**—Is it sarcasm, or is it sense of humour?

**Miss Hopkins**—Both, and I thoroughly enjoy that. What they bring to the class in the afternoons is refreshing, and I really look forward to it.

**Mr Willetts**—There is one in particular who always comes out with the sarcastic, humorous remark—inevitably. You have to take that, wear it and move on—or laugh or whatever. You cannot jump down his throat.

**Miss Hopkins**—You have got to be one step ahead of them. If they see that you are one step ahead they will not try any more.

**Mrs Crossingham**—He is going to be like that in any classroom—it is not going to matter whether it is a single-sex classroom or a mixed classroom. That is that child's nature, and he is going to be that person.

**Mr WILKIE**—There is always one of those in every class. How can you teach people to deal with that?

**Miss Hopkins**—I know that things are working if I can get him to laugh, because he will laugh not only at what I am saying but also at himself. It is that realisation that 'I'm not going anywhere with her—she knows what's going on.' We move on—end of story.

**Mr PEARCE**—The comment you made that 'you have got to be with it' introduces my last question to you. Maybe it is more directed to Brian. I want to choose my words carefully because I do not want to suggest any lack of respect. You are involved in this project. It seems, on the face of it, that you have two very well-trained younger teachers in this research project. Is that deliberate? What was the selection process?

**Mr Debus**—Could I answer that? Because we were trying to keep as many things under control as possible, originally last year we deliberately put two experienced teachers on it. One of those was actually promoted and has gone to Leeton. That person would be in the older grouping compared to Bobby. I do not think it makes a difference. I think it comes down to

having really good teachers, and that is what we were trying to actually get at. It is basically about what they have got in their hearts, the skills that they deploy, their perceptiveness in analysing what the children need and the ability to develop programs from that. That is the basis of all good teaching.

**Mr PEARCE**—Your experience to date that the predecessor who was taking the boys' class prior to Bobby was—

**Mr Willetts**—An older lady had the girls—but when she had the girls and boys together she had no problems with the boys. I think that she was a really skilled teacher, but also one with a real zest for teaching—a real love of it. It came through, and that is where the respect came from for the boys, because she really loved what she was doing and it showed through. It showed that she had a really caring way with the boys. The boys' explanation—the boys that I teach love nothing more than for me to tell them, when I am pulling them into line, why I am pulling them into line. When you say to them, 'I am pulling you into line for your own good, because I care about you,' then you have got a whole new scope for talking to them, and a whole new way to talk to them. Their eyes come up and you get through to them then. But to just berate them doesn't work. This teacher was the same—she would take them aside and speak to them on their own. By the time they walked back into the classroom they still walked back in with their dignity, and then the lesson went on.

**CHAIR**—We will have to leave it there. Thank you very much for valuable input this morning—it has been very helpful. We wish you well as you grapple with this new approach.

**Mr Debus**— Can I just say one last thing? I think it really is the crux of the department's submission. Basically, early success is essential. I note here from an inquiry that 64 per cent of boys go to reading recovery. So they are right behind at the beginning. Unless we marshal and direct our resources at the beginning—unless we build the base—we cannot expect to get the outcomes. I speak very passionately on the need to marshal those resources at the early part of schooling because this whole inquiry is not going to come to anything unless we do that. We need to get in early, we need to have it targeted and we need to have it successful because once you have got that success literacy occurs in those first four years of schooling.

**Mr SAWFORD**—Maybe—with Kerry as a chairman—we might have that as the subject of our next inquiry, which was really my wish for what this one was going to be. You are exactly right. Resources in education are so badly spent in this country and the distribution and the cut-up of the cake beggars belief. I totally agree with you.

**Mrs Crossingham**—As a parent, I want to respond to Brian's beliefs about Reading Recovery training. I am Reading Recovery trained and I know a fair bit about Reading Recovery and I had a son who underwent the program in year 1. If we are talking about education of boys I have real concern with where we are aiming the support for the boys because A lot of boys in year 1 do not have the skills, the brain wiring—whatever you want to call it—to take the reading situation on board. Do not get me wrong; there are a lot who can, but for those boys who are struggling Reading Recovery often comes too early and they still do not have the wiring they need to make reading work. Talking on a personal basis, it took my son until he was in year 5 to actually get that together and that is where some of Bobby's boys are now. They are in year 5 and it is all finally starting to come together. Until now, doing tests like



the basic skills test deems them in the paperwork as failures and I do not believe that it is. I believe it is because that up until that point we do not recognise that boys are not ready for a lot of the things that we are asking them to do.

**CHAIR**—Thank you again for your time today.

Resolved (on motion by **Mr Pearce**):

That this committee authorises publication, including publication on the parliamentary database, of the proof transcript of the evidence given before it at public hearing this day.

**Proceedings suspended from 1.32 p.m. to 2.47 p.m.**

**WADE HIGH SCHOOL**

## Student Representatives

Samuel Allinson

Jake Bryce

James Duffell

Matthew Kimball

Jordan Krszoka

Hifo Loseli

Sebastian Mazza

Colin McKay

Dion Minato

Michael Moglrotti

Chris Palmer

Anthony Papandrea

Matt Roberts

Luke Signor

Jagjit Singh

Daniel Swindale

Garth Tarr

James Winter

**CHAIR**—We thank you for being involved in this process. We will throw a few questions at you. Please be frank with us: we really want to get some feedback as to what boys are thinking about school, how it is going and so on. Are any of you in the boys-only English classes? Could perhaps a couple of you tell me how you feel about that? Is learning English better than it was when you were in co-ed classes?

**Mr SAWFORD**—Maybe, before they respond, we should very briefly explain to the boys why we are having this inquiry. This inquiry was referred by the Minister for Education, Training and Youth Affairs, who was Dr Kemp in the previous parliament, because there was some concern that there was the perception around that boys were not doing as well as girls in some areas. The then Commonwealth Department of Education, Training and Youth Affairs presented to this committee some evidence that the difference in attainment levels between boys and girls, in a whole range of areas, varies across Australia by up to 20 percentage points. We want to find out whether that is true and, if it is, why. The other thing we want to find out is, if it is not true, why all of this is going on. Also, are boys turning off from traditional ways of schooling or has schooling changed in a way that has turned boys off? What is going on? So the reason for the inquiry is to find out whether or not it is the case.

**CHAIR**—And to find out, if it is the case, what we can do to try to address it. So what you tell us will be very valuable. Perhaps you could now tell us about your English class.

**Colin Mackay**—I think being in an all-boys class gives me more confidence, because I am not always talking—we are still talking, but we are not talking as much.

**CHAIR**—Does it give you more confidence to express your views about the things that you are studying?

**Colin Mackay**—Yes.

**CHAIR**—Do you find that you are looking at different sorts of novels now than you did when you were in a co-ed class?

**Colin Mackay**—Yes, more boys stuff.

**Mr SAWFORD**—What do you call ‘boys stuff’?

**Colin Mackay**—War books and things like that.

**CHAIR**—Of those of you who put your hands up who are in the boys-only class, do any of you not think it is better than the co-ed class? You all think it is better. Okay.

**Mr PEARCE**—I would like to ask a broad and general question to get some feedback. You are all in different year levels, aren’t you? What year are you guys in? You are in years 11 and 12. I will start with the year 11 and year 12 students. Talking about school and education and, in particular, about your experience as a boy, as a male, what do you think has been the worst part of your education, particularly your secondary education? What would be the one single thing that you would change if you became the minister for education tomorrow, specifically relating to your experience as a boy? Is there something that you could touch on which you think that you would change if you had that opportunity?

**Hifo Loseli**—There is a bit too much homework and we leave it until the last moment, so that’s why we are not doing as well.

**Mr PEARCE**—Is there a lot of pressure? You have schooling during the day, you have to get home and there is a lot of homework, and it creates a lot of pressure for you.

**Hifo Loseli**—Yes, so that is why we always socialise—we can get our mind away from it. Then the date comes for handing in your assignment and you have not got it because there is too much homework and assignments.

**Mr SAWFORD**—Do you have a job after school?

**Hifo Loseli**—No, I don't.

**Mr SAWFORD**—So you really should not have a problem at all, should you?

**Hifo Loseli**—Yes, I know, but other people do.

**Mr SAWFORD**—How many people in here have a part-time job? And what do you do?

**Mathew Kimball**—I am a night packer at Big W.

**Mr SAWFORD**—Who else works at the supermarket? Nobody. Who works somewhere else? Where do you work?

**James Duffell**—Baby Chopsticks.

**Mr SAWFORD**—What do you do there?

**James Duffell**—I cook Chinese.

**Mr SAWFORD**—Are you good at it?

**James Duffell**—Yes, pretty good.

**Mr SAWFORD**—That is terrific.

**Mr WILKIE**—Is it a good place to come when you are in Griffith?

**Samuel Allinson**—I work at a video shop in town.

**Mr SAWFORD**—Does homework cause a problem when you have got a part-time position? How many hours a week do you work, for example?

**Samuel Allinson**—At the moment we have too many employees, so I only work about 10 hours every two weeks. I couldn't split it up into weeks.

**Mr SAWFORD**—Who works more than 10 hours? How long do you work?

**James Duffell**—I work Thursday and Friday night and I work 10 hours, but it can vary. I do work at other restaurants around Griffith and, depending on what time of the year it is and how much work is on, I can sometimes work up to five to seven days. It does clash with your homework, and I realise that. It is sometimes hard to say no to work when they are very desperate and they have got 40 people coming in and they need someone to help.

**Mr SAWFORD**—Does the school have any flexible arrangements to allow you to work when you like—and should it?

**Mr WILKIE**—When you say ‘seven days’, it is all after school, isn’t it?

**James Duffell**—Yes, it is all after school. I would not work seven days, although I have done it a couple of times. I work, say, four days a week. It does get hectic, but the school does not give you any leeway for that, but I can understand why not—because you are a full-time student and you should not be working. You do not get any leeway; maybe you should get a little—sometimes.

**Mr PEARCE**—Did you do the commercial cookery course here?

**James Duffell**—Yes, I am doing the commercial cookery course at the moment.

**Mr PEARCE**—Are you doing the jobs because you need the money or because you want a career in commercial cooking?

**James Duffell**—I am doing it for both reasons. You do not go to work every day thinking, ‘Yeah, this is the way that I am going to work to succeed in my career and get a better knowledge of stuff. Yeah, you have to work. I am going to get some money for the weekend.’ That is it.

**CHAIR**—How many of you have got a pretty clear idea of what you want to do when you leave school?

**Mr SAWFORD**—Let’s pass the mike around and get it on the record quickly. Just say your name and say what you want to do.

**Samuel Allinson**—I want to leave school and do TAFE retail and business studies, and open a clothes and a music store in town.

**CHAIR**—Good.

**Hifo Loseli**—I will probably stay in business studies.

**Chris Palmer**—I would like to become a cop or something like that.

**Jordan Krszoka**—I want to be a structural engineer in the Army.

**Garth Tarr**—Go to university to study economics.

**Mr COX**—That is a very wise decision!

**Mr SAWFORD**—That is debatable.

**Mr COX**—There are two economists on this committee.

**CHAIR**—Keep going.

**James Winter**—I want to open my own commuter shop so I can fix and retail computers.

**Matthew Kimball**—I want to finish university and become a physiotherapist.

**Colin McKay**—I want to be a butcher eventually.

**CHAIR**—That is it. So the rest of you have not decided. I notice no-one said they wanted to be a teacher.

**Samuel Allinson**—I did.

**CHAIR**—You did want to but you have changed your mind. Perhaps you could tell us why you wanted to and why you do not want to now.

**Samuel Allinson**—Last year my maths teacher, Mr Seers, and I got along really well. I think the attitude the teachers have towards the students makes a big difference to you in your attitude towards teaching and in the way students teach teachers back. The better you get along, the better your work goes, I reckon. I came at the start of year 9 and I wasn't going too well in maths, then I got to know Mr Seers a bit better, and we got along really well and I picked up. I went really well in my School Certificate for maths, so that had a big impact on me. Now I have another teacher and I don't like it as much anymore. I still enjoy maths but not as much as I did last year.

**CHAIR**—So you no longer want to be a maths teacher?

**Samuel Allinson**—I would rather open a shop.

**Mr WILKIE**—Who has got teachers they like and teachers they don't like; teachers they think are good and teachers they think that are bad? We do not want to hear names. We are interested in what makes a good teacher and what makes a bad teacher. Would anyone like to share that with us without actually specifying the people?

**Jordan Krszoka**—I think how much experience a teacher has has got a lot to do with it. We have a new teacher for one of our subjects and the class doesn't really respect him as much. So he has a hard time teaching us, if there are people doing all sorts of things.

**Mr WILKIE**—It is experience in terms of being able to look after you guys?

**Jordan Krszoka**—When they have been a teacher for a long time, they know what kids are going to do and so they know how to handle it.

**Mr SAWFORD**—So it is control and discipline?

**Jordan Krszoka**—Yes.

**Garth Tarr**—I think being able to build a rapport with your teacher and being able to communicate with them on a personal level—not with the teacher having a higher kind of stance—is especially important in the senior years. I think also male students get along better in general with male teachers. At this school I know that male teachers are pretty much outweighed by female teachers and the inability of younger males to get along with females in authoritative positions could be a reason why boys are not achieving so much.

**CHAIR**—Just before we go on, could I just ask the others of you just to respond to that. You said you think boys get on better with male teachers. Does anyone disagree with that? A couple of you disagree but mostly—

**James Duffell**—My favourite teacher is female, so I cannot agree with that.

**Mr SAWFORD**—Why is she your favourite teacher?

**James Duffell**—Because you can talk to her on the same level. There is that teacher-student respect there but you still enjoy yourself when you are in the class. If you are not doing something right, she is able to take you out of the class and tell you what you are not doing right, and you own up to it and realise that you are doing it wrong.

**Mr SAWFORD**—So you are saying the same as your colleague: it is the quality of the teacher that is important.

**James Duffell**—That is exactly it. I agree with that.

**CHAIR**—But most of you are saying you think male teachers, other things being equal, are generally better for boys—yes or no?

**Samuel Allinson**—My favourite teacher last year was a guy, but now I have kind of changed—probably my favourite teachers are females. Just the way they treat you makes a big difference, I reckon—the attitude they have towards you, where they give you a fair go and everything.

**Mr SAWFORD**—What sorts of qualities do female teachers have to have to be successful?

**CHAIR**—Sorry, Mr Wilkie, we have derailed your question a bit.

**Mr WILKIE**—It has been derailed a bit. We are talking about what makes a good teacher or a bad teacher. I think some people would say there are some good male teachers and there are some good female teachers, but what I am interested in is what you think makes a good teacher.

Who are you going to work for? If you find you do not like your teacher, do you find you are not going to perform as well as for someone you do like? If you get on really well with the teacher, are you going to try and do the right thing and get on and learn? If you cannot stand the teacher, are you going to say, 'Forget this, I'm not going to bother'?

**Matthew Kimball**—I think that is right. If you like the teacher, you are going to do the work for them because you feel you owe it to them—because they are earning their living just the same as you are trying to get along at school. But if you don't like the teacher you could just be spiteful and say, 'No, I'm not going to do it.' You always seem to get along better with the teacher you like. You enjoy the classes more, so you learn better.

**Mr WILKIE**—Is that a general view? I will ask people to put their hands up, because it is an important point that we have had around the country. Would people generally agree with that? Does anyone disagree? Thanks for that. Just for the record, most people have put their hands up.

**Mr SAWFORD**—To go back to the female teacher, what are the good qualities that you like about that teacher?

**Samuel Allinson**—She gives everyone a fair go. When you walk into the classroom, she doesn't think, 'Oh, this guy's going to be in trouble,' or anything; she will wait to see how well you go first. And she will make the class fun, sort of. When you walk in, she won't just say, 'Sit down and write this.' You get along well with her, and it makes a big difference. She is an easy person to talk to.

**CHAIR**—Is she young or old?

**Samuel Allinson**—It is Ms Wiseman—she's here. She's cool. She's about 40—I'm not sure. I'm not going to say anything, just in case—or in her 30s. She is pretty experienced.

**CHAIR**—So age is not really the point?

**Samuel Allinson**—I don't think age has much to do with it. Experience does a bit, but I reckon just the way you get along with your teacher makes a huge difference in how you are going to perform for them. Because, like he said, you feel you owe it to them. If you get treated well, you want to treat them well back.

**Mr SAWFORD**—If you had a male teacher who had no sense of humour and who came in there with a fixed view about the boys, you would not like him either, would you?

**Samuel Allinson**—What do you mean?

**Mr SAWFORD**—You said the qualities of the female teacher that you liked were a sense of humour and the fact that she did not make up her mind about anybody—she listened to you first and then made up her mind.

**Samuel Allinson**—She gives you a fair go.



**Mr SAWFORD**—Some males do not have a sense of humour.

**Samuel Allinson**—A sense of humour is not all of it. That's not really such a big thing. It's just the attitude they have. With some teachers, you walk in there and they don't give you a chance. You walk in there and they just say, 'Do your work.' If you try to explain something, they won't listen to you properly.

**Mr PEARCE**—A couple of times, I notice, we have picked up this point that the teacher makes a huge difference. But, when we went around and asked what it was that you wanted to do, you were very definite: you want to open a clothing and music store downtown. Is that right?

**Samuel Allinson**—Yes.

**Mr PEARCE**—I got the very strong feeling that you have a very clear view that that is what you want to do. Is that right?

**Samuel Allinson**—Yes.

**Mr PEARCE**—So if that is what you want to want to do—and I think you said you were learning retail studies or something like that—

**Samuel Allinson**—No; I am going to after I leave school.

**Mr PEARCE**—You want to do that. You have a very clear view about what it is you want to do and you have an idea about how to get there—you want to go into retail studies. So, if you did not have a good teacher, would you not forget about that somewhat and say, 'Look, this is what I want to do anyway. It doesn't actually matter—the teacher is secondary. This is what I know I need to do in order to achieve what I want'?

**Samuel Allinson**—Yes, I don't actually do retail or business studies at school. I've never done anything like that. This is something I want to do. I want to go to TAFE, like I said, after year 12. But the teacher would have a bit of an impact; it is just whether you want it as bad as you say you do.

**Mr PEARCE**—So it can vary, or change?

**Samuel Allinson**—Yes, if it was, 'Yes, I would like to open a clothing store,' then the teacher would make a difference on it; but I really want it, so I'm not going to let the teacher stop me.

**CHAIR**—Back to the question of becoming teachers, none of you said that you want to become teachers. You guys in the front here are the oldest. You are all year 11 and year 12. Can you tell us why you would not want to become a teacher?

**James Duffell**—I would be a teacher but not in Australia. I would go to France and teach English. I wouldn't be a teacher here because they get treated pretty bad.

**CHAIR**—But not by you guys?

**Anthony Papandrea**—Yes, some teachers, the way that they're treated—I see what happens in some classes and I just wouldn't like it.

**Hifo Loseli**—It is how they get treated, and there is too much work for them, as in after school and before school—the extra work they put in.

**Mr SAWFORD**—When you say 'treated', treated by whom—the students or other teachers, or parents?

**Hifo Loseli**—Yes, students.

**CHAIR**—Do you think that if it was easier for teachers in the way that students responded to them and behaved that would make it a more tempting job for you to consider?

**Hifo Loseli**—Yes.

**Chris Palmer**—The reason why I wouldn't want to become a teacher is they have to put up with bad kids. They have to discipline them every day and mark all the tests. A good thing about the teacher's job is probably good holidays, and good pay with all that.

**Jordan Krszoka**—I am just not interested in being a teacher.

**Garth Tarr**—I have the greatest respect for teachers. I think they have one of the hardest jobs that you could possibly do. They do take a lot of crap from students—it is true. That is one of the reasons. My mother's a fairly experienced teacher, and they do get a lot of bad kids who come along and just don't respect them. That's why I don't want to become a teacher.

**Mr WILKIE**—I must admit I thought the same when I was in year 12. I ended up studying teaching, but I did not finish it. We have to make recommendations about how we might be able to help boys in the future with respect to learning in our schools. One of the things that people have been saying to us is that they are pretty good on computers. Can you put your hands up if you are good on the computer? There is a show of hands. The reason I ask that is often people have been learning how to do things on the computer during school but when it comes to their year 12 exams, or exams generally, they cannot actually use them. They are not allowed to; they have to handwrite everything. They are saying if they had access to a computer in their exams they would probably be able to perform a lot better and get a higher mark. Do those people who are good on computers agree with that? Does anyone want to make a comment on that?

**Jordan Krszoka**—That is fair enough as long as everyone had access to the computers. As long as the computers were not made available just for those people who could afford one, otherwise it would be a bit unfair for other people who couldn't get one.

**Mr WILKIE**—Yes; good call.

**Samuel Allinson**—Everyone would have to be up to a certain standard with their computer skills. You could not send in a guy who is a total genius on a computer and then send in a kid who has never used a computer before. Everyone would have to have a certain amount of experience in using computers. They would have to have a certain class or something in preparation for it, so that would make a big difference too.

**Mr SAWFORD**—Just on this same teacher thing, you said that your parent was a teacher. Do teachers—even in a subtle way—simply discourage you from being teachers? Because there is a problem if no-one in this room actually wants to be a teacher, isn't there? You made the point that there are not enough male teachers around. We went to a principal at one school who had 3,000 students, all boys, in his school. He asked all his boys who wanted to be a teacher and not one of them said yes—not one out of 3,000! This is a smaller group and you are saying exactly the same thing. Can you see there is a big problem coming up? Who is discouraging you? Is it your own perception of what is going on in schools? Is it the influence, either subtle or not, from parents or friends or teachers? Why have you come to that conclusion? The holidays are pretty good—you said that. You are the only one who does not want to be a teacher, really. You were quite definite, yet you recognised the holiday part. Who is influencing you?

**James Duffell**—Because teachers make you do what you do not want to do, basically. You come to school—coming to school is not that bad, you get to hang out with your mates. But then you have to go to class and stop talking and get your work out—not a big ask, but still you say, 'Argh, I don't want to do this.' But teachers have got to make you do it and that is probably why you do not want to be a teacher. I think that is probably the biggest influence.

**CHAIR**—We need to wrap it up, I think.

**Mr SAWFORD**—Two more, to finish.

**Chris Palmer**—Teachers, sort of, say indirectly that teaching is a bad job. Back a few years ago when they had the strikes about the pay and all that, it makes you think, 'Oh, they don't get paid well; I don't want to become a teacher then because it's not good pay.' And they complain about different aspects of the job. So you do not know any better.

**Mr SAWFORD**—They whinge too much?

**Chris Palmer**—Yes, basically.

**CHAIR**—Last comment.

**Samuel Allinson**—The teacher that I had for maths last year used to encourage me to become a teacher when I told him that I wanted to. He told me what I would have to do and kind of led me to it. But now I have come into this year I have watched and had a look at the attitude teachers have got and I just do not want to end up having to put up with that every day and having that attitude. Of course, if I were to go on and become a teacher, I would think that I would be a bit different.

**Mr SAWFORD**—What is the attitude you are talking about?

**Samuel Allinson**—Most teachers that I know don't really show much enthusiasm with their job.

**Mr SAWFORD**—They don't like it?

**Samuel Allinson**—It's not that they don't like it. But, in one of my classes, every last period that we have with her she is like, 'I am really exhausted,' and she is always going on about how tired she is. She will come in and say, 'We are all tired. Okay, let's just get on with our work.' She does not seem happy to do what she is doing.

**CHAIR**—There are two of us here, I think, who were teachers and both of us would say we thought it was a great career.

**Mr SAWFORD**—But also recognising that teachers whinge.

**CHAIR**—Boys, thank you very much for your honesty and your frankness. That is very helpful.

**Mr SAWFORD**—Young fellow, you would make a great teacher.

**CHAIR**—Yes, you would—reconsider.

[3.15 p.m.]

### **Student Representatives**

Jessica Bray

Rebecca Bruce

Amanda Favell

Amy Fox

Katie Heath

Alison Lee

Karen Lowe

Melissa Maher

Kylie Martimbianco

Hayley Norris

Sherree Schoonbeek

Samantha Staltare

**CHAIR**—Thank you, girls, for volunteering to be part of this. Just to fill you in with where we are coming from, we are doing a parliamentary inquiry into boys education. There is a reason you are here and that is that it seems that across the country over the last 20 years the results of boys, right from early primary school to HSC level, have been drifting further and further behind the results that girls are getting and we are trying to look at why that is the case and perhaps how we address that if it is the case. We would like you to give us your ideas about what is going on here. The microphone will be passed around and we will all ask questions. Before you answer the question could you give your name for the sake of *Hansard*—your name will be on the parliamentary record, so you can tell your grandchildren that you are on the parliamentary record. Please be frank with us because this is very valuable to us in our understanding of what is going on. I will start with one question and hand over to my colleagues. Do you think it is the case at Griffith that boys are not doing as well in class, or not? Perhaps that is wrong—perhaps that is not the case here. If it is the case, perhaps you might have some ideas as to why it is. Do not be embarrassed, this will be very valuable for us and hopefully for a lot of other people as well.

**Alison Lee**—I think it is an issue here and it does happen in classrooms and things like that. I think it mainly happens because of peers and peer pressure and things. You find that with boys there is a lot of pressure not to do well. If they do do well they are picked on more and they sort of stand out, whereas with girls I suppose you are more encouraged.

**Amanda Favell**—It is an issue in Griffith. For guys it is not seen as cool to be smart and, as Alison said, they will get picked on because they are showing that they have intellect and it is not as tough. The male image is a tough image—do not cry, do not show emotion, do not try—and that is what the guys, I would say, have in their minds. It is just a male image to be tough and not to be studious.

**Melissa Maher**—It is a problem in Griffith, but I do not think it is a problem that can be dealt with just by looking at certain schools. I think it is a society problem, because in the media there are no males that are shown for being intellectual—it is always for sporting reasons that they are put in the media. I think it is a problem that guys are not represented for their intellectual quality, even if they are intellectual. We have had Bill Gates, but that is about it for intellectual ability.

**Katie Heath**—If you look over time in primary schools and things like that, a lot of boys are fairly intellectual and it goes down. As they get older it goes down and down because of peer pressure, and also they realise that other people are stronger in their abilities and they look at that and they think, 'I am inferior,' and so they go down and down. I think at the moment it is such a big problem that cannot be fixed in a year or so. It is because of the big values society places on boys not being recognised for their abilities and stuff. It is probably not going to get worse and worse, but I do not think it can be changed in a year or two.

**Rebecca Bruce**—I think there is a problem and I think it is because there is a stereotype that boys should excel at sport rather than at school and the intellectual side of things—this is agreeing with what Melissa was saying. There is a stigma attached to boys who do excel at school and not at sport. They are called names and made outcasts by the other boys. I think that is the problem—the other boys.

**Karen Lowe**—I do not want to seem to be picking on the schools, but I think the schools encourage it a little bit. They tend to give out awards based on skills rather than intellectual achievement. For example, sporting skills and achievements, woodwork and music tend to get more awards than, say, doing really well in class. So guys tend to focus more on those things than their class marks.

**Jessica Bray**—You have realised that girls are doing better in schools than boys. How are you going to change this? How are you going to make it so boys try harder? You have addressed it, and the girls have addressed some of the problems, but—

**CHAIR**—That is the whole issue for us. We are trying to find out how we address it.

**Jessica Bray**—So, by asking us, you are going to help—

**CHAIR**—For about 18 months we have been visiting schools right around the country and talking to educationalists and teachers. We are trying to get ideas about what sort of recommendations we can make to government about how they address these issues.

**Mr SAWFORD**—Perhaps one of the reasons this committee was set up was that, at the first meeting, we had the Commonwealth Department of Education, Training and Youth Affairs come to the committee and tell us that they had data and information that suggested there was an Australia-wide problem that the differentials between the attainments of girls and boys had drifted from being, 20 years ago, about the same—and you would expect them to be about the same because boys and girls, intellectually, have similar abilities—to up to 20 percentage points different. I think that was reported to us about three or four years ago. If that was true, and some people have reported to us that that is true, then we want to know whether that is an accurate measure. Are we deluding ourselves? Maybe boys are not underachieving at all, and maybe girls are not overachieving as much as they think they are; maybe people are much closer together. It depends on what you measure. If you are only measuring skills that girls are better at and you are ignoring skills that boys are better at, then you are going to have a different result. It is very easy to have a boy-friendly curriculum, which is what happened when I went to school—it was a very boy-friendly curriculum. Some people argue that today it is a very girl-friendly curriculum and the boys are being excluded. Probably the truth is somewhere in between. So that is the reason we are doing this.

**Jessica Bray**—There are a lot more apprenticeships around nowadays that appeal to boys rather than girls. There are engineering, building, carpentry and mechanics apprenticeships. For girls there is beauty and hairdressing, but that is about it—and they are not very intellectual things. Boys think that once they have got to year 10 they can just go and get an apprenticeship and a job, and most of them do. I know a lot of boys in our year who have dropped out to take apprenticeships and stuff like that. More girls probably strive to do well to go to university. More boys are happy taking apprenticeships.

**Mr SAWFORD**—There are a lot of university graduates working in McDonald's, though. It does not necessarily equate that because you have a university degree you get a job you desire. There are many young women around Australia who are working in job occupations that are not of their training, which seems, to people like us, a bit of a waste. We have an overabundance of lawyers in this country. Some of them are not working in the law at all; they are working in other areas. Sometimes, maybe, we have not got the mix between training for what our country needs and trying to match that with what girls and boys want in terms of their own occupations. Maybe we need to look at that a little more carefully.

**Mr PEARCE**—A number of you talked about the cultural aspect and how it is probably not culturally a good thing for a boy to be too academic and too focused that way, because he is going to end up being called something and the rest of the boys are going to have a go at him. This committee has to come up with a report, which is a series of recommendations about the sorts of ideas that we think could be implemented to help overcome this problem. Let us say that Johnny Brown, who is intellectually quite bright and is doing quite well, is getting picked on and being called X, Y and Z but you girls think that he is a smart person. If that is a problem that exists today, here in this school, what do you think the school could do? What sort of program could the school put in place tomorrow that would encourage you girls to support Johnny Brown and say, 'Johnny, don't let those boys worry you; keep it up; keep focused'?

What sort of program could the school put in place to try to educate the boys that are picking on him? What can be done?

**Melissa Maher**—I really do not think it is possible to change it just like that.

**Mr PEARCE**—It might be over time, Melissa. If it was a program that you started now, maybe in three or five years it would make a difference.

**Melissa Maher**—Personally, I do not think it is a problem that is involved in the schools. I think it is just society's view on guys. As I said, on television they are recognised for sporting ability. However, you never see intellectual ability for males demonstrated on television. So personally I think it is a society problem rather than trying to implement something in the school.

**Mr PEARCE**—Therefore, you are saying that maybe there are not the role models for young boys to look at in academia and areas like that.

**Melissa Maher**—That is what I think. I do not think you can change it through putting a procedure in the schools. It is a problem with role models.

**Mr PEARCE**—But if we could train some of the media.

**Melissa Maher**—If you had the ability to change what the media puts out.

**Mr PEARCE**—It is very hard to change the media.

**Melissa Maher**—Exactly.

**Mr PEARCE**—But maybe if there were more role models in boys' daily lives—

**Amanda Favell**—Even Bill Gates, who is the richest man in the world, still gets called a geek because he has brains and is not afraid to show them. But, because of the stereotype that Melissa was talking about that is portrayed through the media, the richest man in the world—any of us would want his money—still gets called a geek. It is not right.

**Amy Fox**—I think that boys are lazy. They need to be told exactly what to do. I think boys learn better if they have the rules set out for them. I think a possible management strategy schools could use is something like two different English classes, where it is boys all in one class and girls all in the other. The boys are worried about looking bad in front of the girls. They would not have that; they would be separated. They would be learning in an environment where they would be able to have the rules set out for them clearly—a bit more than with the girls mixed in with them, where they do not have that as much. I think that might really work.

**Jessica Bray**—If you separate the boys and the girls, it is being biased. One group might get a better teacher than the other, and you cannot really change something to do with the boys without doing it to the girls too. Boys like encouragement and everybody likes rewards, so I



suppose the only thing you could do is something like that. To be told that you have done a good job is good.

**Amanda Favell**—With what Amy was saying, you cannot really segregate them into boys and girls. Society is sexist enough. If we do that, it is just enforcing it. In my opinion, if you have a room full of boys, not much work is going to get done. Even if they have specific outlines given to them, they are still going to muck about.

**Haley Norris**—I wanted to talk about separating them. A lot of boys are smarter than a lot of girls. Boys have a reputation that they have to stand up to: they are meant to be tough, and being a square does not really sit with that.

**Alison Lee**—I was thinking about the boys and girls issue. It seems that a few decades ago boys were excelling more. Then there was the push on girls to excel. Now that has been overtaken. By segregating them and saying, ‘The boys need specific emphasis,’ it is going to keep on going in waves. It needs to be shown that everyone has to work the same amount, that everyone is working towards the same thing. If the boys get the good marks, they have the same opportunities as the girls. It is the same with the girls. They have to be pushed to work hard as well. I think it is about creating an even field and realising that the pressures should be the same. We should have an equilibrium, so that what works for girls works for boys. It is much easier said than done.

But for boys, as Rebecca was saying, it is the stigma. Girls seem to have worked through that. Before, there was a stigma about girls excelling. Girls had to stay home and be wives or became teachers. This is about creating a situation where there are no stigmas for boys and girls, so that masculinity and femininity are not issues in education. It has to be taken away from normal life, society and values. But I do not know how that would be done!

**Mr COX**—We did a rather interesting exercise with the boys. We asked how many of them wanted to be teachers and then how many of them had other ideas about what they wanted to do. I was surprised at how many of them had ideas about what they wanted to do. I was wondering, for comparison purposes, how many girls here want to be teachers. Three. How many other people have ideas about what they want to do when they leave school? Can you tell us what sorts of things they are?

**Samantha Staltare**—A hairdresser.

**Jessica Bray**—I am not quite sure what I want to do, but I know that I want to get a good education. I want to go to university and use my intellect, my brain.

**Amy Fox**—I am looking at something like hotel management.

**Haley Norris**—I have no idea!

**Kylie Martimbianco**—I just want to be a preschool teacher.

**Sheree Schoonbeek**—I want to do child nursing.

**Karen Lowe**—I want to do paediatric physiotherapy.

**Katie Heath**—I want to be an early childhood primary school teacher.

**Melissa Maher**—I am interested in doing a science of some sort. My dream would be to do a Bachelor of Veterinary Science. Fingers crossed!

**Amanda Favell**—Two extremes: either psychology or something to do with retail.

**Alison Lee**—I have not really decided yet, but I have thought about teaching—but then I have about 10 other completely different things that I have thought about too, like PR and things like that.

**CHAIR**—Thank you very much, girls. There are some very interesting insights there and it has been very helpful. All the best.

[3.39 p.m.]

**ALLEN, Ms Deborah Wade, Teacher/Librarian, Wade High School**

**BARKER, Mrs Janice Marea, Careers Adviser, Member, Boys Education Committee, Wade High School**

**BARKER, Mr Robert, Deputy Principal, Wade High School**

**BARRETT, Mr Craig, Teacher, Wade High School**

**BISHOP, Mr George Rowley, Principal, Wade High School**

**CASEY, Mr Allan, Teacher, Wade High School**

**DELVES, Mrs Susan, Parent Representative, Wade High School**

**HICKS, Mr Drew, Support Teacher, Wade High School**

**HILL, Ms Jennifer Maree, Deputy Principal, Wade High School**

**JONES, Mr Peter, Parent (Private Capacity), Wade High School**

**McCONVILLE, Mr Mark Roger, Teacher, Wade High School**

**ROSETTO, Mrs Anna Maria, Member, Boys Education Committee, Wade High School**

**TARR, Mr Garth Michael, Student, School Captain, Wade High School**

**TOMLINSON, Mrs Christine Marie, Member, Boys Education Committee, Wade High School**

**CHAIR**—Thank you all for spending this valuable time after school, when I know you would rather be marking essays or whatever. Just to fill you in on the background of this inquiry, the government and many in the community have been concerned for a number of years about the declining relative performance of boys in education from early literacy testing right through to tertiary entrance level. The reason for this inquiry is to look at whether or not that is the case; if so, what factors are perhaps contributing to it and in what ways we, as governments, might try to address those issues. For probably close to 18 months—although we had about six months off with elections and so on—we have been doing hearings around the country to get people's input, be they educationalists, bureaucrats, policy makers, academics et cetera. So thank you for your time. We really look forward to your input. I think Mr Bishop is going to make some introductory comments, and then I will hand over to some of my colleagues to ask you questions.

**Mr Bishop**—First of all, I would like to officially welcome you to the school. It is great to have this opportunity to talk to the committee. You have already received a briefing about some of the things that are happening in our school—and I may mention some of those. I hope that you found the discussion with the boys fruitful—and also the discussion with the girls, because we have the girls interacting with the boys all the time.

**CHAIR**—It was very interesting.

**Mr Bishop**—There are a few things that we do in our school that you may not be aware of. We have an antibullying strategy. In summary, many of the interventions that we have on that antibullying strategy are with boys. We have staff here who can talk about that if you ask them questions. The school discipline system data reveals that a very high percentage of boys compared with girls are being referred for inappropriate behaviour. In fact, our suspension records show that so far this year 45 boys and two girls have been suspended. We are concerned about that. The Student of the Week nomination process, which is a positive reward system for work ethic, achievement, attitude, cooperation and service, reveals a high percentage of female nominations. Just as an adjunct to that, a high percentage of nominations are being made by female teachers. There are not many male teachers making the positive nominations.

The caseload of the behaviour teachers in our school is nearly always filled with boys. We have a success story with one year 8 boy who has made wonderful progress and is currently involved in a one day a week work experience program. It is a very difficult issue with a number of boys. We spend lots of time trying to motivate and encourage all students, but particularly boys who do not want to achieve their potential. Even senior boys who have interests in part-time work, sport, cars and social activities seem to be happy with mediocrity, and there is a lot of peer pressure that comes to bear on that. Most of the high achievers in our school are girls, and that has been the case for many years. There are some boys, but most of the high achievers seem to be girls. Most of the students in the lower areas of the English language literacy assessment test—the ELLA test—performance bands are boys. There are a lot of things to do with writing there, and we are doing things to try to address some of the writing aspects. Earlier we heard a boy in a woodworking class saying that he does not like writing.

The Griffith business community is thriving, and many boys seem to get apprenticeships and traineeships. But others seem to have the attitude: ‘I don’t have to work; when I leave school there’s a job waiting for me on the farm or with my father or one of my relatives. So why should I work at school; it is already there for me?’ Far more university placements go to girls than boys—and our careers adviser can give you more information about that. The male learning support teacher, Mr Drew Hicks, who is here with us, is a good role model for boys who are experiencing literacy problems. Certainly some of the boys are encouraged to work on their literacy because of Drew. The school certificate information reveals that many boys achieve well with little work at the school certificate level because of their academic ability but then find the transition into years 11 and 12 overwhelming because they have been coasting. Jenny Hill, a deputy principal, has more information about that. It was mentioned in the briefing that we do some interview systems with boys, girls and their parents to fit them into courses. We do that in year 10. We follow that up in year 11 to see that they are on task and things are going well. We encourage the students to come to the parent-teacher interviews, so that the teacher can relate with both the parents and the student.

We have appointed a boys student adviser to give special attention to boys issues in our school. We have appointed a part-time Aboriginal education aide with some school funding and some district funding that assists in working with particularly boys in our Aboriginal community. We have a boys education committee, of which we have some parents here. I thank the parents for coming along today to be involved, and also Garth Tarr, who is one of the members of the committee.

You would have read about our skills streaming program where we withdraw students for social skills and relationship type activities in small groups to help them through some of the difficult times they have. We have some single-sex classes in year 10 English and year 9 PDI health/PE, and we have had some discussions with some of those students. That is a very brief introduction to some of the things that we do in our school, and I welcome questions to our staff.

**CHAIR**—Thank you, George.

**Mr PEARCE**—This committee at the end of the day has to come up with a report with a series of recommendations about some of the strategies, ideas and concepts that could be implemented to try and help boys in their education and in their learning. I have recently joined the committee, and it has been very interesting to come here today to hear from the teachers and from the children themselves about this particular issue. Do you overall accept that there is an issue in this area of boys and how they learn in comparison to girls and, in your experience, if you could wave the magic wand, what would be the one or two key things that you would do? I am directing my question particularly at teachers. Mr McConville, we visited your class in personal development, which I think goes to the heart of this issue—a lot about the psychology of learning et cetera. Do you have any ideas or suggestions based on your experience that might, if you had the ability to wave the wand, potentially solve this problem?

**Mr McConville**—I do not think there is any easy solution. I do not think there is going to be a solution which we can just apply across the board that is going to work everywhere. That is the first thing. I think it is going to be on a school by school basis. The second thing is that I think a lot of the issues are actually coming from outside of the school—social issues—which is having an impact on what is happening in schools.

As for waving of the magic wand, I do not know what the answer would be. We are trying many things at this school. I am the coordinator of the Boys Education Committee and within that committee we have implemented skills streaming, as George mentioned before. That is where we have basically been selecting students who are not disruptive but who could head that way. We are trying to instil within them some skills so that they may start achieving within the classroom. We have also organised some access meetings where we have interviewed boys from year 7 through to year 10 in small groups with a male teacher discussing issues pertaining to their schooling. The idea behind that was to actually get some information from the boys as to where they thought they were going wrong and what we could do to help them. Probably the biggest issue that came from those meetings was their inability to study—they did not know how to actually study and apply themselves. Upon further investigation, it was evident that they do know how to study, but we cannot get them to do it. I think that is part of the issue, and I am sure that Jenny Hill and Janice Barker can talk further about that because they have interviewed the boys regarding that issue.

**Mr PEARCE**—What do you mean when you say that they do not know how to study? Is it that they do not understand the process of how to study?

**Mr McConville**—Yes, they do not know the process of actually how to study. But when you discuss it further with them they do know how to do it; the problem is actually doing it. That came through in all of the interviews we had with the groups. The groups were only small groups of six to seven students who spent 40 minutes with a male teacher. We are running with that program again this year, implementing it twice a year. The rationale behind that is that the boys give us some ideas and we try and come up with solutions within the Boys Education Committee and apply that on a whole-school basis.

We are also experimenting with single-sex classes, and I think there has been a mixed bag of results with those. I can specifically talk about what has been happening in PE. We are finding with the single-sex female classes that the girls are going ahead in leaps and bounds, so to speak. They are participating more than ever outside, and inside there is much greater depth to their responses and they are taking part in discussion more so—this is the opinion of their teachers—than they would in a co-ed class. With the boys' classes that we have in PE, that has definitely been challenging in a different aspect to what I imagined. I imagined being outside with the boys was going to be particularly interesting and fun but that has actually been the most difficult area where we combine both of our groups. In the classroom I have found that, yes, we are getting a great response from the students. I have been enjoying the classes inside, much to my surprise. I thought they were going to be more difficult in terms of, say, discipline and management.

Another area that I think we need to look at at this school, if I was staying here, with the Boys Ed Committee would be looking at some positive role models for the males. We have been concentrating more on one end of the spectrum but we have not been looking at, say, the boys who are role models within their year groups and maybe trying to do some programs with them so we can involve them in some positive role amongst the boys, maybe coming up with a program of rewards for them so that students who think these boys are cool and see what they are doing maybe have an impact over the rest of the group. I believe one of the big issues is literacy levels. I am sure Drew Hicks can talk to you further about that.

**CHAIR**—Does someone else want to elaborate on that?

**Mrs Tomlinson**—I would like to speak as a parent. I am on the Boys Ed Committee. I have two boys, one who has just finished high school last year here at Wade and my youngest is in year 8. I have a problem with him with studying after school. Teachers seem to be happy with him at school. He is an ADD child on medication and seems to be coping reasonably well at school. He is slow in what he is doing but he seems to be coping. But he comes home from school and that is it; he does not want to have a bar of homework. We fight for a good couple of hours to get the homework done. We eventually get it done, but we are constantly fighting because he just does not want to do it, or he does it haphazardly and therefore the results he is getting are not as good as they could be. We had no problems with his brother. He would come home and diligently get into homework, get it done and present it. But this one is totally different. It is interesting to have two children going to the same high school doing the subjects. Okay, there is about four years difference between the boys, but the way he is coping is totally different to the way his brother coped, especially in homework.

From a parent's view, when you are trying to get your child into a habit of studying so as they are going through the high school system they are doing more homework and they are coping with it better, but this child is difficult on that. Wade sends home notes about the kids using their study diaries, but to get my child to write in it or do anything is just impossible; he just does not want to know anything about it. That is just talking from different points of view, that I do have one child who does have problems with wanting to do homework.

**Mr COX**—What does he want to do instead?

**Mrs Tomlinson**—Go out and play. He wants to play Nintendo or watch TV, or he is quite happy to just go up the street and play with other boys that live in the area. He plays sport after school once a week, and with soccer coming up it will be twice a week. He is young for his age for a 13-year-old. He is just the type of kid that wants to get out and let off some steam, I would probably say would be the right words for after school.

**Mr COX**—What about the other parents here? Have they got specific problems with or specific concerns about their sons' learning situations?

**Mrs Delves**—I am another parent. I have three sons and I guess they are doing quite well, but there was the chance there for them to improve in their studies and I said, 'If you work really hard you'll probably get up into level 1,' and he said to me, 'Why would I bother, mum?' I thought, 'Gosh.' I come from a family that have done study, they have been to university, and I just assumed he would want to do that as well. His reason for that was that it is not cool, that all the nerds hang out in level 1 class. I don't want to do that, plus I have to do more work. They are sporting as well. I do not quite know what the answer is. It is perceived that boys should not do well at school. That is from the two older ones. Yet in primary school it was fine; it was not a problem to get merit awards, bring them home and stick them on the fridge. But it is not cool to bring your merit awards home and stick them on the fridge when you get to high school, and that is a problem. I do not know what it is. I am also a teacher, so I am seeing it in other areas as well.

**Mr COX**—I have two sons, so I am seeing it too.

**Mrs Delves**—I think it is a real problem. I teach at TAFE, and we have a lot of youth-at-risk kids, predominantly boys, who are quite bright kids, but why are they dropping out? Why are they now at TAFE trying to do year 10 or whatever?

**Mr Jones**—I have two children at the school. My eldest son is in year 12. I sat down with him for about two hours yesterday. He is having a lot of difficulty in getting results at school. His percentages are very much down. Recently, he was put on a level 1 card because he missed a couple of classes—it could be many classes, but he tells me that it is only a couple. I spent about two hours trying to talk to him yesterday to try to find out what the real issue was with him being able to study. Undoubtedly, he has the ability. He is a very good kid in class, but he is very quiet and he does not ask questions. I got out of him yesterday that he has a fear of asking questions. That fear is being instilled in him by an event or a number of events in his childhood—whether it is at school or out of school, no-one would know—but nevertheless he has a great fear of asking questions. All the teachers recognise that. They recognise that he is a very quiet person, that he has the capability and that he is a good kid who never plays up and

never has a hassle in that respect. So the school can recognise all those things, but they do not have a system in place to handle them. That is a big issue.

My son is no different from many other boys in the class. The teachers can recognise those things, but they are not qualified, nor should they be, to handle those issues and to get kids over their fear. That is one fear that he has, and I am sure that a lot of kids in those classes have other fears. Peer pressure is certainly a great fear. I asked him whether he would like to speak to a counsellor about it and he said, 'No, I don't want to,' obviously because there is a stigma attached to that sort of situation. If there were some way in classes at school that those sorts of things could be recognised and teased out of those kids, there would be a better result.

I believe that my son will eventually be very successful in whatever he does, because he has the right ethic and background. That holds anybody in good stead. This is not such a new thing that has happened. For years we have seen that boys of those ages do not perform as well as girls. I do not see a female sitting on the committee, so obviously at some stage males do catch up. I do not know whether inherently it is a terribly difficult problem, however it certainly should be addressed.

**CHAIR**—Female colleagues who are members of this committee and who are not here might not agree on the extent to which we have caught up!

**Mr Jones**—I can only speak for what I see here.

**Mr WILKIE**—The view has been expressed—it has not had wide support, but we are interested in getting other people's views—that boys and girls require different teaching methods and that the way to teach girls as opposed to boys is not recognised in the training of teachers, and that teachers themselves often do not recognise that there is a difference and do not know how to apply to boys a teaching method that actually works. I am interested in teachers' views on that.

**Mr Barker**—I would agree with that. On a couple of points that you raised earlier, I think one of the things that is lacking, even in primary school, is male role models. I think that, in the social structure within our community, for a whole lot of reasons there is a lack of male role models within the home, and I am not just talking about single-parent homes. I think that within primary schools there is certainly a lack of male role models. I think also that when a boy comes into high school there is a huge developmental difference between a year 7 student and a year 12 student and it is a far bigger gap than what happens in primary school. To a certain extent, kids in kindergarten are in a blissful situation where they simply see the here and now and see themselves as not being overly different to anybody else, whereas I think in high school there is a huge difference.

I totally agree that, when we are talking about how boys play and why they want to get out there and play, the way that boys play is entirely different to the way in which most girls play, and play is a form of learning. That is something that we do not recognise, and I think in a lot of ways the curriculum does not recognise it. I think also that when the boys look at schools as models in terms of where they particularly want to go in their career paths they see something that is a dinosaur rather than something that is a model of what it could be like in the workplace.



So in a lot of cases they look at a school, they look at the gear that is in a school, they see that is 1950s technology and they say, 'What is the point?'

**CHAIR**—Who else would like to speak?

**Ms Hill**—I do not know that I agree with the statement made earlier. I think good teaching will motivate both boys and girls but I think there is a very strong distinction between what I would call good teaching and active classrooms and teaching that is rather mundane and not geared to any of the students. There are plenty of examples of teachers in this school who I think can motivate both girls and boys in a classroom.

I would like to talk a little in response to what Mr Jones said and in response to some other things. I have been involved with Mrs Barker in interviewing all year 11 students this term. That included boys and girls. One of a few strong things that came out is that the boys who are really struggling—the ones who are floundering, the ones about whom we have sat down and said, 'This kid really is not coping with year 11'—are the ones that do not have any goals whatsoever. You will say to them, 'What do you want to do when you finish school?' and they will answer, 'I don't know.' 'Why did you come back to school?' 'I don't know.' 'Do you want to stay in Griffith for the rest of your life?' 'I don't know.' They have absolutely no idea of why they are doing what they are doing and why they are where they are. Those kids are generally the ones I wrote down as being not motivated. Quite a few of them said to us in the interviews, 'I have trouble getting motivated to study. I can't see any point in it.' There were quite a few boys who said that.

This is not the end point or the beginning point in the process. We actually had interviews with their parents and with each individual child last year when they were selecting subjects for year 11; these are follow-up interviews to try to see whether they are coping or not. Last year we made it very clear the amount of work that they would need to put into year 11. We made that clear both at general meetings and also in the individual interviews. We feel that the boys—all of the students actually, but the boys particularly—have come in this year knowing that there is going to be a big leap from year 10 to year 11 in terms of the work that they are going to have to do outside school. That does not mean that they are all doing it, but at least when we were talking to them they would say, 'I know what I should be doing, but I can't do it.' Some of the boys are doing it.

I had a boy, who has repeated year 11 this year, say to me that the able boys in year 11 this year are much more focused and on task. The only explanation I can give for that is that we were fairly open, frank and brutal with what we said to parents at meetings about the sort of commitment that was required for the students to do well in year 11. However, now we are finding that some of the ones that we thought were coping really well are not, so that is another problem. We are intending to follow up now by identifying groups of students who are struggling—they, again, are predominantly boys; we have already made the lists up—to work in small groups on study skills.

Last year we also had some single sex study skills sessions for the Crossroads Course, and all of the boys' groups said, 'We don't know how to study'. When you challenged them and said, 'I just don't believe that; I can't believe that you've got through four years of schooling and never done any study. You must have studied for an exam, a test or something at some stage', they

would say yes. The next step was that we would brainstorm and put up on the board what they had done in the past to study for something. When we did it all, they had quite an exhaustive list so it was made clear to them that, actually, they did know how to study—but it seems to be this motivation to be able to do it outside school time.

I also think that, in the New South Wales system, there is one facet of the curriculum that is really counterproductive to boys achieving well in years 11 and 12, and that is the School Certificate examination. Able students can basically coast through junior school, walk into those exams, score in the nineties quite easily without studying—I have had several boys say, ‘I did no study and I got 89 or 90 in the School Certificate exams’—and then they get into year 11 or year 12 and think that is going to continue, and it does not. That is a really major problem that needs to be addressed—you probably cannot address it, because you are federal and they are state, but I think it is an issue. I do not think those exams are sending the right messages to our able students.

Some of what Mr Jones said we have realised for a couple of years now. We held a public meeting two years ago of students at the end of year 11 because their marks were so atrocious. I have it all on paper if you want to take it; it is a bit rough. It shows what they were getting in the School Certificate—for instance, our top boy in the School Certificate that year had scored 91. On his half-yearly exam in year 11, the aggregate of his marks was 61 and, in the yearly, it was down to 56. Now, that was our brightest boy in year 11. Other boys have performed much better, so he completely tuned out, and that pattern was fairly obvious all the way through.

**Mr SAWFORD**—Are you comparing an examination system of continuous assessment or are you comparing exam and exam?

**Ms Hill**—Exam and exam. Our marks are not scaled as they would be, but it is a bit of a guide because you can see clearly that these boys are not performing as they were at the School Certificate. We have known about it for a couple of years. We have held meetings of concern, and what we have tried to do this year—and, unfortunately, Mr Jones’s son missed out—is really address some of those things. I believe the interviews are having an effect. I think some of the good boys now really feel like they are being supported and listened to because, when Jan and I interviewed them, they were able to have a whinge about subjects that they were finding difficult and whatever. Hopefully, when we follow up next term with the small groups, that will have some impact—but it is not really part of our teaching brief. We are doing that over and above what is really our job in the school. That is a part of the issue too: time to do these things.

**Mr COX**—When you were interviewing the parents, did you come up with any correlations between parental interest, parental expectation and performance?

**Ms Hill**—I think most of the parents here are genuinely interested in their children doing well. Sometimes they have too high expectations of the child, and then you have others that do not have much expectation at all.

**Mrs Barker**—We had over 70 per cent of parents come to the interviews with year 10. It was the first time we had invited parents; the year before, we interviewed the students by themselves. We talked about what they hoped to do, what their goals were and what steps they needed to take to achieve those particular goals and, if they were coming back to years 11 and

12, what subjects they should pick and if they were picking the right subjects. We talked to the parents all about things like that. I think a lot of the parents at this school have the expectation that their children will go to university. Every year probably 40 to 50 per cent of our year 12 students who finish the year get a place at university, so we have fairly high offers of places. I think the parents are very interested. Part of our job should be to increase parent awareness; we have seen that as another area. They still assume that somebody can get 95 in the HSC but they are quite happy for their child to do 15 or 20 hours work a week at Big W or Coles.

Practically every kid in year 11 in Griffith has a part-time job, and the kids in year 12 would be the same. Some—not many—students are working up to 30 hours a week at a part-time job. We have noticed that a high percentage of our year 11 students this year, after talking to their parents and them and saying, ‘We don’t think you can do 20 hours a week in your part-time job when you start year 11,’ have reduced the number of shifts they do. So most of them now would probably be doing two to three shifts a week. That is an area where parents might have had a bit of influence.

**Mr COX**—It is obviously a peer thing—or I suspect it is. They are doing it for money for themselves rather than for money for their families, I take it?

**Mrs Barker**—Yes. At this school, I would say, most of them are doing it for themselves—but there are probably a few who need the money to support themselves. I know a few kids who have to pay their way for a lot of things that they do.

**CHAIR**—Can I ask about the Student Adviser Boys. That position is funded on a part-time basis from within your own resources, I understand. Is that having any impact on boys’ performance? Do you think it would be helpful to have a fully funded position? With larger schools there is a Student Adviser Girls funded by the education department.

**Mr Bishop**—There is a head teacher girls in schools with over 500 girls. We do not have that in our school; we have a Student Adviser Girls, who gets a monetary allowance, and I give them a minimal period concession allowance. The Student Adviser Boys that we have appointed in this school is a person who only gets a period concession allowance to assist. There is no money in the position at all; it is just to give a focus for boys in the school. To answer your question, it would be great to have a boys’ adviser like we have a student adviser for girls in schools with over 500 girls.

**Mr PEARCE**—In your introductory remarks you made the comment that there might be something quite regionally and geographically specific about the Griffith area—that is, it is prosperous, there is growth and there is the notion, ‘I’ve got the job on the farm, so why bother?’

**Mr Bishop**—Yes.

**Mr PEARCE**—Have you had a chance to do any cross-tabulation between those types of academic results and that type of dynamic happening? For example, does that person you identified—who got 91 per cent in the school certificate and is down to 50 per cent now—come from a family which brings a job for life anyway? In other words, have you had a chance to look at that, and is that a real factor impeding performance?

**Mr Bishop**—No, not in that boy's instance, but staff continually talk to me about the underperformance of boys because boys do not want to do it. They do not want to be, as we have heard today, seen to be academically good. They want to be mates with their friends, they want to be driving around in their cars doing all sorts of different things that are not school related. It is a general attitude that comes through in lots of ways and from society, as other people have mentioned, too.

**Mr SAWFORD**—George, are you and your staff aware of a study done at Flinders University by Professor Faith Trent and Malcolm Slade, a researcher, about boys? They interviewed 1,800 boys.

**Mr Bishop**—No.

**Mr SAWFORD**—I am a former teacher and a former principal. I am always very suspicious when people say that. Sometimes it is because the educational program is so boring and so out of kilter with what the kids want or need. One of the prime things the kids said was—and I think both boys and girls responded to this—‘They don't listen to us.’

**Mrs Barker**—That is why I think the interviews have been so positive.

**Mr WILKIE**—The physics teacher made a comment earlier that the curriculum assessment and curriculum has changed in physics—it is far more descriptive now than it used to be in terms of analytical problem solving—and that that has really affected boys in a bad way. He did not say that, but I think that was the assumption that was being made. It has been pointed out at a lot of other schools that that is the case in chemistry, economics and a whole raft of other subjects in the curriculum and that has had a detrimental effect on boys' results. Would you agree with that?

**Mr Bishop**—I believe so. We have taken some specific action in our school, particularly with boys, to improve writing skills, which is their comprehension and their literacy. It is certainly an issue moving from concrete to more abstract types of concepts.

**Mr Tarr**—The curriculum change in physics and the other subjects has only been a recent thing, since the new HSC. So even before that boys were not performing as well as they possibly could.

**Mr WILKIE**—That is a good point.

**CHAIR**—Thank you so much for your time. It has been very helpful, and we really appreciate you staying back.

Resolved (on motion by **Mr Sawford**):

That this committee authorises publication of the proof transcript of the evidence given before it at public hearing this day.

**Committee adjourned at 4.16 p.m.**