

ROMA MIDDLE SCHOOL

Cottell Street, Roma
PO Box 623, Roma QLD 4455

Telephone. (07) 4622 3499

Fax: (07) 4622 4834

Email_Address: info@romamss.qld.edu.au

1st August, 2000

Inquiry Into The Education Of Boys

School Profile of The Roma Middle School

Romna Middle School is a Band 9 school catering for students from Years 4 to 10. It was established in 1987 and is the only state middle school in Queensland. Most students complete their P-3 schooling at the Roma Junior School and approximately 70% of Year 10 students go on to the College of the South West (COSW) which is the Roma campus of Southern Queensland Institute of TAFE. The College caters for students who study the Board of Senior Secondary School Studies subjects as well m those who are enrolled in TAPE courses.

There are about 680 students from Years 4 to 10 with approximately 90 to 100 in each year level. Enrolments have been slowly decreasing as the population of the town reduces. The school does experience a significant rate of student mobility.

A Special Education Unit (SEU) was established at the Middle School in 1996. A small group of students ascertained at level 6 spend the majority of their time in the unit but the Unit also supports students in mainstream classes. Approximately 25% of Roma Middle School students have been identified as having learning difficulties and are supported in smaller classes for English and Maths. Of this 25% a significant number are boys - approximately 3 boys to every 2 girls. Currently 8% of students are of Aboriginal Islander descent. Approximately 2 thirds of these students are experiencing learning difficulties.

Parental expectations are high. The majority of our parents are employed in skilled and semi-skilled occupations with large numbers in the public service and farming. There is significant parent interest in sporting, cultural and academic extra curricular activities-

Social, Cultural and Educational Factors Affecting Boys

The most outstanding feature in the local context for boys is the emphasis placed on sport. We have 106 (18%) boys involved in Saturday morning football. Although cultural pursuits are offered at the Roma Middle School they are generally less highly valued by boys. We have 43 boys (6%) in the PCAP Music Program in Years 4 - 10 and 5 6oys (4.8%) involved in Drama in Years 9-10.

Evidence of parent support for sport is seen in the numbers who turn up for Sports Awards on Assembly and at football matches. Parents will often excuse students from completing academic work, eg, assignments, homework. because of the student's sporting commitments.

The second feature is that reading is seen as boring. According to a survey we held here at the Roma Middle School on boys' attitude to Literacy and Numeracy. 90% of boys prefer to do sport, have fun and be active. They do not like to sit quietly reading. Of the 50 boys

surveyed in Years 7-10. 52% said they had experienced bullying and name calling and there appears to be a link between poor performance and low self esteem.

The reasons why boys perform poorly in English and Maths were given as follows:

- small attention span
- don't understand the work
- boring - no real life applications
- don't like to study
- easy to get unskilled work
- prefer hands on activities
- don't think they need it
- don't need Maths for football

The third major influence on boys is violence. Violence is regularly seen on television, video games and videos and many students experience domestic violence. There have been 100 cases of behaviour management in Years 7-8 subschool and the 9-10 subschool. to date this year. Of these, 90 cases relate to boys while 10 cases relate to girls. These cases deal with bullying, teasing, name calling, physical aggression and verbal abuse. Along with this, is the lack of a male role model in many of the boys' lives. Many of them are underfathered. When we break through the negative behaviour cycle of the boys through counselling and behaviour management consultations, we find that they don't know how to behave because there is not a stable non-aggressive non-violent male role model at home.

Strategies Used at PM

At the Roma Middle School we have put in place the following to improve learning outcomes for boys.

- Ability grouping in Years 7 - 10 in Numeracy and Literacy. This allows students, particularly boys to work at a pace that is suited to their needs and to change groups upon demonstration of the outcomes. It means ensuring that we have the human resources to create a classes and placing larger numbers in classes where students are independent, while ensuring that learning support classes have smaller numbers of students. Most learning support classes are predominantly comprised of boys.
- In years 9 and 10 students experiencing difficulty are involved in Everyday Maths which focuses on practical life skills and Literacy and Life Skills which focuses on career education and job resumes.

Again these classes are predominantly made up of boys.

	Everyday Maths	Language and Life Skills
Year 9 Boys	8 (14%)	6 (11%)
Year 9 Girls	4 (7%)	4 (8%)
Year 10 Boys	6 (12%)	14 (28%)
Year 10 Girls	2 (4%)	1 (2%)

- We currently employ an Aboriginal Liaison Officer and we have also employed a male aboriginal teacher aide to work with boys in the classroom. These are people with whom aboriginal boys can identify.
- We have trialed single sex classes for boys only in Literacy using a male teacher and the boys display on task behaviour with a significant improvement in results.
- Alternative programs have been offered to students experiencing difficulty, eg. Year 10 boys who play U 16 football in the local football competition and are regarded as heroes on the weekend had trouble easing back into the school regime on Monday. A

program of gym work, debriefing and yoga was organised for these boys on Mondays from 8.00 - 9.30. This was found to be successful.

- Two teachers are to attend the Conference on “Teaching Boys Developing Fine Men” in August. This means that professional development money has been committed to improving the outcomes of boys through improving teacher skills.
- We have initiated a "mentoring" program with students "at risk." Students and volunteer teachers are buddied and develop a rapport that enables the student to work through homework, assignment and behaviour problems. As a result student behaviour has improved before the situation escalates.
- We are presently looking at alternative educational programs to address identified needs and to improve learning outcome for boys and we will continue to do so in the future.