

## Executive Summary

AHISA welcomes the opportunity to contribute to the Inquiry into Boys' Education and is committed to excellence in either single-sex or co-educational settings.

Recent research has identified various concerns with boys that are factors that need to be addressed. Lowered male life expectancy, health and wellbeing, a suicide rate much higher than girls, increased substance use and damaging risk taking, often a declining respect for authority, a tendency towards violence and aggression in solving their problems, a higher percentage of boys than girls in discipline programmes and in trouble generally, and the incidence of depression are the main factors identified.

Independent schools are interested in the development of the whole person. Pastoral care is an essential part of the development of the whole boy.

The **development of a whole school approach to physical and mental health** is required if schools are to take into account all the factors identified as especially significant for boys.

Good modelling of all staff is essential. Boys need exposure to a variety of positive role models, both male and female, but especially male.

There needs to be a re-affirmation that it is all right to be a boy.

Boys need structure, routine, fair and firm discipline, clear expectations of behaviour and learn best in a pleasant social environment where they enjoy the company of their peers.

It is important to provide and value a broad range of curricular and extra-curricular activities.

Poor literacy impedes learning. Most schools favour a cross-curricular literacy programme with a broad school focus, developing literacy, social and cultural skills.

Boys will learn more easily if they feel secure and accepted by teachers who show a real interest in them.

Classroom management techniques to improve boys' educational outcomes include improving classroom practices in general, but understanding how boys prefer to learn

The ICT area is one in which many boys feel comfortable and it may well be an area where their educational outcomes can be improved dramatically..

It is important that teachers and parents are encouraged to develop an understanding of the current concerns about boys' education.

# **AHISA'S Submission**

## **Introduction**

The Association of Heads of Independent Schools in Australia (AHISA) welcomes the opportunity to contribute to the Inquiry into Boys' Education. The members of this national Association have a strong interest in the quality of learning of all students in Australia. However they recognise that there is a need to examine the factors affecting boys' learning and the strategies that may assist this learning in the current climate. Boys' issues can be addressed without detracting from the ongoing needs of girls.

## **AHISA**

The Association is a peak educational organization and presently its members are Heads of 280 Independent schools in Australia educating more than 230 000 students. Of these schools, half offer single sex schooling while the other half are co-educational. AHISA is committed to excellence in either single-sex or co-educational settings. The Association feels that it is important that parents have the choice as well as the right to choose the appropriate school for their children.

AHISA values the independence of its schools; not only can they be different from government schools but from each other. Many of our schools are innovative, and are seriously addressing the changes in teaching and learning that come with the modern world as they prepare their students for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century. The staff in these schools are aware that the children of this generation learn differently because of their access to technology. Investigation into how best boys learn within this context, is an important part of the learning experience for staff in our schools.

## **Preparation of this Submission**

The Association was aware that many of our schools have devoted time, energy and resources to the question of boys' education especially during the last five years. There has been widespread consultation, extensive research, including action research, discussions by teachers on what works and what doesn't, surveys of boys, parents, school staff and alumni conducted, and in some cases specific policies on boys' education have been developed.

The two issues contained in the Terms of Reference of this Inquiry were distributed via e-mail to our members with an invitation to respond to the AHISA Secretariat if they wished to provide input to this submission. Many members took advantage of this invitation and this submission has been prepared from the material provided. Common themes have emerged that focus generally on the improving of educational outcomes for boys. The Association would be pleased to enlarge on any of these themes providing more specific information if required. Certainly some of our members will lodge their own submissions which will contain details of specific school programmes.

## The Changing World

The increase of technologies in our world has meant huge changes have occurred and are occurring at a rapid rate. This generation can access information in a global context from many different sources at once, they are exposed to global issues such as poverty, health, conservation, discrimination etc, they have different and enormous pressures to deal with, they learn differently and they lack the knowledge of security of future employment. They are told they must be flexible, adaptable, tolerant and ethical, be good communicators and negotiators, be able to work in teams, become reflective thinkers; indeed that they must have a balance of generic life skills and capabilities that are transferable and which can be applied not only in a wide range of work situations but also in broader contexts if they are to be good citizens of their world. Some of these traits do not sit comfortably with boys and will require direct teaching.

Recent research has identified various concerns with boys that are factors that need to be addressed. Lowered male life expectancy, health and wellbeing, a suicide rate much higher than girls, increased substance use and damaging risktaking, often a declining respect for authority, a tendency towards violence and aggression in solving their problems, a higher percentage of boys than girls in discipline programmes and in trouble generally, and the incidence of depression are the main factors identified.

Many boys see their time at school as a preparation for future employment. The occupations of the immediate future that seem to be providing increasing job opportunities are in the service sector (which traditionally has employed more females than males) and the small business sector (in which women are proving more successful than men). Many of the occupations that boys have traditionally favoured in the past, have disappeared or are disappearing.

## The Development of the Whole Boy

Independent schools are interested in the development of the whole person as they prepare their students, during their schooldays, for life-after-school. Boys themselves need to adopt this broad aim of education, to realize that the school wants to improve their educational outcomes but at the same time further their personal growth and development. Measures of self-esteem, academic outcomes, emotional development and social literacy are issues that need to be addressed.

Many of our schools have found that the **development of a whole school approach to physical and mental health** is required if they are to take into account all the factors identified as especially significant for boys. This whole school approach can be used to create a boy-friendly school programme. Various techniques are used to

- stress the importance of good nutrition and daily exercise from the early years of schooling
- make time for exercise and action allowing them to channel physical energy into permissible physical skills, encouraging sport, recreational activities and outdoor education pursuits that will lead to better life enrichment

- develop self-knowledge, self-management, and the value of working as a member of a group, in appropriate games for age groups
- develop a positive self-image and promote self esteem in the classroom and through pastoral care programmes
- be pro-active about developing a sense of belonging, to create a connectedness with the school and its traditions
- provide a spiritual dimension developing spiritual and ethical values
- help boys explore their humanity
- help them to understand different personality types and appreciate another's point of view
- help staff understand boys' emotional needs, knowing that they often mask their insecurities and fears behind a hard facade
- use boys' interests and strengths to tackle their weaknesses
- help "under-fathered" boys and boys with special needs through mentoring programmes
- make school relevant knowing that this will sustain boys' interest, keep them motivated and "switched on" to learning..

Anxiety has now been identified as the major risk factor of depression which is becoming a huge worry for all adolescents but especially for boys. Where once the diagnosis of depression would come first and the treatment follow, now it is felt that it is best to use the **preventative measure of providing boys with the coping skills to deal with anxiety while at school, that will give them the resilience to avoid depression later.** Depression is a very serious health problem for boys as it is a risk factor of suicide. It is now realized that teachers cannot deal with all of these problems and our schools are increasingly

- Using professionals from associated disciplines (eg health)
- Improving counselling services.

## **The provision of appropriate male role modelling**

Schools generally have a balanced gender policy, catering for the needs of boys without prejudicing the needs of girls. Good modelling of all staff, male and female is essential. Boys need exposure to a variety of positive role models, both male and female, but especially appropriate male models to give them a broad view of manhood. They need to understand that there are many successful ways of being a male. As they respond well to male role models, the introduction into schools of influential role models in a broad range of fields has been seen to be successful. Another successful technique used to challenge stereotypes is to include critiques of media construction of manhood in the curriculum.

There needs to be a re-affirmation that it is all right to be a boy. Celebration of the positive virtues of the male – strength, athleticism, energy, resourcefulness, mate-ship, exuberance, practical skills, creativity and visual/spatial ability etc - by giving examples of best practice is one strategy used in schools.

There is a constant struggle for boys with perceived stereotypes in broader society. Many of our schools are pro-active in challenging stereotypes. The emphasis in Australian society on physical pursuits and the hero-worshipping of sporting heroes can encourage

boys to think that physical activities are more worthwhile than intellectual ones. Boys model their heroes and other significant male role models. One strategy that is being employed in schools is exposure to male role models from the literary fields as well as sporting heroes. Not only does this encourage boys to improve their literacy skills and to realize that it is good to be a successful author or poet, but it gives examples that will help broaden their view of manhood.

There is a dearth of male teachers in primary schools where they can be significant role models. This lack of male teachers can suggest to boys at an early age that serious learning in the primary school is for girls only.

### **Implementation of appropriate pastoral care structures and the learning of life skills through pastoral care**

Pastoral care in independent schools develops from a strong ethical base and is an essential part of the development of the whole boy.

The vertical House pastoral care system used in many independent schools provides an appropriate structure for the caring and supporting of boys and includes mentoring, which is a vital aspect of a good system of pastoral care. Each House consists of a number of boys at each Year level, with the older boys being encouraged to assist and be role models for the younger boys in their House. Excellent role models can have a tremendously positive and encouraging effect on boys. Staff Members lead these Houses acting as carers and tutors to the boys. Opportunities for leadership are provided within this system, as are opportunities for co-operation, teamwork and competition in the various sporting and arts activities conducted within the House structure.

Some schools employ a Boys' Education Co-ordinator whose role it is to seek out useful information, disseminate it within the school and generally support staff in their schools helping them to understand and support boys.

Boys need structure, routine, fair and firm discipline, clear expectations of behaviour, consistency in the restrictions on bullying and harassment. These themes permeate through appropriate pastoral care structures in schools. All students have a right to feel safe at school and different schools have developed policies and use varying strategies to deal with bullying and harassment.

Personal Development programmes usually form part of the curriculum in today's schools. Direct teaching is being done on topics such as how to exert influence in a positive way, how to interact successfully with others, how to handle leadership. Other topics for discussion in pastoral care programmes and in classrooms include diversity, differences, tolerance, communication, conflict resolution, and the development of generic life skills.

### **Provision of a positive learning environment**

Boys learn best in a pleasant social environment where they enjoy the company of their peers. A positive learning environment can be developed with boy-friendly learning and playing areas. Boys need room to move and playing and recreational areas where they can express these energies in positive ways are necessary. Some schools have found that innovative creatively designed buildings and purpose built play areas which reflect the needs of boys of middle schooling age have had a positive impact on learning.

It is important to provide and value a broad range of curricular and extra-curricular activities, embracing the arts as well as the sports. Especially is it important to showcase boys' creative talents in public. There is good cause to celebrate sport and arts activities in the development of the whole person.

Music has been shown to have a positive impact on learning and intelligence and boys are encouraged to participate in musical groups in most of our schools. Opportunities are provided for boys to join bands, choirs, orchestras and other musical groups, not only to encourage this positive impact but also to let boys experience the pure enjoyment of participating in the performing arts. Not only can they benefit from being a part of such a group, but they are provided with an outlet for displaying emotions – something most boys are conditioned not to do.

### **Improvement of boys' literacy and communication skills**

Poor literacy impedes learning and most schools favour a cross-curricular literacy programme with a broad school focus, developing literacy, social and cultural skills. Reading is an important part of literacy. Techniques used in our members' schools include

- introducing specific English language programmes in the early primary years, perhaps concentrating on immersion of language in specific years, but certainly having a structured language learning programme through the primary years
- having smaller class sizes in earlier years to identify and assist poor readers
- identifying specific difficulties in this area early and providing early intervention
- providing plenty of opportunities for oral work – public speaking, debating, presentations to an audience, classroom discussions
- making drama lessons available to all primary students
- welcoming writers and authors in residence, especially male figures in literary roles
- extending opportunities for improvement of literacy skills to those in the middle school as well as those in the primary school
- providing learning centres that can concentrate on individualized support and assistance

For some boys, reading is difficult and they often resist or procrastinate which can put them at a serious disadvantage. Other boys who can read well, prefer not to, wanting to indulge in more active pursuits. Strategies to improve the situation include

- providing daily reading time – a quiet time where they can gain access to literacy experiences
- providing a wide range of literacy resources, especially providing high interest, low reading age for the earlier years
- teaching them how to manage times so that reading can be fitted into what is often a busy programme of school and out-of-school activities
- including true humanities such as English Literature, History, Music, Languages other than English and art in a broadly based Middle Schooling education for boys. The choosing of balanced texts is important
- using the spirituality strand of the Vardy Religious and Values Education Programme. This has helped many boys to speak of their experiences in small groups helping them to explore their humanity
- discouraging sex stereotyping in patterns of curriculum choice
- more valuing of various Language and Communication Studies as prestigious subjects for boys.

## **Improvement of boys' learning skills**

Boys' attitudes to learning often include a real fear of failing even though they have a desire to succeed. They are often surprised and disappointed in their results, exhibiting a real lack of self-knowledge about their own learning. They often underestimate the amount of work required for a task and overestimate their potential for achievement. They sometimes do not demonstrate "stickability", not wanting to attempt something after a failure and they can be difficult to re-motivate. Boys will learn more easily if they feel secure, accepted by teachers who show a real interest in them.

Strategies used in schools to improve boys' learning skills include

- creating a boy-friendly curriculum
- providing learning support programmes for boys with special needs
- understanding how brain-based learning affects boys and implementing techniques to assist them
- educating boys in non-traditional ways to give them different skills for a changing world
- providing Professional Development for teachers to develop methodologies more suited to boys
- ensuring that staff understand the emotional needs of boys.
- using contracts worked out and agreed to by the teacher and the boy

Classroom practices to improve boys' learning include

- promoting learning as desirable and enjoyable, have high expectations
- publicly recognizing achievement in all types of learning, focussing on a boy's self-image as a learner
- using multiple intelligences approaches especially concentrating on the intra- and inter-personal ones.

- taking into account different learning styles. The presentation of information in varying ways, especially using ICTs appeals to boys who enjoy graphic presentations.
- remembering that visual reinforcement is more effective than verbal for them.
- engaging a broad spectrum of boys' interests and abilities
- teaching them thinking skills,
- gradually moving from lower order to higher order thinking
- developing reflective thinking and self-assessment skills
- encouraging self-assessment
- teaching goal-setting, develop skills of planning and organization
- building boys' confidence in risk-taking in learning, give them more accessible tasks before attempting complex ones
- setting assessment tasks that are short, single concept, structured action and information based
- developing group working skills, use experiential learning and interactive work
- using a greater variety of testing instruments
- giving them essay planning techniques
- using peer mentoring and co-operative teaching techniques (boys enjoy learning from each other and they learn while they teach). This can be especially helpful with older boys helping your one in the areas of literacy and numeracy.
- recognising effort as well as achievement
- relating to relevant and immediate interest of boys, especially at the start of a lesson to engage them in the task at hand
- making the classroom as pleasant a place as possible

Classroom management techniques to improve boys' educational outcomes include

- improving classroom practices in general, but understanding how boys prefer to learn
- using more audio-visual aids, interactive whole class teaching, step-by-step treatment of new material, breaking classroom activities into shorter more intensive periods of time on task, dynamic lesson introductions, reward effort care and detail, ask them to expand their answers in oral and written form, use quizzes, give reasons for doing things, give immediate praise and recognition, allow more time for them to think before answering, structure time, challenge them more because challenge helps motivate boys into action
- Using skilful teaching techniques that do not allow the extraverts to dominate a class
- Allowing boys to talk through a problem before composing the answer especially if this is done with their peers. This helps their writing fluency.



## **The use of information and communication technologies (ICT)**

The impact of ICT on boys' education in the last few years has been enormous and will continue to grow. Computer technology is transforming our lives and this generation of students has grown up with technology as an accepted part of their lives. The variation of learning patterns, the different approaches to tasks, the method of processing information and the extent to which access to multimedia encourages creative and analytical thinking need to be examined further. Access to computers has enabled boys to use trial and error techniques to solve problems, to take more control of their own learning, to alter their perceptions as learners. Where the home environment provides access to computer technology and boys take advantage of this access, learning occurs more often outside the school and this is reflected in their results at school.

Technologies of today help teachers to cater for multiple intelligences, different learning styles, individualised learning programmes but also they provide difficulties in areas such as knowledge management, sorting of information and discarding of information that is not useful in education. In the past few months there has been a global increase in convergent technologies – the merging of communications and hardware – allowing even more global access to people who can connect online..

The ICT area is one in which many boys feel comfortable and it may well be an area where their educational outcomes can be improved dramatically.

### **An increase in motivation will improve their educational outcomes**

Increased motivation will help boys to improve their educational outcomes. Boys want to succeed in areas of the curriculum that they value and that are related to their immediate social and personal needs so a good technique is to begin working from what is meaningful and relevant to them. They also enjoy investigating practical issues. They are best motivated by having a problem to solve, giving them choice as to what techniques they can use and giving them the responsibility to arrive at an answer. An excellent example is the generating of a presentation for an audience – perhaps a power point presentation using various technologies. This especially gives them the chance to use and show a variety of skills.

### **An increase in parents' connectedness to schools**

Many schools are finding that it is advantageous to use opportunities to have more parents connect with the school, to take a real interest in, and learn about their children's education. Fathers can have a huge effect on their son's thinking and behaviour. To involve more fathers in activities such as Parents' Nights organized by the school, allows sons to see their fathers valuing education. Another technique is to use Parent Bodies to improve parents' understanding of the issues and concerns about boys' education. This can be done through newsletters, discussion groups, visiting speaker addresses and the like. School and home can then reinforce the work of each other.

## **The pre-service and professional development of teachers**

It is important that teachers are encouraged to develop an understanding of the current concerns about boys' education, ensuring that they have an understanding of the construction of gender. Pre-service teacher training and professional development of staff in schools should include a study of these issues.

Of special interest is the training of staff on literacy strategies, especially those who teach in the middle school years. They need strategies to help poor readers.

It is important to employ teachers with a genuine vocation, who enjoy being with young people, especially boys. When boys develop trust and respect for a teacher, that teacher has the ability to have a real impact on the development of their self-esteem. Because the teacher shows care and concern for students and acceptance of them for what they are, expecting them to do well, then this relationship between the learners and the teacher has a positive effect on the learners' educational outcomes.

Also it is of importance to try to increase the number of male teachers in primary schools, (at present 21% in non-government schools) thus providing positive male role models for boys. However, given the feminisation of the primary teaching force, the more successful strategy may well be to provide appropriate male models in supporting roles for teachers.

Further research is needed on the importance of a teacher's gender to boys.

## **Conclusion**

It is recognised that many of these strategies will help poor achievers whether they be boys or girls, but effective teachers of boys know just how important these strategies are to help boys. Any work that can be done in schools to improve the development of all students is to be applauded.

**Authorised and submitted by:**



Fr Chris Gleeson S.J.  
Chairman

**Prepared by:**

Hazel Day  
Executive Assistant to the Chairman

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Association of Heads of Independent Schools of Australia  
Mercer House, Level 2  
82 Jolimont Street, Jolimont, Victoria 3002  
Tel 03 9650 8679 Fax 03 9650 8147  
E-mail [hazelday@ahisa.com.au](mailto:hazelday@ahisa.com.au)