COMMONWEALTH OF AUSTRALIA

Official Committee Hansard

HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

STANDING COMMITTEE ON EMPLOYMENT, EDUCATION AND WORKPLACE RELATIONS

Reference: Education of boys

THURSDAY, 26 OCTOBER 2000

RINGWOOD

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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

Committee met at 11.02 a.m.

BLOOD, Mr Michael Grant, Head of Campus, Southwood Boys Grammar, Tintern Schools

HENSHALL, Mrs Lynette Dixon, Vice Principal, Head of Junior Schools, Southwood Boys Grammar, Tintern Schools

KENNY, Mr Adam Jonathon, Deputy Head, Junior School, Year 6 Teacher, Southwood Boys School, Tintern Schools

WALTON, Mrs Sylvia Jane, Principal, Tintern Schools

CHAIR—I declare open the third day of public hearings in Melbourne for the inquiry into the education of boys. I would like to take this opportunity to especially thank Tintern Schools for hosting the committee today. I thank both the staff and, of course, the students.

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 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-by-state variations in the school retention rates; and the tendency for some boys to adopt negative attitudes towards school and to disengage from learning.

I welcome the representatives of Tintern schools. I remind you that the proceedings here today are proceedings of the houses of parliament and warrant the same respect. The deliberate misleading of the committee may be regarded as contempt of the parliament. The committee prefers that all evidence be given in publicly but if at any stage there is something that you would like to see in camera then please indicate that and we will most certainly consider that request.

Mrs Walton—Thank you. We welcome you here and thank you for the opportunity to speak with you about something that is critically important to us all. I am the author of the original Tintern submission and I will be joined by my colleagues each of whom has a specific role. We do not plan to talk for very long but we would just like to fill out the three questions that the submission concentrated on which are the three questions which you are researching.

I will introduce my colleagues. Mrs Lyn Henshall, our vice principal, is an educational psychologist and teacher. Her role is as head of both our junior schools but she has an overarching role in all forms of family and student welfare. Mr Adam Kenny is the deputy head of our junior school at Southwood and Mr Michael Blood is the head of campus here at Southwood. He has had long experience in Tintern Schools and has specific overview not only of the whole campus but also of the secondary area.

CHAIR—Thank you. Please proceed.

Mrs Walton—Thank you for coming when you did and for spending some time in the classrooms and just generally getting the feel of the school. I will begin with just a brief introduction and then I will pass on to my colleagues. Let me make two comments first. I have been convinced all my professional life that, apart from parenting, teaching is the most important of vocations. I am convinced of that because the only resource any of us has, and the only future we have, is with our young people, our children or our students. I am also convinced that nothing compares—not wealth nor status nor medals—with the need and the privilege to guide a child through a successful childhood to successful adulthood. They are convictions that I know my colleagues share and they predicate all the work that we do. They are not just statements; they are convictions. They give us a strong basis for what we do.

The submission that I have presented to you was one that gave you an outline of the school and looked at the questions. My role is very much one of enabling the educational professionals—the teachers, psychologists and speech therapists that we have within our school and on our staff—to do the work and put those two guiding principles into practice.

We are also convinced that the primary years are the foundation—and an important one—where literacy, socialisation and a positive feeling about oneself begin to be firmly established and entrenched. We put a lot of expertise and effort into those years. That is not devaluing the middle school years, which for us are years 7 and 8, or the senior school years of 9 and 10 or 11 and 12. They are equally important and at other times and places we can look at those.

Finally, we are a very practical group of people and we like to stress for each one of our young people—whom you can hear out in the playground at the moment—that no matter what or who they are they strive for their own personal excellence of endeavour and in doing so appreciate themselves and others. I will conclude my remarks now and be happy to answer questions later. I will ask my colleague, Lyn Henshall, to take you through the research base that informs our practice which will then be picked up by Mr Kenny and Mr Blood.

Mrs Henshall—Thank you very much. I will not dwell on the statistics of poor literacy and behavioural problems experienced by boys in our society because obviously that is why you are here. We believe very strongly that two things, behavioural problems and poor literacy, are frequently inextricably interwoven. Self-esteem, which is a term I hesitate to use because it is frequently used in such a superficial way—you hand it out on a spoon and it will be fine—is, in fact, a very important factor in personal success. In our opinion self-esteem develops if a child feels valued and also experiences success in learning and, in particular I would say, in the literacy area. There was a talkback program on the radio two weeks ago and all of the people who were phoning in were truants—it was about truancy—most of them boys. When they were asked why they were truanting they said it was because they could not read and there was no point in being at school.

It has been, and is, our task to create and now maintain an environment here where the boys feel valued and have a sense of belonging and connectedness, where they are able to learn successfully and where they can say what I think are the most important words, ‘I can. I can do it.’ We took what we believe are the essential ingredients for successful learning and then looked at what we knew of boys and their particular needs and structured our school to suit them.

I would like to go through what we see as the essential ingredients for learning, and they are as follows: firstly, a school where learning is seen as important in itself, where there is a work-centred atmosphere and where children know that the very best is expected in terms of their behaviour and their academic work. Secondly, a school where there is a very strong structured and skill based sequential curriculum in the primary area to ensure a very solid foundation for future learning.

Thirdly, a school which is committed to providing for individual needs. This means that staff have to use teaching methods which maximise learning; that is, direct instruction—some of which you have seen this morning—to modify curriculum to suit individual needs and to be receptive with regard to the research which can inform our teaching. Fourthly, an environment which fosters a sense of security and wellbeing and where staff appreciate the importance of the social and emotional development of children in underpinning academic success and, indeed, lifelong success. Fifthly, a school where there is good communication between home and school. Sixthly—a very important point as well—staff who love learning themselves and are therefore role models and, in this particular school, male role models; staff who enjoy children, who are flexible and receptive to ideas, who truly believe that each child has the potential to learn, whatever that potential is; and staff who work as a team in the best interests of the students. That is what we see as a base for maximum learning.

I would like to turn to boys' needs. Our knowledge in this area has come from teaching children, obviously, from observation of boys, from research, and from psychologists and various experts in the field. One area which has been crucial in formulating our ideas has been knowledge about the difference between the male and the female brain. These differences include the rate of development as well as particular strengths for males and females. These have an enormous impact on learning, in particular during the first years of school, because these years are critical in establishing a firm foundation in literacy. We must acknowledge this as a community and ensure that young learners are given the very best opportunity to acquire literacy skills.

I will make a few points on literacy and what we see as important. The first area to impact on literacy is in fact the age at which boys start school. Their development in two areas is slower than that of girls: in fine motor control and in language development. In some cases, it would be a year or more behind that of girls when they start school. Both of these areas—the fine motor development and the language development—are critical in literacy development. I have always been a very strong advocate of boys starting school much later than they do, because presenting them with tasks for which they are not ready is certainly not a recipe for success. You could almost say it was the absolute opposite. They are frequently compared unfavourably with girls, who can write well because they have more developed fine motor skills when they start school, and read well because they have better developed language skills when they start. This, right from the very beginning, can set the scene for really poor self-esteem in boys which has a cumulative effect and can lead to quite substantial problems later on.

From a practical point of view, when I enrol anybody, I encourage the parents to start them as late as possible. In our particular case, we are fortunate because we have a preschool which specifically assists children in the areas that we deem appropriate, or that we know are the things we need to work on before they sit down to the formal learning tasks. We are fortunate, of course, in our particular setting, that the boys are not compared with girls and we allow them

to develop at their own pace, no matter what age at which they start. I am aware that the starting age is a very emotive issue. I know it has been visited and revisited. However, I still think it needs to be looked at very carefully.

The second area pertaining to literacy is the teaching methods employed. In the last 20 to 25 years, much research has been carried out in two areas—the speech and language area and the psychology area. It has occurred in these particular disciplines because educators have sought answers to learning problems in schools and they have turned to these particular disciplines to seek answers. The vast majority of students with problems are boys.

The evidence from this research for the way to teach literacy is really compelling. I emphasise that term: it is compelling. At Tintern, we commenced a special facility for girls with a disability known as specific language disorder, once upon a time called dysphasia and, prior to that, aphasia. We started it in 1987 and we have worked assiduously in this area. We are aware of the research and what it tells us about the best way to educate all children, not just the learning disabled. We now have in Australia large numbers of students, in particular boys, who do not have adequate literacy skills. What appears to be the case to us is that, instead of taking account of the relevant research, the education community has persisted in using methods which, apart from not really teaching well, actually compound difficulties with literacy.

The research tells us, firstly, that a child's ability to hear the small units of sound in a word—most usually called phonemic awareness; sometimes muddled up a bit with phonological awareness—is absolutely critical in learning to read. Secondly, English is an alphabetic system where children need to understand that letters are the visual representation of those sounds. This needs to be taught in a systematic and structured way. The whole language method which has, for many years, been used in Australia, the United States and the United Kingdom, is a method which we believe, and I know, specifically contradicts the research. It attempts to turn an alphabetic system into a visual or pictorial system and is not successful. This is a worldwide phenomenon, at least in the English speaking world. There is some evidence to suggest that the emphasis that this particular method places on the look of a word doubly disadvantages boys because it does not work at getting boys to utilise the verbal areas in the left hemisphere of the brain.

If the committee wants to read evidence—I am sure you have probably got it at your fingertips—we have brought along a copy which was recently downloaded from the Internet. It is absolutely compelling. It is by Dr Kerry Hempenstall from RMIT's future learning partnerships conference with the CEO. It is a brilliant summary. These two books are absolutely outstanding. This one is written by Diane McGuiness, who is an American neuropsychologist. It gives you all of the research over the last 20 years. It is wonderful. This one is published by the Institute of Economic Affairs in London, and has virtually the same title. They cover similar things. This one is probably wider in its content. It covers the details of how English was formed and why we should not treat English as a pictorial system.

CHAIR—We will get James to get the details of those three documents.

Mrs Henshall—You have seen our two programs this morning—Letterland for our junior primary and an example of part of the Spalding literacy method. It was just the learning of the phonograms at that stage. It is a much wider scheme. We like Letterland because it appeals to

younger students with its fantasy, music, art and colour. It seems to suit the developmental needs of little children very well and the boys love it. They get out there and they rollick around, dress up and have a wonderful time. They immerse themselves in the Letterland. Sometimes they actually think they are going to a land. They think it is real. The Spalding method, we feel, is probably more suited to older students.

Both programs have a very strong phonemic or phonological basis, which we know from the research is absolutely necessary. The methods, particularly the Spalding method, utilise what is known as direct instruction. In that article from the Internet, Kerry Hempenstall's work gives a very good definition of this method of teaching. The essence of the approach is that nothing is left to chance. That is the problem half the time these days. Nothing is left to chance. No assumptions are made. Children are given explicit instructions, clear goals, small steps, and lots of practice and repetition, all of which ensures a high level of success. In any population there will be children who progress very quickly or slowly and provision must be made for them to proceed at their particular pace. This is done here in particular ways. Adam can talk about that. That is the second point.

My third point pertaining to literacy is that modelling the importance of literacy is another crucial step in improving boys' literacy. The importance of men cannot be underestimated. Boys in our society have been socialised to view reading as a feminine activity. And the advent of the computer has, for some inexplicable reason, given rise to a belief that you need to read less now, whereas the so-called information age is requiring more, not less, skill in this area. We need boys to see men enjoying books and viewing them as important. We have done a lot of that in this area with suitable books, and Adam will talk about that. So those are my three points concerning literacy.

The next thing I would like to speak about is an area of importance for boys' learning in general and hence for their long-term happiness and sense of purpose in life, and that is a boy's need for activity. Once again, biology comes into play here: it predisposes boys to activity. The right hemisphere in the male brain is highly developed in the area of spatial relationships. I am not a neurologist, but that information can be found in books. It is very highly developed. Boys need and want to move and they learn by doing. This must happen in the classroom in as many subject areas as possible. Teaching which allows movement and physical involvement suits boys' learning. We have built into our curriculum specific activities which boys enjoy. They are things like a hands-on approach in music, in art, in information technology, in design technology, in agriculture—we are very fortunate in having a farm attached to Tintern—in science and, of course, in sport and PE.

Until two months ago, when Mrs Walton has took over some of the interviewing, I interviewed all the boys coming into this school and I would estimate—I am sorry I did not take a tally at the time—that 95 per cent had said that sport is their favourite subject. Since being at Southwood, interestingly enough, the preference—according to Michael's little surveys—has been extended to other areas which involve the hands-on learning. I think it is a great pity that our technical schools closed. It has been a terrible mistake. This area needs strengthening, not weakening. This particular learning need must be addressed in society if we are to assist our boys.

I would like to mention the area of social and emotional needs. Of course, they are all bound up, as you would realise. I have just separated them out for the purposes of this inquiry. Every week in the media we hear of the alienation of boys, their disenchantment, their disillusionment. Part of this has to do with the changing societal, family and work structures. The influence of schools plays a secondary role to the influence of families. Nevertheless, we believe schools have the potential to influence an individual and, hopefully, other people when that individual grows up and has a family.

Children have a basic need to belong and to connect to something and to be valued. As our society becomes more fragmented, this is all the more important. We therefore set out to create a community where everyone feels welcome and has a sense of belonging. I feel we have achieved this in our short time. Our school caters for all boys, from those who have difficulties with learning to those who have exceptional talents, and all boys are valued for themselves. We have ensured that there is no one dominant type of masculinity in this school. We feel strongly about this as well. We have achieved this by encouraging boys to participate in a wide range of activities or pursuits, from singing—which is a particular interest of mine—to poetry, public speaking, drama, sports, to name but a few. All of these things are seen as of equal worth and importance.

A sense of belonging also develops not only when boys learn well and feel valued, but where they can feel personally and physically safe. We have worked very hard to see that our physical environment is attractive—I am sure you will agree that it is—and also to see that the relationships between students and staff are positive. This is achieved in a number of ways through the curricula and co-curricula programs and also through the particular policies we have in place. I believe this area needs particular watchfulness as we grow larger. At present, with our size, every boy is known by everyone—students and staff alike. It is like a happy family at this stage but it needs particular watchfulness in the future. We expect of our students very high standards of behaviour as well as work, in terms of courtesy, consideration and cooperation.

In conclusion, I would like to make a final point about our culture. Growing up in today's society is not easy and young people have many contradictory messages thrust at them. Boys receive a message which tells them to be successful and dominant but, on the other hand, the 'cool to be a fool' attitude is regrettably very much alive. Learning is not viewed in a positive light, and school and teachers certainly are not. This negativity is portrayed in the media and in many television programs for teenagers. It is enlightening but really depressing, occasionally in the holidays, to watch these programs and I believe very strongly that they must not be dismissed as harmless. Every educator and parent knows that they are very pervasive influences on children. All this makes change very difficult on a large scale but it should be possible, I believe, given the will of a society to turn that around and make education and learning be seen as a positive thing. If we are going to be the clever or the lucky country, we really do need to do that and have a very strong attempt at it. We certainly have tried to address this in our small school and I think we will go from success to success.

Thank you very much for listening so patiently. I am now going to hand over to Adam and Michael who are going to illustrate what I have been talking about—the background and the theory—by telling you what we have done in practice.

CHAIR—Thanks very much, Lyn. In terms of time management, we have got 17 minutes left. The most important part of all this is us actually talking to you and asking you some questions, so could you keep that in mind.

Mr Blood—In light of that, I think it would be a good idea if I cut down what I need to say because, in a lot of ways, Lyn has illustrated the points that I would be making anyway. One of the things that I would like to comment on very briefly is the fact that boys like to learn in a disciplined situation. They like to have staff as role models who are strong, who are close to them but not too close—they want a bit of distance. They respect learning when the role model in front of them is obviously passionate about what they are doing. In the setting up of the school, we made sure that we employed staff who had that passion and a love of teaching and, in particular, a love of teaching boys.

In terms of how we can disseminate what we are doing here to the wider community, I think one of the important things is that, as a school—whether it be Southwood or another school—the staff get together and actually look at boys' education within itself, take it as a valued part of the overall running of a school, whether it be a single sex school or, as in our case, in a coeducational environment. A common sense of purpose amongst the staff is very important—a common sense of what boys need. If everyone is pulling in the same direction, the outcomes for boys will be much better.

In preparing for this inquiry, I sought the views, as Lyn mentioned, of both boys and parents at the school. It was interesting that they have become more convinced of the value of separate education for boys and girls as they have spent time at Southwood. Boys who have struggled in other environments have shown significant improvement here at Southwood both in their academic and social progress. Lyn has some evidence that is quite startling when you see boys who started with us 18 months to two years ago and where they are at right now. We have had boys who have had lots of social difficulties when they came to the school, specifically coming to us because they were not coping in other schools. It is through the programs that Lyn has outlined, and through the teaching methods that we have employed, that those boys now are far more settled and comfortable with what they are doing.

We still have our difficulties and we will continue to have our difficulties, but by and large the boys who are with us now are far more comfortable than perhaps they were in the past. This in large part is attributed by the parents and the boys to the firm yet fair staff, who show empathy and concern for the students' wellbeing and their academic progress. Ultimately, teaching is about relationships between students, teachers and parents. A school which operates in a climate of trust and cooperation is much more likely to bring about good outcomes for students. I would hope that we do that. All our discipline procedures at this school are done on a counselling basis. We talk. We sort through the problems as they arise. It does not mean we do not have detentions, but it does mean that we look at boys in, I suppose, not a lenient light but a way that values their feelings and tries to explore their behaviour with them.

We continue to build strong links between the boys' and the girls' campuses, because we feel that that is most important in terms of the boys' development. We see the benefits of a learning environment being single sex, but we also see the social needs of the boys in terms of cross-campus activities as being most important. We do this through various programs where, perhaps, excursions, camps and co-curricular activities such as sport, music, et cetera, can be

involving both the boys and the girls. It is through this that important social skills are learnt. This will continue to grow as the school expands and adds new year levels in the future. In light of the time, I will pass over to Mr Kenny, who will talk about the programs you saw this morning and the junior school.

Mr Kenny—From our first days as staff members at Southwood, we have endeavoured to develop a curriculum and environment within the junior school that promotes and encompasses the theories outlined by Lyn, basically to put them into practice. The firm foundation in literacy skills mentioned are tackled specifically as follows. Each class has within it small reading groups of four to five boys. These groups are reading weekly novels based at the boys' reading level, and during literacy sessions boys read with the teacher and complete a rotation of activities. At the end of last year we engaged the services of a reading consultant, who assisted us in the purchase of a variety of books that, whilst encompassing general topics, also contained specific titles directly aimed at boys' interests, such as *River Runners*; *Soldier on the Hill*; *Woods, Irons and Greens*; and *In Your Dreams Isaac.* I have a selection of them there. Each class from years 3 to 6 follows the most successful literature based program that occurs at Tintern: a class novel is read and activities are then offered. Our titles are different from those studied at Tintern, however. For example, whereas the girls study *Number the Stars*, about a young girl's journey, our year 6 boys study *Hatchet*, the story of a young boy who survives a plane crash and must survive in the Canadian wilderness with only a hatchet. Whereas the year 5 girls at Tintern study *The Secret Garden* and *The Silver Fox*, our boys study *Riddle of the Trumpalar* and *The Midnight Fox*. So our class books try to capture the sense of fantasy, adventure and *Boys' Own* type content that many of us also enjoyed as young boys.

The Spalding spelling program that you saw earlier ensures again that concentration is placed upon the skills of literacy, handwriting, spelling and reading. The approach to spelling that the boys are tackling is non-competitive and structured, meaning that there is no threat to their work nor is there the situation where every boy is doing the same list and is therefore being compared. Just as the boys run in different 100-metre races during the school athletics carnival, and just as they swim in different 25-metre freestyle events during the school swimming, so too they complete spelling in different ability based groups. Homework is tackled on an ability based level, and stationery lists reflect each boy's individual level. Boys in year 3, for example, will not all be working from a year 3 maths text book. Some may have a year 4 level book, others a year 2, depending upon their needs.

While these Spalding sessions occur three mornings for half an hour, we are aware that many boys arrive at school having eaten a hearty breakfast and are ready to tackle school life with zest. To sit in a structured half-hour spelling class is challenging, to say the least. We therefore introduced the concept of Energy Plus, a 15-minute whole-group activity session recognising the need for the release of energy that occurs before Spalding sessions. During Energy Plus we ensure that all boys run, move, yell, throw or hit—not each other—or sometimes a combination of all of these. When this is combined with our timetabled physical education and sport periods, our boys—particularly in the upper primary years—are enjoying close to four hours to structured physical activity in a normal week.

Four Fridays a term we hold what we label Book Chat: once again, boys reading a book whilst in an ability based group of four to five, yet ranging in age level from years 2 to 6. We enlist the help of parents to ensure that each of the 13 groups we currently have is reading with

a significant adult role model. Presently our parent helpers include two grandmothers and one father. Through Book Chat sessions, house debating, house poetry and public speaking, all boys are enhancing their verbal skills within a public forum.

Our units of study once again reflect boys' interests and love of hands-on learning. We study flight, the sea, explorers, geography and the solar system, and ensure that in doing so the boys are practically involved, whether it be in making space shuttles or planes or, once again as most of us have done as young boys, in designing and building billycarts as a part of the study of force and motion.

Our camping program reflects the need for boys to be outside and active. We begin camps at year 3 and continue in a sequential program that exposes the boys to different outdoor environments such as the marine environment, which is our years 5 to 6 camp at Phillip Island, through to the year 8 camp in an alpine environment.

Whilst we believe that our curriculum caters for individual differences and provides a learning environment in which boys' needs are met, it is just as important that each boy develops in a spiritual sense. Our regular assemblies promote camaraderie and belonging, through the recognition of effort and achievement. Whilst our boys undertake external academic competitions such as the University of New South Wales maths, English and science competitions, it is the effort that is recognised more than the final result. We ensure that in assemblies each boy receives certificates during the year that reflect values such as courtesy, cooperation, honesty and improvement. During class and, indeed, recreational times, staff work hard to ensure there is a focus on the valuing of individuals and that they are encouraged to see issues from others' perspectives.

We have deliberately structured teacher placements in 2001 to ensure that there is a male teacher at every CSF level—year 2, years 3/4 and years 5/6. Our PE teacher is a male; our music teacher is a male. Every boy has direct teaching, guiding and mentoring from significant males, yet we are not just a male dominated learning environment. In an era where it is often young boys who are seen as the troublemakers in society, it is important to ensure that not only do the boys contribute meaningfully to the wider community but that the wider community also has the opportunity to see boys in a positive light, as do the boys themselves.

Our community service program is such that the boys are actively involved. We have established an ongoing link with the Wesley Community Contact Centre, based here in Ringwood. Through our annual winter warmth appeal and Easter egg drive, we collect and provide assistance to many within the local region who are in need. Each year members of our student representative council spend two mornings at the local shopping centre selling merchandise for the Anti-Cancer Council's National Daffodil Day. At Christmas our boys actively support the Starlight Foundation, and during the year other welfare organisations are supported, depending upon the boys' motivation. Earlier this year the boys organised a sponsored run to raise money for victims of the Mozambique floods.

As in all good junior schools, our first aim is to ensure that each child feels cared for, valued, safe and happy. Through the aforementioned we believe that we fulfil our aim, whilst catering especially for the different needs and interests of boys.

CHAIR—Thank you very much, Adam and everybody else. One of the techniques I learned in my public life was the longer you speak the fewer questions you get. I was just going to propose to you that, if it is possible, we could extend this session until 12 o'clock and then commence with the boys. Is that all right? There are a number of questions we would like to ask.

I will begin by asking you, Adam: one thing that is unusual about this school is the number of men who are teaching in a primary school environment. I think on Tuesday the Principal of Scotch College, in Melbourne, told us that in his school population there would not be a single boy who would want to be a teacher. Why did you go into teaching? What is it that attracted you to teaching, and why do you think teaching is considered to be of so little value by young men who are going on to tertiary education?

Mr Kenny—I suppose the first part is that the attraction was that teaching provides a variety of experiences for a male, so I can still maintain my sport through coaching the boys and through being involved in sport. There is the outdoor side of life so you are involved in camps and yet you still get the academic side of things: I enjoy English, so I still get the chance to teach English. But I also have a love of children, so that in itself is also an attraction.

As to the second part, why boys do not wish to be teachers, perhaps as I am in a junior school it is not so much the case. I would hope that there are a lot of boys and children we deal with who do see teaching as a worthy profession. Those who do not are perhaps still judging importance on money. It is still a very underpaid profession. They also judge it on, perhaps, a feeling that it is a female orientated profession, particularly in kindergartens and in primary schools. Also, perhaps they see it as a profession where the general feeling among people who do not have knowledge of education is that as a profession it is low paid, there are a lot of holidays and you work from nine till three. I think the general feeling in the community is that it is a profession that is not recognised as being one of great worth.

CHAIR—Did your friends think that there was something odd about your wanting to be a teacher?

Mr Kenny—Not something odd, no, certainly not—not about the teaching side of things. I think that they often wonder why you would do it in regard to the financial side of things, but I would hope that I impart it to them that I enjoy greatly my profession and that I certainly am not stressed. It is a great profession in that sense.

CHAIR—If we have a national campaign to recruit men to teaching, you will be in it. Another problem we have is that this is, as I do not have to tell you, a polarised debate. We have had people at one end telling us that the problems that boys have got are all part of a feminist plot to diminish in some way the progress of boys through life. At the other extreme, we have had people who have said that there is no problem. In fact, quite a few people suggest that the real problem is not so much between boys and girls—boys not doing so badly as compared with girls—as in socioeconomic status: the sort of area you grow up in, the economic resources your family has got, whether you are an Aboriginal person, whether you live in a remote part of Australia is a more significant indicator than gender.

When you were speaking to us, Adam, you said that the boys come to school well fed. In schools in other parts of Melbourne and other parts of Australia, the kids, as you would well know, come to school unfed and teachers in schools are having to deal with a whole lot of problems. Could what you are doing at this school be applied in a low income area, in either an independent or a government school environment? Do you think that if you were drawing kids from a low income background, where parents may not always be as interested in education as they might be, you could get the same results? Dr Rowe told us yesterday that to start from a low income background determines where you start, not where you finish. Could one of you respond?

Mrs Walton—As the generalist, I will have a go first. From my reading, from my knowledge of the research from Britain and America, from Peter Hill's research from Melbourne university, absolutely yes. The prime resource in the school is the teacher. If the teacher knows the skills and techniques, if the teacher is supported by the greatest resource we can give—that is, other teachers—then you can do it. I would have no hesitation in saying that, none at all.

When we started Southwood—this is a converted 1962 Victorian primary school and it is great—we had a few naysayers looking at us and saying, 'You are charging a fee'—yes; that is because we are an independent school and we were categorised in 1982; that is fine, that is the way it is—'What have you got to offer?' My first answer to them was, 'Well, I do not have braid and bluestone, but what I have is a teaching system that gets results with young people. There is the staff, and that is what counts.' So I would say yes, but I will leave it to the practitioners.

Mrs Henshall—It is obviously difficult. However, just because they are sometimes well fed does not necessarily mean the parents are actually terribly supportive, I would have to say. We have our own difficulties with that sort of thing. And I do not think lack of money necessarily predisposes you to not getting somewhere. If you have got a good model in front of you—female or male—and that person knows and can inspire a child, you can go great places. You can do the skills. I think Peter Hill's stuff says that.

Mr BARRESI—Would you answer the other part of Brendan's question, about the SES and the background the kids come from. What is the make-up, the demographic backgrounds, of the students here?

Mrs Walton—On the SES scale we fall in the middle. Our number is 112, which is middle middle-Australia. The top end is 130, the lower end is about 90 to 95, so we are hovering in that middle area. We draw from this area. Some years ago—nonetheless it would still hold true—we drew quite strongly within a 15-kilometre radius of the Ringwood East centre of the two schools.

CHAIR—I should say that we are being devil's advocates, in a sense. There are some people who say that, if you take kids from high income families—I basically represent an electorate like that—they will do well. There are others who take a defeatist attitude and say that, if you come from a poor background, you have got no chance.

Mrs Walton—No, we could not accept that. We could transfer ourselves, the four of us plus our colleagues, to the lowest socioeconomic place you could find in Australia and we would put

it into practice. I would be arrogant enough to say, 'Give us a month and we'd show you a difference.' We are practitioners, we are in there.

Mr SAWFORD—I agree with that. Basically, what you have come across with very strongly is that your focus is on an educational program. As Brendan has indicated, we are into the fourth day of this inquiry. You do, in public inquiries, receive extremes, and we have received the extremes. You have not mentioned gender, you have not mentioned socioeconomic status, you have not mentioned homophobia, you have not mentioned a whole range of other things that have been put to us in terms of determinants. What you have put to us is, in fact, balanced. Right at the very beginning when we came here this morning we saw a very structured lesson with a very talented young teacher called Adam. Then Michael took us next door and balanced it up with some creativity and design on an individual basis, as against a whole-class, rote basis. So within the first 10 minutes that we are here we see a balance. From my perspective that has been very impressive, but the more impressive thing is that you have focused—all of you, Sylvia, Lyn, Adam and Michael—on educational program. I suspect that if more people in education did that and worried about the other things later, we might all be better off.

Mr BARTLETT—Mrs Henshall, you said there is compelling evidence regarding teaching techniques and the more structured, phonics based teaching, especially for boys in the early years. A number of our witnesses have supported that view, while others have disagreed. I guess the question is: if the evidence is so strong—I agree that it is—why are more of our schools not using that approach? Is the problem in academia, in our teacher training institutes and our Bachelor of Education courses? Is the problem with educational bureaucracy? Where do you see the problem, and what can we do about it? How can we actually bring about a change at the core?

Mrs Henshall—I think it is very entrenched. I think people have rigidly held to it. It started about 20 years ago. When you actually read the stuff by the proponents, the so-called gurus, you find it is gobbledygook. I do not know, it is a blindness. They will not look at the right research. Possibly it is because the teaching profession is not a discipline in itself but a conglomerate of people teaching a whole range of subjects, whereas with something like all of the work in American universities in the speech pathology area—mentioned in one of those books is Paula Talloll's research on phonemic awareness, and changing the brain because of its plasticity at a young age—I think they look at the wrong research. There is a snowballing effect. The people in the teachers colleges have been taught by the old method and will not look at anything else. I think the best way of doing it would be changing that, probably: changing the attitudes and compelling them to read the research, really.

Mr BARTLETT—How would you recommend that we, as legislators, do that?

Mrs Henshall—I do not know.

Mr SAWFORD—You actually did that once before.

Mrs Henshall—Can I say that it has been changed in England. I think Kerry Hempenstall's document refers to this. They have had dreadful trouble in England, but the research in England is terrible, too, on the levels of literacy—not just for boys but for girls as well. As you would realise, for every one girl problem, there are between four and nine boy problems in everything.

The English, I think, have looked at it with alarm and have made changes. It is changing, according to Kerry's latest document. From *The Times Education Supplement,* for the first time, about two months ago, I saw an article saying that they were looking at it, and they were going to change it. I really think they have to do so.

When people say there is not a problem, that is just not true. Because we specialise in this particular disability—language disorder—we have had three boys at grade 6 level referred to us, who now will receive maximum government funding for a specific language disorder, completely undiagnosed from their schools. I can tell you that there are so many more out there. If somebody would give us the money, we would start a school tomorrow and try to do something with those boys on the whole.

Mrs Walton—If I can add to what Lyn has said, it has always seemed to me that we need to look at educational professionals as well as teachers. I know there have been numerous inquiries into teacher education at the universities, but it is disheartening when you interview graduates who are coming out into the primary schools next year and if you ask them how they would teach reading to prep, they have no idea. They cannot even describe the whole language method which we, of course, would help them to forget, but they have no idea.

Somewhere within the universities, there has to be an understanding that what is necessary is not the agenda that is there at the moment. From our point of view, what must be looked at is what we consider to be the role of the school in society. The second thing that would be critical would be for the legislators, federal and state, and the CEOs in the departments of education, to grasp a three- or four-point practical philosophy. You heard it here today. If that could be grasped, and if that light could shine, not only would the profession have more status, because it would have a direction, but also it would empower people in the teacher training areas, in the schools, and it would assist those that look after our professional welfare, the unions and our other areas to, very soon, I think, understand that we need to have in our schools a range of people. Because we are an independent school, I have been able to employ a psychologist who is a teacher, speech pathologists who are teachers, other people in other areas who have got specific training but who have come into teaching. It is critical, and that is the way you need to do it.

Ms GILLARD—In this inquiry, if you generalise the data—and I know it is generalising—you would say that boys used to outperform girls and in the last 20 years problems have emerged whereby boys are under performing vis-a-vis girls. We have heard a lot of evidence, and I am still struggling to identify what is the point of change, because things like boys presenting to school with less fine motor skills and less language development presumably have always been with us. Issues about teacher training, teacher support, professional development have probably, in the modern age at least, always been with us: I suspect that they are not new. I would be interested in getting a focus from you on what you think has changed. It seems to me there are two possibilities: either through the equal opportunity programs we have taken the weights off girls and they have actually ended up where they should have been if those weights had not been on them, or something has happened to the boys. I would be interested to hear what you think the change points are.

Mrs Walton—I agree that all generalisations like that are a bit dangerous. Firstly, over the last 30 years the curriculum has become so diverse that we are almost drowning in curricula

choice. That is another topic, and I would be happy to go through that with you. Secondly, the progressiveness of the 1970s, while it was quite good in many ways, led to a style of teaching that became more or less process permissive. Now the researchers are saying, 'Direct instruction, clear instruction, limit your curriculum, don't try to do too much,' and all the rest of it. So that is the second reason.

Thirdly, I was on the Board of Studies for 14 years, both VCAB and VBOS. I ended that at the end of 1997 when I took on an honorary university position. But in that 14 years it was fascinating to me to see a couple of statistics constant, and the Board of Studies would have them. At VCE level, whether it was TAFE or whether it was your classy top subjects like physics and literature and French, or the ones like I teach, geography and all that sort of jazz, the top students were generally always boys, and the bottom students were always boys.

What has happened with the girls—and I can only speak for Victoria—is that once the Victorian government, in the mid-1980s, quantified curriculum through the CSFs, and with the study designs, which was a deliberate attempt to put a more verbal base to mathematics and to science, that immediately advantaged girls who previously had for some reason felt disadvantaged, and probably were disadvantaged. If you looked at the upper end you would have found that the way in which a lot of teaching was done in the maths and sciences in particular was directed towards the way boys understood things and so on. The advantage then of the girls school, which we found at Tintern, and Michael and Lyn have been with me for most of my career at Tintern, was that our girls did not know they could not do mechanics and physics because there were no people to inform them of that. Similarly, our boys here do not know it is not cool to read poetry and they queue up to go into our poetry speaking competitions. So it is an interesting thing.

In answer to your question, some things are constant. I think there have been these huge curricular shifts. I think the complexity of life now is so great that everything comes into the school, and until we can simplify curriculum and move in a combination of new and traditional methods I do not think we will find our answer. I agree with you that there is that sort of inconsistency.

CHAIR—Mr Barresi wanted to ask some questions.

Mr BARRESI—Sylvia and Lyn, it is heartening to listen to your evidence. It is certainly supported by a number of the witnesses that have come to us in the last three or four days. But there is also a number of witnesses, particularly those I have to say, regrettably, who are in the bureaucracy or in decision making positions who dispute what you are saying about the verbal reasoning that is going into curriculum or even the importance of male teachers versus female teachers and the fact that there is even a difference between girls and boys in curriculum.

One of the two areas which I would like to get your views on that has been disputed is that it does not really matter that the boys are underperforming the girls in school because at the end of the day in employment that evens itself out. They will get a job. They are more likely to get a job than the girls are. Their employment prospects are better. That is one point on which I would like you to comment.

The second one is that it does not really matter that 70 per cent of our teachers are female because the hierarchy within the school and the education system is male dominated anyway, although in this school it almost seems to be the reverse. I am interested in your views about that. As I say, I am disappointed to hear those comments because it does come from those who are in a position to actually set the policy.

Mrs Walton—I will make one brief statement and hand over to Adam and Michael, or Lyn. I have never been able to conduct my Tintern assemblies with bra burning and table banging, because I have looked at my girls and known that every one of them had a father and brothers and grandfathers. However, we have run a very strong girls school. We do not run this boys school by beating drums. I cannot get carried away with the gender debate. That is not to turn away from historical and even current disadvantage for many women, but in my experience here we just do not get into that debate, we try to get above it and educate young people. I will hand over to the others.

Mr Blood—I would like to say that as far as the boys are concerned I think it is very important that they see balance in what is in front of them. We have made a specific decision to employ males. That is fine, but I also insist that Mrs Walton is seen taking a very constructive part in the assemblies because it is important that the boys also have a view of females in authority as well. That is very important from our point of view. As the school goes on I am sure we will even the staff male-female ratio, but we will always want strong male role models, as Adam has pointed out, in the lower primary areas where we are insisting that we have one at each of the CSF levels.

I think that the enthusiasm that males bring to teaching is very important. Certainly that is the reason why I chose to be involved in education. It is not because I want to sit in that office over there; I actually dislike it intensely. I have loved being in the classroom with the boys or girls or with a mixed class. It makes no difference to me—it is the passion.

Mrs Walton—We do not really mind.

Mrs Henshall—I have a comment on the statement that it does not matter at the end of the day because boys are more likely to get jobs than women. I cannot really even take that on board. To me it is all about an individual, male or female, and their individual success. A job is only one part of life anyway. I just think that is an astonishing statement really.

Our mission is to make sure that every single boy who cannot read and write who comes in here can get those skills. I can tell you there are plenty of them; that is why they have come here. Once they get the skills they can then go on to feel good about themselves and be successful people in society.

CHAIR—I am sorry to say this but we have to finish at that point. Thank you so much for putting so much thought into the submission you have made to us today and for putting a lifetime of commitment into seeing that children are well educated and achieve their potential, whether they are boys or girls. Thank you very much.

If you want your blood pressure to go up a bit you ought to read some of the submissions that we have received; we can send them on to you. If you have any comments to make on anything that we have already received or we receive subsequently, send it and it will be considered.

Mrs Walton—Dr Nelson, we have appreciated the privilege and for any of these things we are more than willing to contribute in any way. Thank you very much.

Proceedings suspended from 12.03 p.m. to 12.08 p.m.

[12.08 p.m.]

BLAND, Jarrad, Student, Southwood Boys Grammar School

KINNE, Kirk, Student, Southwood Boys Grammar School

MOLONEY, Ashley, Student, Southwood Boys Grammar School

PAPANICOLAOU, Dean, Student, Southwood Boys Grammar School

CHAIR—Good morning, boys, and thank you for talking to us today. We are looking at the way boys learn and the things that are important to learning and teaching. Some boys have problems; some boys do not. We have all got problems of one sort or another. Today, we want to hear what you think about learning. Would someone like to start? Have you got something prepared that you would like to say?

Dean Papanicolaou—No.

CHAIR—Okay.

Mr SAWFORD—We will fire some questions then. Perhaps you could tell us if you have always been at this school. If you have been at another school, perhaps you could talk briefly about the differences between the previous school and this one. Maybe you could talk about some of your likes and dislikes. Who has been at this school all the time? Ah, you have all come from different schools. That may be a good question to start with.

Mr BARRESI—It is a school where you go for two years.

Mr SAWFORD—Okay. Well, maybe you can tell us some differences between your previous school and this one. You do not have to name the other school.

Dean Papanicolaou—At the school where I was before, we had to catch a bus to go to their sports complex. Here, we have got the gym, and they did not have one of them. The swimming pool is at Tintern, which is not very far. And I prefer the teachers here.

CHAIR—What do you like about them, Dean?

Dean Papanicolaou—They are nice and have got a good sense of humour.

Mr BARRESI—Are the subjects that you do here similar to what you were doing at your previous school?

Dean Papanicolaou—Not really. There, it was just more like writing and writing and writing. Here we have a mixture of things, and that is better. I like that.

CHAIR—Why is it better?

Dean Papanicolaou—I really prefer not doing just one thing. Here, we can do more things. It is better outside, more room, more things to do.

Ms GILLARD—Do you do less writing than you used to?

Dean Papanicolaou—Yes, but we still do writing here. Not as much as, like, story writing and all that.

Ashley Moloney—I find here there are a lot more different subjects. At my old school we did not have technology, or we did not have sport and PE and things like that, so there are a lot more opportunities here.

Mr SAWFORD—Why do you think you did not have sport at your previous school?

Ashley Moloney—Because we did not have a sports teacher and we did not have organised sports time. It was only at recess time that we could play games like that.

Mr SAWFORD—So you had no set periods for sport?

Ashley Moloney—No.

Mr SAWFORD—What about for expressive arts, for art and design?

Ashley Moloney—Yes, we had art, music and Japanese, and that was about it.

CHAIR—Who is your favourite teacher, Ashley?

Ashley Moloney—I like all the teachers.

Ms GILLARD—A diplomat in the making!

CHAIR—You could be in politics one day.

Mr BARTLETT—The school you came from is a brand new school. That would have been a very pleasant environment there, amongst the trees and with brand new buildings, wouldn't it?

Ashley Moloney—Yes, it was, but there were so many children there it just got out of hand.

Mr BARRESI—It was a big class that you were in?

Ashley Moloney—Yes.

Mr BARTLETT—Kirk, tell me about the school you went to?

Kirk Kinne—The school I went to did not really have any facilities like a proper gym or a swimming pool. They did not have proper set gardens; they just had blocks of wood covering them and that was about it. There were no set sports times. We did not have technology or anything like that. We had a certain language but we did not learn a lot. So this is a lot better.

Mr SAWFORD—Why did you not learn a lot of language?

Kirk Kinne—We mainly just wrote things out in Italian, like one, two, three, four, five, six, seven, eight, nine and 10, and that was about it. We did not really do anything that would—

Mr SAWFORD—So there was a lack of variety in the way in which language was taught to you?

Kirk Kinne—Yes.

Mr SAWFORD—How different is it here in the way language is taught?

Kirk Kinne—There is a variety, like we play games and things like that, but we also do work like learning animals and—

Dean Papanicolaou—The colours.

Kirk Kinne—Yes.

Mr BARRESI—Jarrad, some of your friends have mentioned technology as one of their favourite subjects here, or they did not have it at the other school. Do you do technology?

Jarrad Bland—Not at my old school.

Mr BARRESI—But over here?

Jarrad Bland—Yes.

Mr BARRESI—What is it about technology that everyone loves?

Jarrad Bland—You get to use your hands.

Dean Papanicolaou—Yes. It is the hands-on work.

Jarrad Bland—Building things.

Dean Papanicolaou—Experiments.

Kirk Kinne—And when you build them you know you made them.

Mr BARRESI—Exactly. You are very proud of what you made. What have you made, Jarrad, that you are very proud of in technology?

Jarrad Bland—We made a money box.

Dean Papanicolaou—Puzzles.

Jarrad Bland—At the moment I am making a model spacecraft.

Mr SAWFORD—How many specialist teachers do you have here? We saw a music teacher, and there was an art teacher. Are there any other specialist teachers that you come into contact with?

Kirk Kinne—We have a PE teacher.

Dean Papanicolaou—Library.

Ashley Moloney—And a science teacher too.

Kirk Kinne—And say if you are good at certain things like swimming you will have a certain swimming teacher—

Dean Papanicolaou—Yes, swimming camp.

Kirk Kinne—and go over to Tintern every now and then to do swimming.

Mr BARTLETT—Most of your teachers here are men. How does that compare with the schools you came from?

Kirk Kinne—My old school was pretty much women teachers, but here it is better because they have a similar personality to you and a similar sense of humour and they can understand us a bit more, I think.

Mr BARTLETT—So it is good to have a combination of male and female teachers?

Kirk Kinne—Yes.

Dean Papanicolaou—A mix.

Mr BARRESI—How often do you go down to the girls campus?

Dean Papanicolaou—We had our Olympics day there and we went and did sport. Sometimes we do poetry competitions. We memorise poems and we do them.

Mr BARRESI—Is that good, going down there? Do you like mixing it down there and talking to the girls—

Dean Papanicolaou—Yes.

Mr BARRESI—or is it a bit of a pain?

Dean Papanicolaou—No, I do not mind it. We swim with them as well after school. They have a swimming team.

Ms GILLARD—Where you went to school before, did it have both boys and girls?

Kirk Kinne—Yes.

Ms GILLARD—Do you like it better just all boys, or is it better to have mixed classes with the girls?

Ashley Moloney—I like it better all boys.

Ms GILLARD—Why is that, do you reckon?

Ashley Moloney—Because the boys used to always try and show off in front of the girls and just not concentrate on the work, but here there is no-one to show off in front of.

Ms GILLARD—What do the rest of you think? Is that right?

Kirk Kinne—Yes.

Dean Papanicolaou—Yes.

Jarrad Bland—Yes.

Dean Papanicolaou—It is easier to do speeches.

Ms GILLARD—Why is it easier to do speeches?

Kirk Kinne—If you do them in front of girls they may laugh at you or not understand what you are saying whereas if you are doing them in front of your classmates and—

Dean Papanicolaou—They understand, kind of.

Kirk Kinne—Yes.

Mr BARRESI—Is that because of the subject that you are talking about? Do girls laugh at you because of the way you were speaking, or because of what you were speaking about?

Dean Papanicolaou—Probably both.

Ms GILLARD—Or just because they are girls!

Mr BARRESI—The last speech you gave, what was the topic of that speech?

Kirk Kinne—I did a speech yesterday for Mrs Henshall because she is not going to be head of junior school any more. It was a tribute to her and it was in front of the junior school and a few parents and teachers.

Dean Papanicolaou—It is more nerve racking because it looks like there are more people. In front of boys it is not as scary.

CHAIR—Do any of you guys do poetry?

Kirk Kinne—Yes.

Dean Papanicolaou—Yes. We have a poetry competition each year.

Kirk Kinne—And a public speaking competition each year too.

CHAIR—Do most of the guys go in that?

Dean Papanicolaou—Yes, most people.

Kirk Kinne—We have a house competition. The poetry competition is not compulsory, we do not have to do that, but with public speaking you have to go through a first round at least.

Mr SAWFORD—How does the school handle boys' sense of humour?

Mr BARRESI—You might have to explain that to them.

Mr SAWFORD—Someone mentioned a sense of humour, that you liked—

Dean Papanicolaou—Yes, because if we have a boy teacher and he understands a boy's sense of humour. When you are making jokes he understands more. In front of girls it is harder to make a joke. If you are talking about things and your teacher understands it is kind of easier.

Ashley Maloney—The teacher might make a joke about football or cricket and it is easier for boys to understand that sort of thing.

Dean Papanicolaou—Yes.

Mr BARRESI—When you go home you have homework I assume. What kind of homework do you do? Is it mainly reading based, or maths?

Kirk Kinne—We have language and maths. Every term we have a specialist subject, not special, but we study on a certain thing. This year grade 5 is studying explorers. So we are doing explorers like Captain Cook.

Dean Papanicolaou—We get a program to do for the week and it is due Friday and so we do bits and bits and hand it in on Friday. Or you could do it all in one night, but it is pretty hard.

We have a punctuation sheet where you put capital letters, talking marks, full stops and names. You write that out. There is reading, maths, and a journal.

Mr BARRESI—We were told by one of the teachers that the boys go down to the girls campus to do cooking. Have you done that yet?

Kirk Kinne—No. I think that is at senior levels.

Mr BARRESI—Are you looking forward to that?

Dean Papanicolaou—Yes, I guess so.

Mr BARRESI—What about you, Jarrad?

Jarrad Bland—I guess so.

Mr BARRESI—You are not sure yet? This may sound irrelevant and it probably is to some extent. How many of you have got Nintendo or play stations at home.

Kirk Kinne—I do.

Dean Papanicolaou—I have got a Sieger, but it is pretty old.

Mr BARRESI—Do you spend much time playing on it?

Kirk Kinne—Not during the week, but on the weekends I play it a bit.

Dean Papanicolaou—I am usually outside.

Mr BARRESI—There are computers here at school as well. Do you spend much time on the computers?

Dean Papanicolaou—When it is raining we are inside playing games.

Kirk Kinne—Or in class writing things out on the computer.

Dean Papanicolaou—When you are typing things out, but not playing games at home.

Mr BARRESI—Is that a favourite part of the day, playing at the computers here at school?

Dean Papanicolaou—No. I do not enjoy it. I do not like computers. They are all right when you type things up. I am not a fan of playing games on it.

Ashley Maloney—I find things like playing Nintendo for four hours just boring. I would rather go outside and jump on the trampoline or something.

Mr BARRESI—Can one of you guys come to my home and talk to my little boy about that?

Mr SAWFORD—Are you involved in organised sport?

Ashley Maloney—Yes.

Dean Papanicolaou—Yes.

Kirk Kinne—Yes.

Mr SAWFORD—What sorts of sports are you involved in?

Kirk Kinne—All sorts.

Dean Papanicolaou—We have water polo, which is only for some people. Other people who are not doing water polo are playing tenpin bowling or indoor cricket. We rotate—last term we competed against other schools. We play football, T-ball and bat tennis. We play against other schools.

Mr SAWFORD—Do you play in organised teams on a regular basis on the weekend?

Kirk Kinne—I do. I play basketball each Saturday.

Ashley Maloney—I play football and swim.

Dean Papanicolaou—I play football, basketball and swim.

Jarrad Bland—I play tennis on a Saturday.

Mr SAWFORD—This is a question all adults always ask young children. Young children probably ask why we are asking that. Have you got any plans of what you would like to be when you have finished schooling, or university? Have you got some idea of what you would like to be?

Dean Papanicolaou—Be a football player.

Ashley Maloney—I am not sure, but I would like to do something sport related like a physiotherapist or a PE teacher or something like that.

Kirk Kinne—I am not sure either. I have no idea.

Jarrad Bland—I do not have any plans for the future.

CHAIR—We do not know what our plans are either.

Mr SAWFORD—There is change every three years.

CHAIR—Kids obviously get into trouble, and even grown-ups. What happens if you get into trouble here?

Kirk Kinne—It depends how bad the trouble is. If it is really bad we could go to Mrs Henshall's office, or Mr Blood's office if it not so bad. We could stay in at recess or just have a chat with the teacher about something.

Dean Papanicolaou—We do not usually stay in at recess in our class If we have not completed our homework we would probably do it at recess, but that does not take too long.

Mr BARTLETT—How does discipline here compare to discipline at the schools you were at—is it stricter here or pretty much the same?

Dean Papanicolaou—Pretty much the same.

Mr BARRESI—Have any of you been in trouble at school?

Kirk Kinne—Yes.

Mr BARRESI—Go on, Kirk, tell us about it.

Kirk Kinne—Talking in class.

Dean Papanicolaou—Yes, I get in trouble for that.

Mr BARRESI—That is pretty normal, isn't it?

CHAIR—I do not think Jarrad would be getting into trouble for talking in class.

Jarrad Bland—I am just nervous.

Dean Papanicolaou—You are not the only one.

CHAIR—Some people talk a lot when they are nervous and other people do not say much. We are all different, aren't we. The last thing I would like to ask you guys is: how did you get picked to come and speak to us?

Kirk Kinne—Mr Kenny came and told us one day. He told us to come up to Mr Blood's office and Mr Blood told us about this. We all said okay.

Ashley Moloney—He asked whether we were interested, and we had to bring a form back if we were.

Mr BARRESI—Your mum and dad gave you permission?

Ashley Moloney—Yes.

CHAIR—Thank you very much. I used to have to come and talk to politicians, and it does make you nervous, so thanks so much for doing it. It is not an easy thing to do, but we have got

a lot out of this. You guys are very lucky to be at this school. Go home and say to mum and dad, 'Thanks for sending me to this school.'

[12.29 p.m.]

CAMPBELL, Brayden, Student, Southwood Boys Grammar School

COLES, David, Student, Southwood Boys Grammar School

LAMPERT, Robert, Student, Southwood Boys Grammar School

McGOWAN, Lachlan, Student, Southwood Boys Grammar School

PRESS, Seth, Student, Southwood Boys Grammar School

RAWLINS, Trent, Student, Southwood Boys Grammar School

CHAIR—Good morning and welcome. The government of Australia is interested in finding out what is happening with the education of boys. In some cases, boys are not doing as well as girls for all kinds of different reasons. We are pleased that girls are doing really well but we want to find out what is happening with boys. Some boys are doing really well; some boys are not. Dr David Kemp, the federal education minister, asked us if we would have a look at the issues, which means, if it is to be done properly, talking to kids as much as teachers, parents and everybody else. That is why we are here. You can say whatever you like in this inquiry; however, Mrs Walton and others are here, so you had better not say everything you like. Do any of you have something you would like to tell us about your education—what you think is good or not so good about education—or would you rather that we just ask you questions?

Mr BARRESI—The school has been going for only two years, so all of you have had experience at another school at a secondary level. What are the differences between the school that you were at and this one? What have you found?

Seth Press—There are more sporting activities.

Mr SAWFORD—What are the big differences between your previous school and here?

Seth Press—There is more variety of subjects. You get to do woodwork, metalwork and cooking. In primary school you did not.

CHAIR—Is that good?

Seth Press—Yes.

CHAIR—How old are you boys—between 12, 13 and 14 years of age?

Seth Press—Yes.

CHAIR—What do you like about the teachers?

Seth Press—They are friendly.

Lachlan McGowan—They are pleasant.

Trent Rawlins—They are encouraging.

CHAIR—It sounds like you are going to go a long way. They are pleasant, encouraging and—

Trent Rawlins—Helpful.

CHAIR—Do they care about you?

Seth Press—Yes.

Mr BARRESI—The other teachers at the other school would have been encouraging and pleasant too, wouldn't they?

Brayden Campbell—Yes.

Mr BARRESI—What makes these teachers different?

Brayden Campbell—I think they understand you more because it is more about boys, instead of boys and girls.

Mr SAWFORD—What are the advantages of that? You obviously came from a mixed school, a co-ed school.

Brayden Campbell—You can concentrate better when you are in an all boys school because you are not distracted by girls.

CHAIR—Girls can be distracting, can they?

Mr SAWFORD—Or is it because boys show off in front of girls?

Brayden Campbell—Probably.

David Coles—It seems that teachers are also a little more tolerant of boys' behaviour, that is, when they show off.

Mr BARTLETT—What are your favourite subjects?

Seth Press—Sport and technology.

David Coles—Design and tech.

Seth Press—Woodwork and outdoor ed.

Mr BARTLETT—Is there any subject that you do not like?

Seth Press—Maths and art.

Robert Lampert—I do not really like maths. I do not know why. I just do not like it, I guess.

Mr BARTLETT—We all have our favourites.

Mr BARRESI—Do all of you consider yourselves to be good readers?

Seth Press—Yes.

Mr BARRESI—Were you always good readers, even before you came here?

Seth Press—Yes.

Mr BARRESI—You weren't, Trent. Are you a good reader now?

Trent Rawlins—Yes, average.

Mr BARRESI—How did that happen?

Trent Rawlins—Mr Blood helped me out. I have been coming in before school and he has been giving me interesting books to read.

Mr BARRESI—What are you reading?

Trent Rawlins—What am I reading at the moment?

Mr BARRESI—Yes, what sorts of books did you start reading?

Trent Rawlins—Action books.

CHAIR—Does Mr Blood or any other teacher do that for other boys as well?

Trent Rawlins—Yes.

CHAIR—Are there a lot of boys that they have to do that for?

Trent Rawlins—I am not quite sure.

Mr BARTLETT—Do any of you read much at home as a recreation? Do you enjoy reading?

Seth Press—Yes.

Mr BARRESI—Some people tell us that reading is a bit of a sissy thing to do. What do you think?

Brayden Campbell—It depends what you read.

Mr BARRESI—So having the freedom to choose your own books and the type of books you are reading, that is a big help?

Seth Press—Yes.

Mr BARTLETT—I was just going to ask if you had any ideas on what you might want to do when you leave school. Have you thought about it much?

Seth Press—Landscape gardening.

Mr BARTLETT—I have got a job for you.

CHAIR—Some of the others?

David Coles—IT technician.

Trent Rawlins—A doctor or lawyer. I would like to help people.

Brayden Campbell—I would like to be a lawyer, I think.

Robert Lampert—Probably the same.

Mr BARRESI—Is your father or someone in your family a lawyer?

Robert Lampert—Yes, my grandpa was.

Mr BARTLETT—Would any of you think about being a teacher?

Lachlan McGowan—No.

Mr BARTLETT—Why is that, Lachlan?

Lachlan McGowan—I haven't really thought about it.

Mr BARTLETT—How about you, Seth?

Seth Press—I probably could not handle it.

Mr BARTLETT—Why is that?

Seth Press—I just know sort of how the guys respect teachers. They respect them well, but—

Mr BARTLETT—They misbehave sometimes?

Seth Press—Yes, give them a hard time a bit.

Mr BARTLETT—And you think that would be hard to handle. You other guys think the same, do you?

Seth Press—Yes.

CHAIR—Do all of you guys want to finish year 12?

Seth Press—Yes, we all do.

Mr BARRESI—Some of your mentioned that you are doing cooking. You go down to Tintern to do your cooking. Is it a mixed class, the cooking, or is it just boys?

Seth Press—Just boys.

Mr BARRESI—Would you prefer to be with girls in your cooking class?

Seth Press—Probably. They could help us.

Mr BARRESI—How do you get on with the girls down there?

Seth Press—Good.

Mr BARRESI—Do you develop friendships with the girls?

Seth Press—Yes.

CHAIR—Do some of the kids get into trouble at school. I presume they do?

Seth Press—No.

CHAIR—You guys would not get into trouble, of course, and that is probably why you are here. What happens when kids get into trouble, when the boys are doing the wrong thing?

Seth Press—Sometimes, if it is a bad thing, they get an after school detention on a Wednesday, or pick up papers at lunchtime.

Lachlan McGowan—Lots of times a teacher would just tell you off—give you a warning or two and then you get after school detention or something, or lunchtime.

CHAIR—Does that happen very often? Are there many kids that have to stay on Wednesday afternoon?

David Coles—I don't think so.

CHAIR—Are you guys in year 8?

Robert Lampert—They are in year 8, and we are in year 7.

CHAIR—You cannot tell. You guys are getting there. Do you have to look after some of the younger boys? Do you have a system where you might have a boy in year 4 to look after, or anything like that? You obviously don't.

Seth Press—Probably you do, like buddies, but not in year 8.

CHAIR—Yes.

Robert Lampert—In year 6 we did, but not in year 7.

CHAIR—Do you think that is a good thing?

Robert Lampert—Yes, I think it is a good thing. You are helping out younger boys and setting an example for them.

Mr BARRESI—You were in year 6 last year at Tintern and you were a buddy to whom?

Robert Lampert—A prep.

Mr BARRESI—For the whole year or for how long?

Robert Lampert—About half a year, I think.

Mr BARRESI—What did you do with that student? Did you sit in the class with him or just play with him?

Robert Lampert—Yes, we sat in class and they chose a book and we read it to them. We did other activities like drawing and on occasion you would go outside and play ball or something with them.

Mr BARRESI—Wasn't that a pain having to muck around with a young kid or a little boy?

Robert Lampert—Yes.

Mr SAWFORD—If you wanted to change something in the school—if you have any new ideas—such as the way the class was organised, the sports program or the way new things are bought in the library, what do you do?

David Coles—Speak to the teacher about it.

Mr SAWFORD—Have you had any new ideas?

David Coles—I think most of the ideas go through the SRC.

CHAIR—So do kids put their ideas up through the SRC?

Seth Press—Yes and then we take it from there.

Mr SAWFORD—Have there been any dramatic changes that have happened through that process? What are some of the decisions the SRC has recommended to the staff?

Seth Press—A lot of fundraising. This Friday we are having a Canteen day.

Mr BARTLETT—Do you think the teachers are fairly responsive to your ideas?

Seth Press—Yes.

Mr BARTLETT—Do you feel that you are listened to in the school?

Seth Press—Yes.

CHAIR—We all worry about things—and I do not mean sort of worrying about your homework—but if you had something that was really worrying you, is there someone at the school you think you could talk to about it?

Seth Press—Yes.

CHAIR—So each of you feel that, if you were worried about your mum or your dad or the way the other boys were treating you, or something like that, you could go and talk to someone about that?

Seth Press—Yes.

Mr BARRESI—Do you all live at home with mum and dad?

Seth Press—Yes.

Mr BARRESI—Are your mum and dad heavily involved in the school? What kind of involvement do they have with the school?

Seth Press—Parents clubs and committee meetings.

David Coles—Open days.

Mr BARRESI—Does dad take an interest in the school or is it mainly mum?

Lachlan McGowan—Both.

Seth Press—Both.

Brayden Campbell—It is mainly mum.

Mr BARTLETT—Why do your parents choose to send you to this school?

Seth Press—Because I have got two sisters at Tintern; they knew that this school would be just as good.

David Coles—It is close to where we live.

Lachlan McGowan—Mine is the same reason as Seth's. I was at another school and my parents really did not really like that that much and they gave me the opportunity to leave. I came down here for an open day and I really liked it, so I came over. I have got a sister at Tintern as well.

Trent Rawlins—I love the school and I like the teachers and so do my parents. Also the class sizes are small.

Robert Lampert—Yes, I am the same. My previous school was mainly a sporting school and my dad thought I could get a better education here.

Brayden Campbell—I have half as many people in our class this year as I had last year.

Mr BARTLETT—That is a big plus, isn't it, having small classes?

Lachlan McGowan—Yes.

Seth Press—In my primary school, I had 30-something in my class and at the start of this year we only had 10. Now it is 14 or 15.

David Coles—You get a more caring attitude to each of the students from the teacher. There is a closer relationship between student and teacher.

Mr SAWFORD—Is it hard moving to a new school, or did you all have friends or some association here?

Seth Press—It was not that hard because everyone was new. We were all in the same boat.

Mr SAWFORD—Right, everyone was new?

Seth Press—Yes.

David Coles—A few people knew each other.

CHAIR—Do any of the dads do canteen at the school?

Brayden Campbell—No. We have got a tuckshop that one person looks after.

CHAIR—It is catered? Okay.

Mr BARRESI—Dr Nelson does tuckshop duty every now and then.

CHAIR—Yes, at my kids' school. It is a good idea.

Mr Blood—One of the things that we have done—the boys might reflect on this—is that we have instituted a father-son dinner for the middle school, which was held for the first time this year. It was very successful. The boys might like to tell you about that.

CHAIR—Would someone like to tell us about that father-son dinner?

Mr BARRESI—Did you have to really bend dad's arm to get him to turn up?

David Coles—No. I wanted to go but I was away. I was up at Uluru for the Qantas ad.

CHAIR—That is a good reason to miss it! How did you guys find the father-son dinner—did you enjoy it?

Robert Lampert—Yes, it was good.

CHAIR—What happened?

Brayden Campbell—We had dinner, there was some trivia, and we had a guest speaker.

CHAIR—Who came to speak?

Lachlan McGowan—I cannot remember. It was the coach of a soccer team of some sort.

Brayden Campbell—It was the assistant coach of the Olyroos.

CHAIR—Did your dads have fun that night?

Robert Lampert—Yes.

Brayden Campbell—Yes.

CHAIR—Do you think it is a really good idea?

Robert Lampert—Yes. I think it brought the relationship a bit closer between the dads and the sons.

Seth Press—It is not like every night you would spend time with your dad, because you are doing homework or he is working or something like that.

CHAIR—Should there be a mother-son night, or do you already have that?

Seth Press—We do not have that.

Ms GILLARD—Do you end up doing lots of exams and tests?

Seth Press—We have only had tests. We have not had exams yet. We have a fair few, not too many.

David Coles—Mostly they are just seeing how we are going and if we need to work more on a subject or we are doing all right with it.

Ms GILLARD—Is that where your marks come from or do you have to do projects and things at home?

Seth Press—We do projects.

Robert Lampert—It is kind of both. We do some projects and assignments and we also have tests, so our marks come from both of those.

Ms GILLARD—Which do you like better? If you had a choice of your mark being on a test or on a project, would you rather do the test or the project?

Robert Lampert—Probably the project.

Lachlan McGowan—Test.

Seth Press—Both, probably.

CHAIR—What happens if you are studying something here at school and you are not going very well? Some of us are good at some things and not so good at other things. What happens if you are not doing as well as the other kids?

Seth Press—On a Wednesday night, if you are struggling with maths or need help with something, a maths teacher and Mr Blood come in and, after school, they help you with your maths for an hour or two.

Mr SAWFORD—Do you volunteer for that?

Robert Lampert—Yes. If you are having problems with any particular thing you just go to the teacher of that subject and they will help you.

David Coles—There is a bit of curriculum support as well.

CHAIR—You guys are in year 8 at the school. Who are your heroes? Who are the people that you admire? Who do you think is great?

David Coles—Dad.

Seth Press—Yes, dad. And Martin Luther King.

Robert Lampert—Abraham Lincoln.

CHAIR—Why is that, Robert? Why do you like him?

Robert Lampert—Just because he was a great man. I just like him.

Brayden Campbell—Nelson Mandela.

CHAIR—What is good about him, Brayden?

Brayden Campbell—He is just a great man. I think he is very respectful.

Lachlan McGowan—He fought for something he believed in.

Trent Rawlins—He stood up for his rights.

David Coles—He did not give up.

Mr BARRESI—Where did you learn that?

Lachlan McGowan—Just reading about him and watching TV.

Ms GILLARD—Mandela came to Melbourne.

Mr SAWFORD—What scares you? What intimidates you? What do you feel uncomfortable about?

David Coles—Bullying.

Mr SAWFORD—Does it happen in this school?

Seth Press—Not much.

Lachlan McGowan—Not at all.

Mr SAWFORD—Does it happen where you live?

Lachlan McGowan—No.

Mr BARRESI—Did it happen in your other school?

Trent Rawlins—Yes.

Mr BARRESI—That was pretty emphatic, Trent. Was it pretty bad at the other school?

Trent Rawlins—It was not that bad, but worse than this.

Mr SAWFORD—What else scares you and makes you uncomfortable?

Brayden Campbell—Public speaking.

CHAIR—Politicians turning up at school.

Mr SAWFORD—You are doing very well though, Brayden.

CHAIR—So you guys are pretty happy?

Brayden Campbell—Yes.

Mr BARRESI—Do you have posters up in your bedroom?

Seth Press—No.

Lachlan McGowan—I have got a few.

Trent Rawlins—I have got a few.

Mr BARRESI—What are the posters of?

Lachlan McGowan—Motor bikes and cars, and hockey players.

Mr BARRESI—Any particular hockey player?

Lachlan McGowan—No.

Mr BARRESI—Australian hockey players?

Lachlan McGowan—Yes.

Mr BARRESI—What about you, Trent?

Trent Rawlins—Sportsmen.

Mr BARRESI—Which sportsmen?

Trent Rawlins—Michael Jordan.

Mr BARRESI—Is he a hero to you?

Trent Rawlins—Yes. A lot of NBA basketball players.

CHAIR—We can always get you a few Phil Barresi posters. Thanks so much for talking to us, boys. We really do appreciate it. It is not an easy thing to do, but it is obvious that the things you are doing at the school are helping you to do it. I do not think I could have done what you have done today when I was your age. Thank you for being here. I do not have to tell you that

you are really lucky to be at this school. I know you have already done it but you ought to thank your mum and dad for sending you. Have a great day and a great life.

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

That the committee receives as evidence and includes in its records as an exhibit, for the inquiry into the education of boys, the document received from Mrs Sylvia Walton entitled *Preventing and overcoming reading failure.*

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

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

Committee adjourned at 12.54 p.m.