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**HOUSE OF
REPRESENTATIVES**

STANDING COMMITTEE ON EMPLOYMENT, EDUCATION AND
WORKPLACE RELATIONS

Reference: Education of boys

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HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

STANDING COMMITTEE ON EMPLOYMENT, EDUCATION AND WORKPLACE RELATIONS

Thursday, 30 November 2000

Members: Dr Nelson (*Chair*), Mr Barresi, Mr Bartlett, Mrs Elson, Mr Emerson, Ms Gambaro, Ms Gillard, Mrs May, Mr Sawford and Mr Wilkie

Members in attendance: Mr Bartlett, Mrs Elson, Mrs May, Dr Nelson and Mr Sawford.

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.

WITNESSES

**CAMILLERI, Associate Professor Peter James, Convenor, National Social Policy Committee,
Australian Association of Social Workers489**

**HORDERN, Ms Sarah Elisabeth, National Policy Officer, Australian Association of Social
Workers489**

MOLETA, Ms Elizabeth Ann, Accredited Member, Australian Association of Social Workers489

WYLES, Mr Paul Dominic, Accredited Member, Australian Association of Social Workers489

Committee met at 9.06 a.m.

CAMILLERI, Associate Professor Peter James, Convenor, National Social Policy Committee, Australian Association of Social Workers

HORDERN, Ms Sarah Elisabeth, National Policy Officer, Australian Association of Social Workers

MOLETA, Ms Elizabeth Ann, Accredited Member, Australian Association of Social Workers

WYLES, Mr Paul Dominic, Accredited Member, Australian Association of Social Workers

CHAIR—Welcome. Is there anything you wish to add to the capacity in which you are appearing?

Mr Wyles—I am a senior social worker with ACT mental health services.

Ms Moleta—I am a social worker in private practice.

CHAIR—I declare open this public hearing of the inquiry into the education of boys. The purpose of this inquiry is to examine 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. We also aim to identify successful educational strategies and ways to promote their wider adoption in schools. Particular concerns which have emerged from the submissions received include, but are not confined to, the gender and state by state divergences in early literacy attainment identified by testing against nationally agreed benchmarks, the gender and state and by state variations in school retention rates, the tendency for some boys to adopt negative attitudes towards school and disengage from learning, and how boys difficulties relate to broader social and economic change.

I remind you that all the proceedings today are proceedings of the parliament and warrant the same respect as proceedings of the House itself. The deliberate misleading of the committee can be regarded as contempt of the parliament. The committee prefers that all evidence be given in public, but if at any stage you want to say anything in camera then please indicate that that is the case and we would most certainly consider that request. Could you give us an overview of your submission, highlighting what you think are the most important points, and then we will do questions and answers.

Prof. Camilleri—Thank you very much for accepting our submission. We know it was somewhat late in the process. We feel very pleased to be called before the committee and thank the committee for inviting us. I will just present a very quick overview of what we see as the key issues. Paul and Elizabeth are here to talk about one of the programs we have highlighted in our submission as an example of what we thought was a very successful program. They will briefly provide an overview of that and the evaluation of that program and the key sorts of ideas that flow from that. Sarah will summarise what we see as our major recommendations.

Very briefly, I would like to say that we saw four key issues coming from our submission. When we put out a call to our membership for an interest about this inquiry, we were actually overwhelmed by our members, in terms of both the numbers who were interested in responding to us and the quality and passion that they have around this. It certainly surprised us how much interest there is in our social work community around this very important issue. The four key things which we see that came out were that, in the arguments around boys doing badly we were very concerned, as an association, that we do not see it as a see-saw, with girls doing well meaning that boys are doing badly. So one of the key things that came from our members was that this was not a see-saw relationship whereby, if girls were doing well, boys were doing badly. But there are key issues around some boys doing particularly badly within the school system and many girls also doing badly. Some of the key issues that came out were around poverty and the low socioeconomic experiences of those families.

The other key issue that came from our members was the issue around single parent families. They were very concerned that we do not get into a position in which we blame single parent families for the poor educational outcome of boys, though there was a recognition that, for single parent families—and many single parent families are obviously headed by women—they are actually doing it tough and all sorts of programs are needed to assist and help those families bring up boys and support that educational process. The third key issue we felt was around moving schools from the rhetoric into reality as a community resource. Many school systems talk about the whole school approach, but actually opening the school as a proper community resource is a problem. We argued in the submission around issues of bringing in other government and non-government agencies, providing a whole range of services, not just for children but for families, and particularly issues around parenting courses and parenting programs.

Finally, the key issue that came out of our submission was appropriate male role models—that concern was expressed—particularly as in primary schools the number of male teachers has dropped and is dropping. I work at the Australian Catholic University here in Canberra and the number of males coming into our primary education program has decreased and the numbers are relatively small. Many of our members were concerned that there was a big issue around that. They were very concerned that bringing males in had to be appropriately done, and that it was about demonstrating what we saw as appropriate role modelling between males and females in terms of teachers. That is about respect for relationships between the genders as teachers, sharing of power and authority within the school systems, and also bringing more male mentors into schools in recognition that, for many families, not just single parent families, fathers are often absent either emotionally or often physically because of the work they do. The community role models that were, say, more traditional 30 or 40 years ago have disappeared. We need to build on that and the schools seem to be an appropriate and important place for that to occur. I will hand over to Paul and Liz now.

Ms Moleta—Paul and I developed a program for violent adolescent boys which has resulted in these boys choosing non-violent responses when they are angry. It is called an anger management program and it runs for six weeks. It has to be run by a male and a female and, in our case, a social worker. The reason for this is that the behaviour of most of the boys that we see is quite violent and they are often coming from situations of violence at home. It is very important that they see a man and a woman responding equally and non-violently to one another.

The first three weeks of the program involve understanding the nature of violence and anger, what happens when you get angry, and really digesting and dissecting that process for them, the object being that once you understand where your anger is coming from then you can do something about it. Then we look at alternatives to that. We use the group format, because it is well known that their peer group is the most influential group for an adolescent and so we are using the peer group in a positive sense for change. It is often attributed to negative activity but when you hear an idea or an alternative response being suggested by one of your own friends you are much more likely to take it up than if an adult suggests that. It is also very effective even when there is no change at home because children are already looking at moving away from their parents and what their parents' ideas are. It is a natural progression for a 12-year-old to be doing that, so they are looking at other ways of behaving and other options are readily acceptable to them.

I started the program the first year I was a school counsellor at a particular school, and I ran it four times during that year. Probably overall, I ran it around 10 times in that school and it has been run in two other schools as a one-off. I called Paul in as a mental health worker at the time to help me set it up. Because of its success I did monitor it through the teachers and talked to the teachers about helping to support these children while they were going through the program and, also, as a follow-up.

Because of its success we wrote it up and presented it as a paper at our conference and I did a follow-up survey two years later on the 10 boys that remained who were part of the first four groups, and all of them showed no more violent behaviour. I was also able to see that these boys then came back to me as the counsellor when they had other problems. None of the problems ever involved violence, yet they had other issues. They had peer problems and family problems—nothing at home had changed, but their responses had changed. It was very empowering. They then felt that they could solve a lot of other problems with alternative measures and they could seek an adult in a therapeutic role to help them with that.

Mr Wyles—I was going to talk briefly about why we think this particular program worked, and I think some of the things that Liz has said are particularly important. It draws on the natural peer group that is developing for boys in the early stage of high school. Boys in high school often feel safer in groups talking about issues. Sometimes individual counselling can be difficult for boys who are extremely self-conscious at that age.

Therapeutic group work practice looks at the idea that individuals learn best and gain better insights from each other. They can support each other and share experiences and strengths so it is less of a top-down experience and more of a sharing experience. The anger management group in the school setting succeeded, we believe, because it was integrated into the school curriculum. It was within class period time and it was also task focused so the boys came expecting to do some work in that period.

It was supported by teachers, and teachers could also reinforce support and witness change in the boys, so it had that sort of feedback loop. The program provides a real alternative to punitive methods of dealing with boys with violent behaviour. The group leaders are clearly important. In modelling, as Liz mentioned, it was important to have a male and a female group leader and, in fact, a lot of the boys in the group had come out of homes where there was domestic violence, so it was providing an alternative to the boys.

Importantly, the anger management group also introduced many boys to the concept of talking to the school counsellor. As Liz said, some of these boys in the first or second year of high school would then feel okay to go back and see the school counsellor individually in later years. So that is an important point, I think, as it breaks that stigma about going to see the school counsellor.

The development of this program, too, as Liz mentioned, was a joint effort of the school counsellor and the mental health worker, and I wanted to make the point that the division between health and education is arbitrary and the two are closely related and strongly influence and impact on each other. So we can have lasting outcomes by intervening in education in terms of the long-term health of boys and young men. So we are focused on the emotional and mental health of boys through group programs such as this that will have lasting long-term effects in terms of educational outcomes, health and wellbeing of boys for a relatively small investment of time by schools.

Ms Hordern—To sum up, I think there still needs to be quite a bit of research commitment to examine what the factors are concerning the social and educational development of boys. Included in that, we feel that it would be useful to evaluate teacher training programs because it seems that over the last decade to 15 years the expectations on teachers to provide a wide range of programs in schools just keeps growing. Our association wonders whether it is reasonable to expect teachers to take on all these other duties. Surely their core business is education and, just as we would not expect a community health nurse to be teaching literacy, we wonder whether it is appropriate to expect teachers to be training kids in emotional development. That is not to say that they should not have an awareness of those sorts of things but I think you need experts with expert knowledge to do those very tricky types of interventions.

A second recommendation is that there be a national audit of the programs already developed and being run in schools to assist boys with problematic behaviour or learning difficulties. One reason for Liz and Paul coming along today was to demonstrate to the committee the sort of stuff that is going on in very small ways around Australia—but there is no central collection of that sort of data. We have the impression that people are reinventing the wheel all over the place.

A third recommendation is that there be a systematic and ongoing evaluation of programs so that some best practice principles can be established with a variety of target groups. What is going to work well with indigenous youth is not necessarily going to work well with young people from a non-English-speaking background from a part of a large city.

A fourth recommendation comes from what has been extremely helpful in the area of suicide prevention. The Australian Institute of Family Studies has a national clearing house of literature, research, program development—all that sort of stuff—on that topic so that people who have an interest in the area are able to access it easily and cheaply. We could do the same sort of thing with education and social programs for boys.

Finally, there is the idea of truly maximising the use of school sites and opening them up as real community centres. Schools are one of the few places that kids feel reasonably comfortable in the adult world. There seems to be a lot of potential for using that school space to provide

other services to them and to their families. One way of doing that would be to attach people from other services to schools—but at this point I will hand over to all of you to ask questions.

CHAIR—Thank you very much. Firstly, I would like to say that I think your submission was excellent. That does not mean that I personally agree with everything that is in it, but it was very good. You had obviously made a lot of effort to consult the members and you covered the vast majority of dimensions of the inquiry, so for that in particular I do thank you. Whoever put it together did an excellent job.

Mr SAWFORD—Your submission might have been late but it has encouraged debate. Like Brendan, we all probably have different views on what has been put forward. In terms of the submission, one of the things that I was a bit disappointed with is that it was not put in a historical context. I say that for a very definite reason. Thirty or even 20 years ago the differentials that were measured then between girls and boys were less than one percentage point over a whole range of areas—the average was 0.6. It now varies up to 20 per cent. There is a whole range of things that have obviously happened in the last 20 years to create that. No-one in this group wants a backlash against girls—we want girls to succeed. That is not part of this agenda at all.

You have identified a whole range of things in terms of teacher training, males in primary schools and core business. If you could perhaps concentrate on those three, Sarah, you mentioned core business. What we have done to teachers in the last 30 years is just add and add and add. You have presented a dilemma, too, in that you want to add as well when you want to put the community centres in. Let me try and explain and get you to respond.

There is a core business in education. In the English-speaking world the most significant longitudinal study of success or failure in girls or boys—gender is not really relevant—has been the Inner London Education Authority's seven-year longitudinal study published in *The Times* 1986 which basically said that the most significant determinant of success or failure of all school students happens between the ages of 7 and 11 and is reliant almost totally on the quality of the educational program that is offered to the children. It has found that educational program or schooling—if you want to use the other word—is far more important than gender, socioeconomic background, religion, ethnicity, or any other issue—not that they are not issues, but they are all secondary. If you cannot get the first one right it is not much use attacking any of the others.

That comes back to your last thing about the community centre. We have teachers basically under stress with community expectations piling up upon them—quite unfair expectations on them. They cannot do the core business because of the other pressures. I have seen schools that have tried to develop into community centres. They have caused absolute mayhem, not because the intention is wrong—the intention is correct—but they do not understand the historical context in which schools operate and they do not release pressure on teachers—they actually add pressure. Would you like to respond—but I will have to go because there is a division in the House? We will all have to go—but we will return.

Ms Hordern—Does anybody else want to put out a couple of questions and then we can discuss them while you are away?

Mr BARRESI—I would not mind getting into the question of ADHD. No-one has raised that so far.

CHAIR—We will have to leave. The reason we are leaving is that usually on Thursday mornings nonsense goes on here. At the moment there are a number of quite heated political issues being discussed. At 9.30 this morning I suspect both sides will be in the House for about 15 minutes. We will return and when we do we can go through beyond 10.30 a.m. I apologise to you. It is not the fault of any of the Labor members or of the government ones.

Proceedings suspended from 9.28 a.m. to 9.57 a.m.

CHAIR—We will continue. Do you want to answer the questions that were put just before we left?

Ms Hordern—Yes. I will start off replying to Rod about his concern that opening schools up to the wider community would end up putting more pressure on teachers. In fact, we are very aware that there is too much pressure on teachers already for them to be able to do their core business effectively. This idea was really intended to be pursued in such a way that there would be a real partnership between the teaching staff and the school and whatever other organisations it was opened up to so that it would free up the teachers to get on with their core business rather than add more pressure onto them. Is that making sense?

CHAIR—Yes, I understand.

Prof. Camilleri—I suppose our argument has always been that schools and teachers are not the same thing. Hospitals have a whole range of professionals involved—doctors, nurses, social workers, psychologists, OTs, physios. Schools have always just had teachers, but the school system is now expected to do a whole lot more around the social and emotional development of young people. Teachers are one part of the profession that provides some of that core business, which is about literacy and curriculum, and a curriculum which, as a society, we expect all young people to gain certain skills from. There are a whole lot of things that we are expecting school systems to do: to support young people and families and to provide a holistic education. In some ways you need other expertise coming in, whether social workers, psychologists, other mental health professionals or whoever or whether that is done as a school system attracting those staff or in partnerships between—as an example with Paul and Elizabeth—a government department and a non-government school.

CHAIR—So what you are saying is that if you pursue this model you would actually reduce the pressure on teachers and they could actually concentrate more on core activities—

Prof. Camilleri—Exactly.

CHAIR—rather than having to be counsellors, social workers, parents, feeders of unfed kids, and so on.

Prof. Camilleri—Yes.

Ms Hordern—The way in which it was done is the crucial thing because it could go the way that Rod suggested.

CHAIR—I should have said earlier that Kerry himself is a former teacher.

Mr BARTLETT—Just taking up that issue, I have got a bit of a problem with that. I can see the need, within the school context, for specialist social workers, counsellors and so on for perhaps the more extreme cases—kids who have got significant problems. But a lot of the problems with boys, in terms of underachievement, lack of self-esteem and problems that come from the lack of a positive male role model, I do not think would be resolved or solved by an expert social worker/counsellor coming in. For a lot of those boys that would appear to be contrived and there would be great difficulties in the practicalities of making it work in the school environment.

The best thing for them, as part of the regular day-to-day contact with their teachers—and with a male teacher particularly, if possible—is provision of the positive modelling that is needed. The most effective things that happen in schools, in terms of building relationships and helping to build the confidence and self-esteem of the students, are those things that come as part of the ongoing contact between the teacher and the student, particularly out of the classroom through sporting teams, et cetera. I just wonder about the effectiveness of bringing an expert in from outside. Even if you had two or three social workers in a school, they would have minimal contact, really, with boys in any meaningful way. Could you comment on that.

Ms Hordern—What we are talking about is not so much just having expert professionals who would be more appropriate for dealing with the hard end of the spectrum, but having a range of programs available through the school. It could be opening the school up to other community leaders or sporting people in a more formal way than is currently happening.

Ms Moleta—Could I just add to that? Dealing with the extreme end of the spectrum has a very positive impact on everyone else in the school as well.

Mr BARTLETT—True.

Ms Moleta—I just wanted to mention that as well.

Mr BARTLETT—I do not deny that but, for a lot of the boys who do not have obvious behaviour problems or obvious emotional problems, a lot of problems of underachievement, et cetera are still there. I just wonder how they could be tackled.

Prof. Camilleri—All of us have actually had experience of working in school systems, and there is an issue about providing—

CHAIR—There is a division and I have to leave. I am sorry to cut you off.

Proceedings suspended from 10.02 a.m. to 10.33 a.m.

CHAIR—We will continue.

Ms Hordern—Could I respond to that point that you were making about community. I think it ties in with what Rod was saying earlier—that we really do not have a historical perspective here. I think over the last 30 years we have seen a real decline in community, and opening

schools up to be more community centres is a way of imposing some sort of formal community structure on communities that do not have those informal networks any longer. Maybe this is not a very popular view with people of your political persuasion, but maybe the government, or perhaps a non-government organisation—some overarching organisation—needs to take responsibility for fostering community building, because it is not happening in the way that it used to. This is probably because of the high mobility of people, people working longer hours and changes in many families having both parents working—all those sorts of things.

Mr BARTLETT—I really wonder whether you can contrive or artificially build a sense of community by putting structures like that in place. It is my view that the best way of strengthening a community is to strengthen the family unit as much as possible. I know that you are in many ways trying to swim against the tide there, but to artificially try and make schools take those roles, I think, is very difficult and I think it would be counterproductive, really.

Prof. Camilleri—We were arguing in our submission around some of that that a variety of family forms is now the norm, and we cannot swim against the tide, whatever our view about what sort of family should exist. But what is really important is: how do we support all those families and those children within them? We saw that schools can play a partnership role with the families. Some families feel very excluded from the educational process. If early primary was the model that ended up through the whole system we would be very happy. Most parents feel very welcome when they take their kids into year 1, year 2 and year 3. But as they progress through the system, somehow parents often feel less encouraged or less supported as being part of that community.

There are some ways in which schools, as well as other agencies involved, need to reach out and help support those families. We do not want to put the burden on the schools as being the only agency to do this. We actually see the school as being a natural social system, where other agencies, particularly non-government, can be invited in to help develop a community, not in an artificial way but by building on those strengths that you mentioned. You cannot contrive a community; it has to develop and evolve around those sorts of natural partnerships.

Ms Moleta—I work regularly in a government school, and it has been noticed that inviting the parents in to discuss issues about the children and then feeding back to them has got those parents more involved with the school and their children's education. It has broken down some of those barriers.

CHAIR—Sir John Carrick—who, as you know, is no right-winger—has been involved in developing models of primary schools as community centres in New South Wales, particularly in low income areas like Redfern. It has been extremely successful. For single parent families or families of low socioeconomic status or who live in public housing estates, where the school has become a centre from the time children are in their early infancy, it is part of the community. A whole range of things is happening at the school, so you have contact with it from the very early years of your child's development.

Prof. Camilleri—There are some examples of that occurring in the ACT with some non-government agencies, particularly drug and alcohol services, and youth workers being invited into schools. The problem with teaching some of that curriculum around human values is that kids see teachers as teachers and, if school counsellors are teachers, they are still seen as teach-

ers. Some of this work that the youth workers and others do is allow a space where kids can talk about issues with a sense of freedom that they normally do not have in their classrooms.

CHAIR—One of the points you made in the submission which I thought was particularly interesting was the question of a materialistic, hedonistic society. A number of things were recommended in the end of year report, but you did not actually put anything to the political, economic and social leadership of the country in terms of how we might change that. As you know, one of the terms of reference is to look at the broader social issues that impinge on the education and development of boys. Could you expand on this concept?

Prof. Camilleri—This came from a number of our members who work particularly in schools in which there are a large number of people from low socioeconomic status groups and single parent families. They felt quite strongly that the values society seems to be promoting are about consumption and very materialistic notions. They were concerned that, as a society, we need schools to examine what our core values are, what our beliefs are, what we see as important and what keeps us as a society and keeps us as community. How we can achieve that is the sixty-four thousand dollar question. Some of it is about political and social leadership and, in some ways, even intellectual leadership.

We have very few of what would probably be termed public intellectuals, people who talk about these core issues of values in our society. It is often a debate between politicians, rather than a public intellectual discourse about what the important values are for our society, and whether, if we are moving beyond what we see as being important for our society, we should be examining some of those issues. I am afraid we do not have really clear recommendations we can give you, other than that this is a major issue that in some ways needs a public forum and discussion rather than a political discussion.

Ms Hordern—There is some research being done now. I do not know if you have come across the work by Richard Eckersley from the ANU. It talks about the fact that once people reach a certain level of material comfort, then additional income does not increase their sense of wellbeing or happiness. This is quite a widespread realisation in Australian society and yet it does not seem to be getting publicity.

CHAIR—I have got into a bit of trouble recently for suggesting that we need to have a debate in our country about whether we should forgo some component of economic growth in return for desirable human and social objectives. We should at least have a debate about it. In fact, I have just written a piece for a national women's magazine about this kind of concept. Part of the problem that boys are having stems from when my generation was growing up. When I was growing up, my parents, my father in particular, basically said to me that if I studied hard and worked hard, coming from a lower income grouping, I should do better than my parents: I should drive a better car, live in a better house and have a higher standard of living. In all kinds of ways the next generation is still tethered to that value system, but the reality they face is starkly different in probably most cases.

I have a feeling that boys especially, who still predominantly see their lives as being defined by their occupation and their work, reach that middle schooling period and think, 'There is no real place for me. I am not ever going to own a BMW. I am not going to live in a nice house. I cannot ever achieve these often unstated goals for our society. I cannot fulfil the unfulfilled am-

bitions my parents are putting onto me.' Perhaps they are disengaging for some of those reasons. They are not stated, but I have just got a feeling that that is a part of it.

Mr BARTLETT—There are other problems there as well for young men especially who are wanting to attract women and raise a family. If they are not seen to be successful in those career and material ways, then there are esteem problems for them as well. That leads to a lot of other social problems. I want to come back to the issue of social workers.

Ms Moleta—Sarah and I have to go.

CHAIR—If you have got any supplementary ideas or comments you want to make, please feel free to send them in. They will be considered. Don't think it will be past the deadline.

Mr BARTLETT—I have two quick questions about the role of social workers in schools. Firstly, are most of the more serious cases you deal with boys rather than girls?

Ms Moleta—Yes.

Mr BARTLETT—Is it two to one?

Ms Moleta—Three or four to one.

Mr BARTLETT—That is very interesting. Are the social workers in schools mainly males or females?

Ms Moleta—Females.

Mr BARTLETT—By what ratio?

Ms Moleta—It would be 80 to 90 per cent female.

Mr BARTLETT—So we have the problem of getting male teachers in schools and we have the same problem of not enough male social workers?

Ms Moleta—Yes. That does not mean that social work intervention does not work. But that is why the anger management program in particular must have a male. I do sometimes run it not with a social worker but with some other person who is good, but of course it is very time consuming to find them.

Prof. Camilleri—That is part of the problem we mentioned in our submission about attracting males not only into teaching but also into human services like social work. We would probably have less than 10 per cent. I head the social work program here and I would have less than 10 per cent who are males. That would be fairly traditional in social work throughout most of Australia.

Attracting males in is a real problem now for teachers, particularly in primary education—and it is about the pay, it is about the conditions and the services in those professions, particularly

teaching. There is some element around primary teaching of the genuine concerns around sexual abuse and exploitation, as occurred previously in schools. Many young male teachers going to the schools are very frightened.

CHAIR—They do not want to risk being accused?

Prof. Camilleri—Yes. I hear the young males doing the primary education training talking about that issue, often saying that they feel reluctant about going to schools because of that fear. We need to acknowledge that.

CHAIR—You made recommendations about a couple of things. One is conducting a national review of teacher education programs. Why do you think there is a need for a review, and what sorts of changes do you think should occur?

Prof. Camilleri—Hopefully, we were replying to Rod's earlier question. The curriculum for teacher training has expanded over the last 10 or 15 years and more is expected to be packed in. To get registration in certain states, there are requirements about what sorts of units have to be done and curriculum. A whole range of outside expectations are coming on teachers. We need to look at what really can be expected of teachers, what some of the issues are that they need to face and have understanding of, so that in some ways we can make the school system work out what the core business is that teachers should be focusing on and what the services are that schools need to either develop or go in partnership with other agencies in to run those sorts of activities that are now expected of schools.

Some of the concerns that were raised by members were, for example, issues for teacher training around greater awareness of how to use and work with other professionals. The traditional old school nurses that used to be in the system are not often there anymore, and they have not learnt, I think, how to refer appropriately to health services—mental health services, in particular—and how to develop a partnership around dealing with kids. So there is a whole range of things that they need to be aware of, but at the same time we do not want to overload their curriculum or else it gets covered so quickly.

CHAIR—The other suggestion is to mandate the teaching of human values via the school curriculum. In a sense, I think a lot of parents have recognised that by sending their kids to independent schools, whatever their flavour, so there is some kind of value system that at least is underwriting the education. Can you talk to us a bit about that?

Prof. Camilleri—On your earlier point about a hedonistic materialistic society: without really saying it, with a lot of these practitioners we are talking about the issue of spirituality—not necessarily in a religious context, but about spirituality. It is about what values we see as important in our society. So part of that was to say that we need to focus on exploring that with young people in the curriculum, and it may be one of those areas in which you can have both teachers and non-teachers involved in developing that and working with the schools with that. We see it as really important that those sorts of human values that we treasure in our society are actually talked about and discussed within the schools. That means having a partnership with parents about what those values are, and a clarity around that.

CHAIR—It is interesting that you say that. I am a bit different here; I get a few problems. I have been arguing for some time that we need to articulate a national vision for our country which is not just economic but human and social. One of the problems in government schools is that, if teachers start to talk about values, then suddenly you have got parents saying, ‘What the hell are you doing with my kids?’ But if we were as a nation able to say, ‘We’re striving to become a people that value the health and integrity of human life as much as we do achieving our economic objectives. There are certain values of compassion; we want to be competitive; we want to be an outward looking people; we want to be reconciled with our past,’ a whole range of things like that—

Prof. Camilleri—Respect for diversity, all those sorts of things?

CHAIR—Precisely. Then those things can be taught legitimately in schools because you can say, ‘These are virtues by which we want our nation to be judged and to develop.’ What you have just said reinforces my view that that is something important we need to do as a people. The Americans, for example, are well advanced in that regard.

Prof. Camilleri—And they have no problem in dealing with that within their state school system. The civic classes are not just about understanding the politics of the country but about understanding what the values are and what we commit ourselves to. Certainly, underlying all the submissions from most of the social workers that we had, that pulled this together, was that sense of values—that we need to be articulating those values and a commitment to recognising that, with the changes in our economy, there has been lots of social transformation and there have been new losers in that who are feeling very isolated and vulnerable, particularly those in rural and remote communities. Young men in those communities are particularly feeling very vulnerable. Part of it is that we seem to have lost some of that unspoken consensus of what our values are.

CHAIR—If any group of people loses sight of that in which they believe, then they start to disintegrate.

Mr Wyles—It relates directly to increasing suicide rates for young men, I would suggest.

CHAIR—I think Kenneth Clark said that we can destroy ourselves with cynicism and disillusionment just as effectively as with bombs.

Mr Wyles—We had an off-the-record discussion about attention deficit disorder, and I was just reflecting on that. It was mentioned in the submission that there was an epidemic. In the circumstances, I might write my comment. I was just going to suggest that, certainly in health and mental health services, we are now seeing large numbers of adults presenting with attention deficit disorder, and I think there are implications.

Mr BARTLETT—Perhaps you could send us something in writing, if you don’t mind. Sorry this has been so disrupted.

Mr Wyles—That is fine.

CHAIR—I am sorry that this has been the way it has. It is a real pity. I will talk to the secretariat and we may get you back again next year. Thanks for your evidence.

Mr Wyles—Thank you for your time.

Committee adjourned at 10.52 a.m.