



Secretary
Inquiry into the Education of Boys
Standing Committee Employment, Education & Workplace Relations
Parliament House,
Canberra
ACT 2600

26/6/00

Dear Sir/Madam,

I believe I am well qualified to submit comment into this much needed inquiry. As a parent of four boys, health professional and coordinator of a school based research project involving predominantly boys, I welcome this national inquiry. Boys in Australia are a much neglected and undervalued national treasure that deserve consistent support in our schools

1. The Mid North Coast Division of General Practice (MNCDGP) Attention Deficit Disorder (ADHD) project² has been implemented for 3.5 years in 8 schools. As project coordinator, I have observed first hand, the 1.5-2.5 year waiting list that regularly occurs in the public sector for access of interventions that have significant impact on learning and mental health³⁴. 50% of the 140 children discussed to date have been identified as having speech/language disorders or delays. *Half of these children were not previously identified as having problems.*

- ◇ The links between speech and/or language processing difficulties and later mental health problems are well documented.⁵ The investment in early intervention has been shown to reduce government spending in later life, as unemployment benefits, social security, corrective training.
- ◇ Every urban and rural child should have access to appropriate speech, occupational therapy and learning support services when they need it.

¹ Foster P&J, Case conferencing : effective management of ADHD, Family Physician, July 1998,

² Struggling to Attention, Sydney Morning Herald 29/9/97

³ Baker & Cantwell, A prospective followup of children with speech /language disorder., 1987, Journal of American Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry

⁴ Faraone S, Beiderman J, A prospective 4year followup study of children at risk for ADHD psychiatric, neuro psychological and psycho social outcome 1996, Journal O f American Academy of child and Adolescent Psychiatry

⁵ Cohen N, Unsuspected language impairment in psychiatrically disturbed children: prevalence and language & behavioural characteristics , 1993

2. I believe the current education system sends a negative message to boys in general, and especially boys with different learning styles, about their value and contribution to the school community. I am concerned that the current Commonwealth & State governments are not investing in educational and health support that is crucial to optimal development and learning. I am hopeful this inquiry will be a turning point for this crucial issue. The curriculum needs serious review to successfully engage all students as participants in their learning process. I believe that if as parents and teachers, we listened to the students, they could make a very useful contribution and increase our understanding of which formats and methods they find most effective⁶.

- ◇ Include student representatives in this enquiry to provide them some means of improving their educational outcomes. If they could collect student testimony on audiotape for the enquiry- I think this would be valuable resource.

3. Social skills deficits within the entire student body, are the main area of concern in all the schools I work in. This area is often reported by parents of children with ADD/ADHD as the main issue that isolates their child. Language difficulties further exacerbate this problem. The Mid North Coast ADHD project identified the need for social skills training. As a result Burnside (NSW) has developed a program to be implemented concurrently with a parenting support program. This program was evaluated very positively.

Whole school training in social skills, from the gardener to the Principal⁷ is another effective method. The purpose of this type of program is to ensure a whole school ownership of the issue and provide consistent management of behavioural violations. A critical component is to link the behaviour with a relevant consequence.

- ◇ Social skills training for students and parent strategies courses should be seen as a valuable investment in our communities.

4. Learning difficulties and delays accessing treatment exacerbate the outcomes for these children. The reference team of health professionals in the ADHD project encourage parents to apply for the child disability allowance to assist them with the extra financial burden that a child with special needs requires. However, they do not have the alternative option of paying for private intervention in rural areas- a double whammy!

- ◇ Rural families are disadvantaged by lack of services or unacceptable waiting times for therapy that compromise the child's educational outcome and reduce their potential.
- ◇ The absence of private alternative educational and health services should ensure that extra positions are allocated in the public rural sector to reduce the current disadvantage of rural students.

5. Teachers are one of our most valuable resources but they have a very low level of public appreciation. I would like to see their wages more performance based, with a media focus on the celebration of high achievements, initiatives & innovative programs.

- ◇ Ongoing staff development of differing learning styles similar to the medical CME points required for registration, would better equip class teachers. As many of current workforce trained when special education, (incorporating differing learning) was a separate course, we are disadvantaging these teachers not to provide the upskilling necessary to harness the strengths of the students and support the weaknesses. Robert Brooks⁸ promotes this concept in schools as identifying the "Islands of competence" of a child by integration of self esteem in all areas of the curriculum.

⁶ Spencer, K. Helping students with learning difficulties through adaptations and accommodations, Distributed by The Learning Difficulties Coalition, NSW

⁷ Lavoie R, "Last one picked, first one picked on" video, Silvereye Educational Supplies

⁸ Brooks R, The Self Esteem Teacher, 1991, American Guidance Service Inc.

- ◇ Teachers should be encouraged to pursue ongoing courses and training at their own expense to further their own professional development. This should be offset against significant increases in wages and reward of initiatives.
6. Rural students face many extra barriers to achieving their academic goals: Urban schools are better equipped, more sought after by high quality teachers and provide a range of educational options in a relatively small geographical area. Rural areas have a very limited choice of schooling options. If the particular culture of a school is not suited to a particular child or families needs, there is often no other option but to move the family.
- ◇ Rural schools are inadequately funded for the areas they serve and the disadvantages they face.
7. The recent ban on staff development funding in NSW further disadvantaged classroom teachers-currently in NSW, the Department of Education designate the date of staff development and the topic-thereby removing school control of their educational needs. No wonder state schools and teachers in general do not have ownership of their professional development - it is seen as a government responsibility. Staff development and skilling should be more accessible, acknowledged and remunerated.
- ◇ High profile city conferences could be video or audiotaped for distribution in country areas.
8. The declining standard of the state education system in NSW has resulted in a massive exodus to independent and catholic private schools. These schools attract a high proportion of higher need students who often qualify for some level of Commonwealth & State government support in the state system. However, in the current funding arrangements, this funding is designated to the school, not the student and this inequity is not in the best interests of the child.
- ◇ I believe the state & commonwealth governments should provide appropriate funding to the student, based on their needs, not the school.
9. Attention Deficit Disorder is not recognised or funded as a difficulty or disability in the education department. According to the NHMRC report⁹ 2-6% children are affected, predominantly boys. The lack of extra funding disadvantages class teachers and other students and results in further isolating children and families with ADD/ADHD .
- ◇ ADD/ADHD should be included as a diagnosis for extra funding support due to the complex medical, educational and social needs of children with this diagnosis.

I enclose attachments of the first two references for the committee's attention. I look forward to proactive, structural changes to assist ALL boys to develop to their full potential as a result of this enquiry.

◇ Yours sincerely,



⁹ National Health Medical Research Council Working party report ADHD, 1996