COMMONWEALTH OF AUSTRALIA

Official Committee Hansard

HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

STANDING COMMITTEE ON EMPLOYMENT, EDUCATION AND WORKPLACE RELATIONS

Reference: Education of boys

TUESDAY, 24 OCTOBER 2000

MELBOURNE

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HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

STANDING COMMITTEE ON EMPLOYMENT, EDUCATION AND WORKPLACE RELATIONS

Tuesday, 24 October 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 Barresi, Mr Bartlett, Mr Emerson, Ms Gillard, 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 10.10 a.m.

LUDOWYKE, Mr Jeremy Bryan, Spokesperson, Victorian Association of State Secondary Principals; Submission writer, Australian Secondary Principals Association

CHAIR—I declare open this hearing of the House of Representatives Standing Committee on Employment, Education and Workplace Relations and welcome all the witnesses and observers. This committee is conducting an inquiry into the education of boys. The purpose of this inquiry is to examine the social, cultural and educational factors affecting the education of boys in Australian schools, particularly in relation to their literacy needs and socialisation skills in the early and middle years of schooling. The committee also aims to identify successful and educational strategies and ways to promote their wider adoption in schools. Particular concerns which have emerged from 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 school retention rates and the tendency for some boys to adopt negative attitudes towards school and to disengage from learning.

I remind you that the proceedings here today are proceedings of the parliament and warrant the same respect as proceedings in the House itself. The deliberate misleading of the committee may be regarded as contempt of parliament. The committee prefers that all evidence be given in public but should you at any stage wish to give evidence in private, please ask to do so and the committee will consider that request. Could you give us a precis of the association's submission and then we will take questions and answers.

Mr Ludowyke—Thank you for the opportunity to address the committee. I am the principal at the Princess Hill Secondary College. What I would like to do is to briefly pick out some of the key issues or themes which we see as relevant to the terms of reference of the committee and then to focus in on some of the key recommendations that we have made—people will find those on the executive summary, which is the first page of our submission.

As far as some contextual statements go, as a body which clearly has a keen interest not only in relation to the practice of our schools but also the outcomes for young boys and young girls in our care, it is an area which our associations have had significant involvement and interest in for over, at least, a decade. A couple of the contextual comments that we would make are that the debate that has surrounded this issue, particularly the media debate, has tended unfortunately to be dominated by a fair amount of polemic from all areas of a spectrum in terms of where people might position themselves politically or otherwise around these issues. That, as the general tenor of the debate, is something that we have found unhelpful as far as ensuring that there is some information and informed research base to deliberations and directions that might come from that. It has tended to be a clouding rather than a clarifying factor.

One of the key elements of our submission, which I would certainly stress, is the need for the committee's work—let alone any other work that is done within this field—to be very solidly grounded in a good research base. That is certainly the approach that both ASPA and VASSP have taken consistently in their own research and writing and recommendations in the area. Unfortunately, having been privy to a number of the submissions posted on the committee's web site, it is unfortunate to see that that is still not the consistent theme of the debate—that there is still quite a lot of polemic and not a lot of good ground in existing practice and good

research in the field. So in our submission we have tried very much to go back to that research base and to draw or extrapolate from that the sorts of recommendations that we think would be appropriate for your committee to consider.

I will pick out a couple of general themes before focusing on some of the specific recommendations. One of the real core strengths around which action can be taken in this field is the fact that it is one of the few areas that we have a consensus policy within the state, territory and federal governments. I am referring to the gender equity framework. As no doubt you folk will be aware, given the politics of education, the capacity to agree upon a consensus policy which is going to be affirmed by every state and territory, as well as the Commonwealth, is a very unusual thing to occur, yet there has been a strong theme and tradition within the general area of gender education that that is something within which all parties can agree. What is more, that is true of the very systems of education as well.

The current gender equity framework provides quite an adequate policy framework within which all of the issues that are the brief of the committee can be adequately tackled. Whilst I know that has not always been the consistent theme of some of your submissions, I think it would be very much throwing the best baby out with the bathwater, if the intention were to move away from consensus. I would also argue, this being an area that I have also been involved in—in terms of that policy development—that the chances of again at this juncture getting consensus between states and territories, let alone the various systems of education, on any new policy is probably unlikely. It is, I believe, appropriate, potentially effective and certainly the most adequate of the policy frameworks within which we have to work.

Another caution, I guess—which is a consistent theme of our submission—is that needs, directions and potential strategies that relate to this field are not, unfortunately, going to be simplistic. For a start, the particular contexts and particular issues of specific communities, schools and cohorts of students are such that the capacity to recommend even general themes that may be consistently applied across all of those variables is unlikely, except in a degree of rarefaction to be, of itself, fairly useless. I think part of the unfortunately complex job which the committee faces is how to make some of the recommendations—given your terms of reference—in ways that are able to resonate amongst all of those variations. I will come back to that in relation to a couple of the recommendations particularly.

Extrapolating on a particular example of how that might play itself out in practice and how it relates to another, I think, very key issue for this committee, I have phrased a question: in the various discussions—regardless of what the specific target area in relation to the education, social or other outcomes for boys might be—what actually is the intended outcome of work, endeavour or movement in the field? There seems to have been, in the debate, a lot of confusion as to what an intended outcome might look like.

To give you some idea of the complexity of that, it is worth referring to some very good research that we have seen recently from the UK, where this has been—for all sorts of indicators—much more on the topic and a vexed issue. That research has recently been undertaken by the National Foundation for Educational Research in the UK. It is referred to in our submission. The second phase of that research targeted a number of schools, specifically ones that were seen to be delivering very effective programs as far as improving educational and broader outcomes for boys. The outcome of the longitudinal research which the foundation

undertook was very interesting and refers back to the question of what is, in fact, the intended outcome, if we are looking at improvements for boys. The research, against very good benchmarks, was able to show that the effectiveness of those strategies—although the strategies were very different in the different context of those schools—was to significantly improve, in this case, the academic achievement levels of boys.

However, the dilemma which it also fostered was that, if the focus was on the gap in academic performance between boys and girls, that same work and the same outcomes demonstrated a widening of that gap. The key question is whether our intention in terms of an outcome is to improve the education of boys—particularly those cohorts of boys who may be underachieving—or is it to flatten the clearly indicated gap, particularly around literacy, between boys and girls. The intention and the degree of invasiveness of those two aims are very different. It would be fair to say we are already in a position where we can begin to identify within the context of specific cohorts of young boys or within the context of specific communities a number of quite effective potential strategies that will, in fact, significantly improve those outcomes. However, if our intention is to in some way intervene and interfere—and it would have to be almost a form of direct intentional interference—to flatten the differential between the achievements of boys and girls, those same strategies will not be the ones that ought to be recommended or adopted. The strategies we would be referring to—and I can come back to those in more detail if the panel wishes—are in effect good teaching and learning strategies and therefore all students would benefit from that. I would advocate that that is what it should be. I think that ought to be in fact the direction that we take.

As the panel will be aware. the debate is about whether or not we can recommend particular strategies which might privilege a specific group at the disadvantage of another. It is a particularly vexed issue which the panel needs to consider. However, there is a positive direction forward if we can point to and develop strategies that in fact will enhance educational outcomes for all. But one thing we are therefore putting aside is whether or not the key focus ought to be on the gap between the relative performances of either specific cohorts of boys and other cohorts of boys or between girls and boys.

The submission certainly includes a caution about our capacity to talk effectively about boys as an amorphous homogenous group. To give people one example of that in relation to academic performance, because that has certainly been the one that has attracted the most attention in the media, within Victoria we are currently looking at significant changes to senior curriculum for the VCE. One of those shifts will be an increased emphasis upon examination based assessment. It is quite clear from some of the research that certain cohorts of boys will in fact be potentially significantly advantaged by that shift of assessment strategy. However, there will be other cohorts of boys—and they are the ones who have always tended to be at the bottom end of the achievement scale—who will in fact be disadvantaged by that. The solution for one group may not be the solution for another.

The other area which I think the panel may be interested in are the particular views expressed within our submission about the relative value of, if you like, privileging men in employment into education. Perhaps I may leave that for questions as it is again a fairly constant theme through some of the submissions. I think that is actually a much more complex issue than has commonly been extrapolated upon either in the submissions or in the media coverage. It is one that we should approach with some caution.

I will comment briefly on some of the key recommendations and then throw it open for questions and further advice. The executive summary lists eight key recommendations in our submission. The first one I have already spoken to and that is the prominence that we would place on the existing quality of the federal policy framework, *Gender equity: a framework for Australian schools*, adopted and supported by each state and territory and each system of education. We would certainly advocate that that already provides quite an adequate policy basis upon which to address any of the range of issues that fall within the terms of reference of the committee.

The areas that I think, from my reading of the submissions, might be a little more particular to our submission relate in part to recommendation 3. That is a recommendation that a key, helpful strategy, which we would certainly advocate to the committee, might be the encouraging of networks of teachers. Even from what we know of what makes for effective professional development for teachers, I do not think it is a case of having to recommend strategies to teachers. For all the reasons that I have mentioned about the specifics of a particular context, a particular issue, for a particular community or school, we cannot make generic statements about what will or will not be effective strategies. What I believe we should recommend is to provide the opportunities for the practitioners, who will be the ones to know the most effective strategies for their particular context, to discuss and debate and pass information between one other. All of what we know about teacher professional development and good improvement in schools would tell us that that is going to be a very effective strategy. The recommendation is that DETYA resource, advocate and support networks—which might be either online or face-to-face networks—of educational practitioners to discuss and extend their practice. That is a key strategy that I would highlight in our submission.

I will go through the others very quickly. Both recommendations 4 and 5 point to the importance of research to effectively inform the debate. As I said at the outset, one of the areas that is covered in the terms of reference of the committee that has been a source of dismay and a bugbear, both in terms of the media and of practice endeavour to do something about it, has been the degree of uninformedness. So I would advocate that a strong research base is critical to any movement forward in this field.

Finally, recommendation 2 is a recommendation for tooling up, which would be worth while. Again, DETYA, which has done very effectively on a number of issues in a relevant area in the past, may be commissioned to produce a resource kit based on a whole school approach—I can extrapolate on what that means, although it is spelled out in some detail in the submission—that would provide individual schools with the capacity building to be able to develop an action plan within their own context. I might leave my remarks at that and ask the panel for their questions or if they seek any further extrapolation on what I have said or on the submission.

CHAIR—Thank you very much, Mr Ludowyke. That is very good.

Mr BARTLETT—Mr Ludowyke, you raised some interesting questions on the dichotomy between raising the standard across the board for boys and girls versus trying to narrow the gap and you made the point that we ought to be focusing on general improvements in education that raise the standards for girls and boys. Do you envisage that those strategies you have in mind would increase the gap or have no impact on the gap between achievement levels?

Mr Ludowyke—The research that I mentioned from the UK indicated that good strategies will do both, because good strategies are likely to enhance educational outcomes for everybody. The indications in that research were that the levels both of specific cohorts and of boys overall increased quite dramatically but so did those of girls. Therefore, the gap remained relatively stable. It widened slightly but was not statistically significant. I think it would be very difficult to define some general strategies which would do one without the other, because in the end it seems to me that those strategies are going to be about better teaching and learning. I do not think that the research has yet demonstrated that there are in fact particular or peculiar strategies that will do one without the other.

Mr BARTLETT—Surely there is a range of strategies for us to improve levels of achievement for both those genders, but within that range of strategies surely some would be more effective in reducing the gap or reducing what seems to be a relative disadvantage that boys face?

Mr Ludowyke—If I use the one example, it is fairly innovative and at the forefront of where lots of schools currently are, which is a focus upon individual learning styles and using materials such as Howard Gardner's 'seven intelligences' to look at different ways in which students learn. There has been some endeavour—and I have to say that at this point the verdict is still out—to find out whether there are some learning styles that are more common amongst boys, or amongst some cohorts of boys, and whether there are other preferred learning styles more common amongst girls.

Interestingly enough, where schools have done some work on endeavouring to emphasise some of the learning styles, such as kinesthetic learning, learning by doing, learning by what you have in your hands rather than what you read in a book, there has been a fairly widely held but untested belief that some of that might in fact improve outcomes for some specific cohorts of boys in particular. Again, the research tends to be finding that if, as I would argue, there is good teaching practice—that is, if teachers audit their teaching and learning practices so they include all the range of different learning styles—what is probably more true is that any individual will find some resonance with each of those learning styles. It is not that they do one at the exclusion of the other. Therefore, whilst the intention might be to provide better accessibility for some of those cohorts of boys, other groups in that class, whether they are girls or whether they are, for example, people from a particular cultural or ethnic background, will also be advantaged by that. There is no good research to date saying that that, which is probably the one that has been most mooted, will improve outcomes for boys without accentuating the gap. We just do not see it in the research to date, and that is not for want of some good research. It is just not showing up that that is an outcome. I would again argue that if the intention is to raise educational standards—which I would wholeheartedly say it ought to be—then why not raise educational standards for everybody.

Mr BARTLETT—But in conjunction with reducing any disadvantage, I would argue.

Mr Ludowyke—Yes, for some particular cohorts which we can very clearly identify. For example, as mentioned in the submission, if we focus on literacy, all of the research—national, some of the in-depth research that has been done, particularly in Victoria around the Quality Schools Project—will tell us that the best indicator of poor levels of literacy will be socioeconomic status, not gender. So if we were to particularly focus some of our strategies on

boys from a low socioeconomic background, we would probably be far more strategic and far more effective than having a general policy that looks just at boys, because there are some boys in that cohort who are doing very well, thank you, in terms of literacy.

Mr SAWFORD—That is if your assumption about socioeconomic background is correct, and it may in fact not be. Research all through the mid-eighties by the inner London Education Authority—one of the few authorities that actually did longitudinal research, which is almost absent in Australia—suggests exactly the opposite to what you are suggesting, but that is another point.

With many of the problems that have existed between girls' and boys' achievements in a number of countries—Canada, New Zealand, Norway and Australia—the differentials were less than one percentage point prior to 1980. At a previous public hearing in Canberra we were given information about New South Wales, where the differential was 0.6 in 1979 and 1980. It has now varied from 15 to 20. There is also a gender gap in Victoria for year 3, which showed up in the 1999 literacy benchmarking tests: boys are 7.3 per cent behind girls—the second widest gap in Australia. In 1998, the gender gap in Victorian year 12 retention rates was the widest in Australia, with boys 15.2 points behind girls. It has been consistently higher for 10 years. I suggest that in Victoria something has gone horribly wrong with the education of boys and the system is not meeting their needs.

Mr Ludowyke—Can I take a variety of those points in turn. We can look at retention rates. If people saw the front page of the paper in the last couple of days, they would know that our government has turned itself quite deliberately to that and set some interesting targets in terms of what it has intended with retention rates. The longitudinal research on retention rates will tell us, for very understandable reasons, that there has always been a far stronger link between employment patterns, particularly youth employment or youth unemployment patterns, and the retention rate of boys. There is nothing new in that. That is a pattern that we have seen in the whole postwar period. In other words, where the economic indicators are running well and where unemployment is running low, then the retention rates of boys, particularly in post compulsory education, will decline.

There has been a very strong link in the past—and I would certainly argue that this is a pattern which we are beginning to see break apart—and always has been in the post compulsory and postwar period, between the retention rates of boys into senior education as compared to into employment, apprenticeship or other avenues or pathways. Again, the good research is showing us that that pattern is breaking down. There is now less of a direct link between boys' retention rates and employment levels than there has been in the past. I think that is a dangerous indicator in terms of what it tells us about the potential future of the boys who are at risk of leaving and not completing post compulsory years. The research is telling us that that group is at significant risk in terms of their future earning capacities and their employability. I am certainly not intending to disguise it or say otherwise—those things are real. However, I think the other thing that has been a contributor to that pattern is the nexus that has always existed between finishing schooling, regardless of where that is to happen, and proceeding to employment, which has also disappeared. We are now seeing a much more complex picture of what happens to young people once they leave school. Their future may include—

Mr SAWFORD—May I interrupt because time is of the essence. You are taking us down a path that I do not particularly want to go down because I do not think it is informative. In the last 20 years the differentials have gone from less than a percentage point up to 20. Let me put it in a context, because I do not think you put your submission in a context. There are no historic references to significant changes in the last 20 years in the organisation and administration of schools and in the pedagogics that have been used in Victoria. There is no reference at all in the submission to any of that. Yet I know, as a former teacher, there have been dramatic changes in all of those areas. For example, in 1973 the Karmel report recommended to Australian governments that there be a creation of a single comprehensive public secondary school in Australia. In hindsight, that was a disastrous recommendation because it took away the diversity that existed in public education and replaced it with uniformity. The administration of schools via the state governments in every state of Australia has changed dramatically in the last 20 years. The per capita resources that have been applied to junior primary, primary and junior secondary have been disadvantaged compared to other sectors of education over the last 20 years. Have they no impact on what has happened?

Mr Ludowyke—I would say wholeheartedly that that have had an impact. As you pointed out, we do not have the good research to tell us what has and what has not.

Mr SAWFORD—You have history. Surely the Secondary Principals Association of Victoria have a corporate history?

Mr Ludowyke—Yes.

Mr SAWFORD—Basically, according to your submission, there is no historic context. You talk about context.

Mr Ludowyke—Yes.

Mr SAWFORD—But you should put a submission in context, and there is no historic context at all in terms of the significant changes that have occurred in the last two decades.

Mr Ludowyke—I would have to say that some of the trends you have highlighted occurred prior to the last two decades. If you want me to refer to some specifics, I can refer to the research that was done, in this case, in New South Wales going back to 1870 tracking the differential between girls' and boys' achievements at the leaving, or final, year of education, whether that was initially at what we would now call year 10 or finally at year 12. The research going back to 1870 has demonstrated that there has always been a differential between—

Mr SAWFORD—We did not have public education in Victoria in 1870. That is a silly statement to make.

Mr Ludowyke—I am talking about New South Wales research in this case.

Mr SAWFORD—New South Wales did not have public education in 1870 either.

Mr Ludowyke—It did in 1873, and that is where the research—

Mr SAWFORD—You said '1870'. We did not have public education then.

Mr Ludowyke—I said '1870s'. From 1873, that research will indicate that there has always been a gender gap in performance between boys and girls.

Mr SAWFORD—Yes, less than one percentage point.

Mr Ludowyke—No, that is not true. It was not less than one percentage point, and that gap has stayed consistent.

Mr SAWFORD—That is not correct.

CHAIR—I do not agree with Rod on all things, but all the evidence we have received that I have been reading is consistent with what he is saying about the difference—and there are reasons for it.

Ms GILLARD—In disaggregating some of this stuff—and I found your submission useful on these questions—you conclude that we need more research on the interrelationship between or contributions to disadvantage of income, SES and remoteness of location as well as gender. In a lot of the other material, if you wanted to snapshot the debate—and snapshots never really work—some people are saying that gender is the most significant factor. Other people would say that SES, remoteness or race are more significant factors in defining disadvantage. Whilst you have recommended more research, I would be interested in your comment about how you would rank those factors in disadvantage—SES remoteness, race and gender.

Mr Ludowyke—That is difficult to do given that, to some extent, it is going to relate to the variabilities of those within a particular community. For example, we know that if you are wanting to identify the aggregation of the most disadvantaged group, it would be indigenous boys in remote areas. They would be the most disadvantaged group in terms of their educational outcomes. Of course they are a small cohort in some particular communities. However, what I would actually argue is that there is an interweaving of those relative patterns—that is, a significant cohort you could expect to find generally within a community would be boys from a low SES background. Universally in all of the research they would be an underachieving group, a group most at risk of some of the outcomes that Rod has alluded to—early school leaving, underperformance, lack of continuation on into post compulsory and further education and training. I think that would be a very specific cohort. The rest of it, because of how complex that interweaving is, is going to be very community or location specific.

Ms GILLARD—You mentioned in your presentation—I do not recall it in the submission—that, in the contemplated changes to the VCE, you would expect that a move back to examination based assessment would be better for at least some cohorts of boys. What is the research on that assessment style and gender?

Mr Ludowyke—We have been able to track—and VASSP has done this in the last five or six years—the current performance patterns, given the assessment regime that has existed for the last five or six years. People know that there has been some degree of external examination, some degree of school based assessment. So, we are able to see which cohorts of kids perform better in the external assessment as compared to the other.

If we have got a shift in our assessment regime that places greater emphasis upon the external assessment, we can also predict from that which cohorts of kids will therefore overall have an improvement in their assessment level. If we are looking at cohorts of boys, they are likely to be boys from a high SES background, largely in urban and provincial areas. Richard Teese's work, *Who wins at school?,* and some of the more recent work Richard Teese has done around the VET area, vocational education and training in schools, is very good research in that field because it disaggregates and looks at specific impacts for particular kids. What that means is those kids would achieve, let us say, the A to A plus band on an external examination, whereas they might get into the A or B plus band in their school based assessment. So, they are going to be advantaged. The boys down the other end of the performance scale in the D, E and ungraded bands are boys from a low SES group, and they will tend to perform better on the internal assessments than the external. So a shift to external assessment will mean that those kids' outcomes will be lesser.

Ms GILLARD— I know you say it does not necessarily differentially impact on the base of gender, but the middle year schooling stuff is disturbing in your submission and in a variety of other submissions that we have got. Have you got a comment on what is going wrong in middle years of schooling that needs to be addressed?

Mr Ludowyke—It would certainly be one of the areas that I would be advocating for close attention, and that is happening, as people know, both at a federal and a state level in Victoria, as well as in other states. There has been very good research around that, for example, the MYRAD project in Victoria, the middle years research and development project. That is what I would advocate is a good example of where we should be heading in some of this stuff because it has got a very solid research base through the University of Melbourne and it builds up the juvenile profile of where kids are going.

What that longitudinal profile begins to show us is that where kids are disengaging from schooling is emerging as a pattern in about grade 5. Whilst we might not see some of the bad indicators of that in terms of their performance, their truancy, attendance or drop-out rates until maybe years 8 or 9, they are beginning to switch off back in grade 5. That is where the prevention and preventative strategies need to kick in. If we leave it to years 8, 9 and 10 we are leaving it too late, we are bandaiding over a disengagement from learning that has already happened. If we can carry those kids forward in terms of changes to curriculum, changes to even—as Rod has pointed out—structures of schooling, then we will be still having them there engaged in education in year 8 and 9, and that is where your improvements in academic outcomes, et cetera, are likely to therefore show through.

The other interesting comment I will make about that is that the MYRAD stuff, the preliminary pilot research which is in there, indicates that there is not a strong differential in terms of attitudes to schooling between boys and girls. They decline overall and the decline is quite alarming, but there is not a significant differential in that attitudinal attentiveness to school between boys and girls as a collective cohort.

Mr EMERSON—Picking up on that point, with the MYRAD project and the work of Dr Professor Peter Hill, he has shown from his research that the boys entering the middle years, the worst performing boys, the bottom 10 per cent, actually go backwards at least for the early middle years, which I suspect has helped invoke in people's minds this concern, particularly

about boys, but you are saying that there are not any different attitudes to school. What has been postulated to us in visiting some of these schools is that boys, when they leave the primary school where they may have just a single teacher and go into a classroom environment where through the middle years they may have 30 or 40 teachers, feel that no-one really cares about them. I think it was put to us that boys seem to feel that more acutely than girls, and that this could be contributing to their underperformance and, in fact, going backwards. Is there any evidence that that is right?

Mr Ludowyke—That is absolutely true. That is a key factor that they have been able to identify and that is the advantage of getting good research that allows you to focus in on what specifically differentiates someone who handles that transition from primary to secondary school well as compared with somebody who does not. It is a constant theme of the submission where we argue that, without that good grounded research, we are really stabbing in the dark. What is indicated in that research is teacher responsiveness: the sense of connection that a particular child has to at least one teacher, who they see as 'in there with them'. It is a critical factor in their engagement or otherwise with schooling and their positive attitude towards schooling. Certainly, therefore, if you were to hone strategies that would improve that, then it is going to be far more effective—we would hope—in terms of their engagement or re-engagement with schooling. It is clear that we can begin to zero in on some of those very specific target areas to work on. It is one of the few good examples. I would hold it up as an exemplary model of the way in which we should be going.

Mr EMERSON—Does that contradict in any way the thrust of what you have been saying, which is that there is really no big difference between boys and girls and you should not really have strategies directed towards boys or girls but to better learning?

Mr Ludowyke—No. Certainly nowhere in the submission does it say that we should not have strategies to simply target specific improvements for boys. What I have said is that a focus upon, for example, building greater responsiveness—that teacher responsive issue—is a very appropriate teaching and learning practice from which all kids would benefit. It remains to be seen—and as I said, there is no research that tells us this—whether zeroing in on and focusing our energies and attentions on that which we know will improve outcomes for those at risk boys will also be an improvement in the educational outcomes for all kids. My guess is that is will. But it will particularly pick up those boys which other strategies may not pick up.

Mr EMERSON—I have two quick questions on year 12.

CHAIR—We need to be fairly concise with this.

Mr Ludowyke—I will make the answers short.

CHAIR—Yes, if you can.

Mr EMERSON—I took you as saying the economic cycle and year 12 retention rates have tended to be fairly well correlated, but that may be breaking down now.

Mr Ludowyke—Yes.

Mr EMERSON—The year 12 retention rates in the 1970s, when unemployment was not significantly different over the decade to what it is now, were below 30 per cent. In 1999, they were 72 per cent. We have asked for some work from the department to get some correlation done on this but it seems to me that that would be a very weak relationship now. The related question then is: do you think year 12 retention rates are a predictor of basic lifetime employment opportunities? In other words, is it increasingly true to say that a kid who drops out of year 12 in the year 2000 is much more disadvantaged relative to a kid who in the 1970s dropped out of year 12?

Mr Ludowyke—We are beginning to see some very good research which tells us that that is exactly true. The research which ACER has done was a longitudinal study of where kids got to after leaving school and they have tracked that cohort right through until age 25. It tells us that early leaving and low levels of numeracy have a lesser impact on earning capacity or periods in or out of employment than poor literacy. That is an interesting thing to know. But equally, some of the recent research we have seen from even ABS would tell us that early leaving and leaving prior to completion of the compulsory years of education are direct indicators and predictors of bad patterns of employment and earning over those people's lifetimes.

CHAIR—Thank you very much. We appreciate very much you providing us with your submission and coming along to speak to it today. If there are any subsequent ideas or concerns that you have as we go through this, please do not hesitate to pass them on to us.

Mr Ludowyke—Thank you very much for the opportunity.

[10.55 a.m.]

THEXTON, Mr John Murray, District Inspector, Victoria Police

CHAIR—Welcome. Perhaps you could give us an overview of your submission, and then we will have a question and answer session.

Mr Thexton—I am currently the district inspector for the police district of Whittlesea, which takes in the shire boundaries of the city of Whittlesea, which is a northern suburb of Melbourne. It has some metropolitan areas and some country areas. Obviously I do not come before you today as an educational expert, but I do come before you today as somebody who is approaching this issue from a community safety perspective. I think that, if we look at measures of community safety, when it is approached from this perspective, males are grossly overrepresented. What I mean by that is that there are more young males than females who are processed for offences, victims of crime, involved in successful suicide attempts and dying from drug overdoses. I believe all these areas represent aspects of uncontrolled risk taking.

Generally speaking, most of these males have fallen from the school system and have left school early. Some are picked up by programs that are there to especially address this type of behaviour. One of those programs is called Handbrake Turn, which takes young offenders who have offended in respect of car thefts or are likely to fall into that category. That program puts them through a course of study and they end up with a TAFE qualification at the end of it, but it also builds their self-esteem, teamwork and the like. This program has been evaluated and been seen to have a very good success rate in either returning young people to study or getting them employment—I think it is about an 83 per cent success rate.

There are obviously other programs throughout the country that do intervene at this stage and one of those is Operation New Start, which is a program that is run in the southern suburbs of Melbourne. It is a collaboration between a whole lot of different agencies, including the department of education and training, the police and the department of human services. It seems to me that for kids to be involved in these programs, there has to come a point of crisis. What I would like to see is that we do not get to that point of crisis and that our school system is able to identify these kids before they get to that stage and is able to do something about it. If we can get programs like Handbrake Turn with a very high success rate, I cannot see why we cannot do that while kids are still in school.

Basically, I see that what we have to do is to harness risk taking and we have to demonstrate how the chances of failure can be minimised. And that should be outcomes for both boys and girls. As I have said, offending, suicide and drug taking are all examples of risk taking. I think what our schools have got to do is to take more of a role in showing how chances of failure can be reduced and how we can productively take risk. At the end of the day if we can do that within our school systems, we will be having kids coming out much more competitive at the end. That would show benefit not just for the kids that we have got at the moment that are leaving early and are falling through the gaps but also for the other kids who are normally high achievers.

CHAIR—Thank you very much. Is your obvious interest in and commitment to this issue a part of your specific job with the police department or is this a personal thing that you have taken up?

Mr Thexton—It is very much part of my job. In Victoria, the Victoria Police has instigated a program known as local priority policing. Basically, that is community policing and it is based on two planks. One is creating far better links with other agencies and the other is getting feedback from the community. Traditionally, the police force has been seen to have the job of protecting life and property, preserving the peace, preventing and detecting crime and helping those in need. Where I see this as coming into place is very much as part of our crime prevention role but also it is very much part of our role where we come across an offender and charge that person. It is very much in our best interests to get that person to liaise with the most appropriate agency and make sure that that person is connected with that agency so that we are in fact preserving the peace and we do not have to go back in a crisis situation again.

CHAIR—In the school environment, you have identified as one of the things the lack of male role models and lack of male teachers. Others have suggested to us that it is not the lack of male teachers, it is the nature of the relationship that the teacher has with the student that is more important. Can you tell us why you think more male teachers might be appropriate?

Mr Thexton—I did not actually say that. I said that that was an area that I believed should be researched. I did not actually say it was fact. I said it is an area that should be looked at and could be examined because of the disproportionate number of females who are presently in primary school, for instance. Does that have an effect?

CHAIR—I beg your pardon. I am familiar with the Whittlesea area. Am I right in saying that the kids that you are dealing with are disproportionately represented in lower income areas? Is that right?

Mr Thexton—Yes, that is correct.

Mr BARRESI—Just following on from what the chairman alluded to, the previous witness in his submission said that male teachers in a teaching role were probably unlikely to identify kids at risk. What is your view about that? They are saying that they are not tuned into those sorts of behavioural traits that the kids may exhibit in the schoolroom.

Mr Thexton—Obviously, my view is not that of an expert in any way. I would say with regard to identifying kids at risk that if the risk is early school leaving, and that type of thing, then it is usually quite obvious. Quite often they are either very loud and not cooperative or else they do not participate at all, so you have the two extremes.

Mr BARRESI—I share your enthusiasm for programs such as Handbrake Turn. In fact, I have a look-alike program about to commence in the next couple of months in my electorate, out in the eastern suburbs of Melbourne. One of the features of Handbrake Turn—and the deputy chairman of the committee, Rod Sawford, would probably agree with this—is a concentration on the pre-apprenticeship type of training. That is an area which has been missing in schools since the demise of technical schools. What you are saying is that perhaps we should be returning to that sort of format in our curriculum and that the type of curriculum run by

Handbrake Turn should be going back into the classroom. Is that what you are advocating, or did I misread you?

Mr Thexton—No, that is quite correct. One of the things we need to do is address the balance between academic achievement and technical proficiency. It seems to me that academic achievement is valued far higher than technical proficiency, and there probably has to be a rebalancing there. Being technically proficient or being a craftsman or whatever is probably fairly well regarded on the outside, in industry; but in the school situation it is probably not so well regarded. That has been evident not just for the last 20 years—it was probably evident even when I went to school. It would be a cultural shift, in some respects. It is all very well saying that you are going to try to raise the levels of literacy, but you have to get people to the starting block in the first place.

Mr BARRESI—Wouldn't VET in schools—the move to have vocational education back in the school environment—be picking up this issue for us?

Mr Thexton—It would probably depend on how it is reintroduced. If it is reintroduced as a poor cousin of academic achievement it is not going to achieve as much as it could.

Mr BARRESI—You have a comment in your submission about service providers seeing no correlation between gender and crime. Is this service providers putting their heads in the sand on the issue, or is there an aspect of political correctness gone mad here?

Mr Thexton—That was what I was trying to point out in the particular article which was produced by the Commonwealth government with respect to crime prevention. Nowhere through the entire summary of the findings was it mentioned that gender might have been a factor, that males were apprehended far more often than females. In Victoria the figures were that, in any one year, for youths under 19 years of age, something like 83 per cent were male offenders and the remainder were female, so males far outweighed females. It may be something that, throughout the ages, has been fairly consistent. But if we want a safer society we should acknowledge it and we should do something about it. That is where I am coming from—trying to make it a safer community.

Mr SAWFORD—Just continuing that theme of acknowledgment, we are at a very early stage in this inquiry but already there seems to be a theme coming out—you have made this point also—about a failure to acknowledge the high offending rate of young males. And we have had, from educational witnesses, the point that there is perhaps a failure to identify the increasing gap between what is happening with girls and what is happening with boys. You mention that particular statistic about 53,000 young people under 19 who were processed. Are they separate young people or are repeat offenders included there?

Mr Thexton—That may very well be repeat offenders included, but that is the total number that were offences or offenders.

Mr SAWFORD—A senior policeman in Adelaide once told me that, if he could remove 14 young people from the streets of Adelaide, crime would go down 40 per cent. That may be an exaggeration, but it certainly points out that there is recidivist activity among young males who

are almost blatantly challenging the law and anyone associated with the justice system to 'come and get me' basically. Is that a problem also in Victoria?

Mr Thexton—Yes, it is certainly a problem. Really, the percentage of offenders throughout society is not that great, but it is that small percentage that causes a great deal of harm and a great deal of anguish for their families and victims alike.

Mr SAWFORD—In your circles, do you think there is a failure within the police department to acknowledge this or is it just the literature? Where is this failure to acknowledge coming from?

Mr Thexton—Sorry, the failure to—

Mr SAWFORD—To acknowledge that there is a problem with young male offenders? I agree with the point you make.

Mr Thexton—I certainly do not think there is a failure on behalf of the police department to acknowledge that there is a problem with young offenders. The Victorian Police Force, and I am sure other police forces around Australia, are very conscious of young males offending.

Mr SAWFORD—Are there particular groups in Victoria that you get frustrated with who have a totally different point of view?

Mr BARRESI—Some service providers.

Mr SAWFORD—Or people out the front, the politicians?

Mr Thexton—No, I think the frustration comes from the lack of resources to attack these issues at an early stage. The frustration is that quite often it is a crisis situation: it has to become a crisis before something is done. That is a frustration. The frustration is that we as agencies do not speak as well with other agencies and the whole picture is not achieved in the first place. But that is not to say that it is all black because the police department are in schools; police departments do speak to the Department of Human Services and the like, but we could do it better if we were better resourced and if we intervened earlier.

Mr SAWFORD—What attributes do people need to be able to deal effectively with young male offenders?

Mr Thexton—For young males, you have to show that you are fair dinkum and that you can achieve what you say you can. So you have got to be honest, up-front and straightforward.

Mr SAWFORD—Do women have difficulty in dealing with young male offenders?

Mr Thexton—I cannot comment on that. I think, in any situation, it is best to have a balance. When I was going through primary school, the balance was very much the fact that it was all male teachers, and that was probably not right. So it is probably better to have a balance—say, fifty-fifty than have it all one way and not the other.

Mr SAWFORD—Your instinct is that the current 20 per cent of teachers in primary schools who are male is a poor sign?

Mr Thexton—I think we could increase that. There are probably barriers to that. As I mentioned in my submission, a lot of males who work with kids have been very much discredited over the years, particularly where families have broken down. The kids are usually with their mother and the mothers can be very distrustful of other males so they might not be as inclined to send their children to extracurricular activities where males are involved. It is not just one factor and it is not just education, it is a whole range of things.

CHAIR—On the 83 per cent of offenders under 19 years old being male, was it ever thus? I imagine that it has always been the case.

Mr Thexton—That is what I said before: it may always have been the case. But if we want a safer community, it is something we should acknowledge and perhaps do something about.

CHAIR—Yes, of course. But at least it does not seem that boys' education leading to misbehaviour and social dysfunction is a new trend. We have not gone from half of them being boys 20 years ago to—

Mr Thexton—No, I do not think you can say that.

CHAIR—When you were talking to Rod you were alluding to boys in sole parent families, which are, in most cases, sole mother families. In the case of the kids you are dealing with who have fallen out of the school system or, if they have not, have problems with the law by definition, are sole parent families disproportionately represented or do you have an equal representation of traditional mother-father type relationships?

Mr Thexton—I do not have those figures in front of me because it is not something we record. But from experience, yes, that is the case. Quite often mothers really go into bat for their kids, and quite often they acknowledge that having a significant male role model would benefit their son and that that is not there.

CHAIR—So your anecdotal experience is that a lot of the kids do come from sole parent families—divorce being one risk factor that has a cumulative effect with other things—but there is no hard evidence the force collects here in Victoria to support that?

Mr Thexton—No.

Ms GILLARD—I have two questions, and one of them follows on from that. You point to an interesting conundrum in your submission: for those families that would like to access a male role model and needing to do it outside the family because of family breakdown, one of the problems is that we are also in a cycle where a lot of external male role models have not got particularly good press. We have had dreadful allegations against male teachers, scout leaders and what have you, so there is a natural suspicion by mothers when deciding what programs to put their sons in because they would read that in the newspapers and worry about it. I am not sure what the answer to that is, but it is a difficult problem.

Mr Thexton—I agree with that. The way to rebalance that would be to come out in support of young males being involved in those types of activities and to try to counteract some of the bad press. Obviously, not every scout leader is involved in that type of activity. All you can do to combat that is for people in positions of influence to come out and support those types of activities.

Ms GILLARD—On the other question I was going to ask you, Craig and I had the opportunity to go to Whittlesea and meet with the people who are involved in the Whittlesea Youth Guarantee, which, for those who do not know, is a project tracking early school leavers. It arose because an identified school cluster recognised that, two years after people had left school, there was no tracking of whether they were in work, training or some mix of the two, or just sitting at home on the couch or rattling around the local shopping centre causing problems for the police. So there was a deliberate endeavour to track the destination of each early school leaver and to try and provide them with the support to access work or education opportunities if they were really falling out of the net. Is there police cooperation with that program and, if so, of what nature?

Mr Thexton—Yes, the police sit on that committee. There is a senior sergeant from Mill Park police station and also from Epping police station. In fact, each police district has now got what we call a local safety committee and members of the Whittlesea Youth Commitment sit on that committee also. We see that as a very important linkage of linking kids who are in danger of leaving school with employment or further education.

Ms GILLARD—So you think that is a model you would recommend to resolve some of these problems, or at least get better linkages?

Mr Thexton—Yes. In the state of Victoria, truancy has been an enormous problem and has not really been tackled by anybody, and that may be one way of tackling that. The Whittlesea Youth Commitment has now got seven brokers that come into the schools where the kids are at risk of leaving school. But what we have got to do along with that is go back further and try to stop those kids from getting to that stage. Listening to the previous speaker where he was talking about grade 5 and that being part of the research, I think that is very true, that it does start before they get to high school and that is where you have got to tackle the problem, probably even before that.

Ms GILLARD—Thank you.

Mr BARTLETT—Continuing on this issue of the importance of a positive male role model, in the cases of broken families and divorce is the issue the lack of a positive male presence or the trauma of the break-up of the family to begin with? Would the replacement of the natural biological father with a positive stepfather have some impact? Also, to what extent, if any, is having a very influential male teacher a way of partly overcoming that problem? I do not know if any research has been done, but just intuitively and from your experiences, would you be able to comment on that? Are you aware of where a positive male influence through scouting groups, teachers, et cetera, may have at least partly overcome the lack of a father figure?

Mr Thexton—As I said at the start, I am not aware of any research, but I am aware, through watching *A Current Affair* or something similar, of a case where they had a male teacher in

Western Australia take over a class and it seemed to have very good results for that group of young males. Obviously, if you intervene at the correct time when the child is ready for it you can come up with startling results, but you have got to have the right combination of effects. Often, being a stepfather can be a very difficult role to step into. Sometimes you need others outside that because that has got its own pitfalls. But, if you can have positive role models in a number of different areas then I think your likelihood of success and your likelihood of being able to intervene at the correct time is increased greatly.

Mr BARRESI—Towards the end of your submission you suggest that we should examine:

schools developing experiential learning programs in conjunction with other agencies and community groups, such as Lions Club or Rotary

Are there any such good examples at the moment that we can look at?

Mr Thexton—Think there are a lot of good examples of that, but where they fall down at the moment is that they are not ongoing, they are not continuing, and they are not part of a bigger program. The Victoria Police has a program called High Challenge, which I have got some material on if people want to have a look at that. It is basically a camp out at Northcote. It is there for two things; it is there to break down barriers between police and young people, but it is also there to build confidence and teamwork and that type of thing. Victoria Police has got a youth advisory unit and High Challenge is part of that.

As I mentioned earlier, Operation Newstart is also a program that has been running for a number of years in the Frankston area, which I can get further material on. In respect of Handbrake Turn, they did an evaluation on that program in November last year. I have copies of that should the committee wish to look at it.

Mr BARRESI—We can get copies of that. It is a Commonwealth funded program.

CHAIR—Coming back to the kids who get into trouble with the law, who you are dealing with, when I was at school you had this basic idea that, if you worked hard, you would do well. You would do better than your parents. A lot of the kids that I have dealt with—who have been in the same situation that you and the kids are in—feel that, no matter how hard they work at school, they are not going to meet the expectations that life is putting in front of them. They think they have to have a flash car, an expensive house, do better than the parents, all that sort of thing. What has worried me is that most of the kids, when you scratch the surface, feel a sense of hopelessness about what sort of future they are likely to have. Is that consistent with what you have come across with these kids?

Mr Thexton—Yes. A lot of the kids do not really examine that or think about it. They just go with the flow. But I would agree with that. As I said in my earlier submission about risk taking, it is important to demonstrate how the chances of failure can be minimised for boys particularly, and, for the boys we are talking about who are dropping out of school, that can be demonstrated experientially. Instead of going out and stealing a car, which obviously gives these kids a bit of excitement and an adrenalin rush, you can take them out, for instance, abseiling. You can show them how to do an equally risky thing but you can minimise the chances of failure. You can minimise the risk. So it still appears a fairly risky venture but you can do it in as safe a way as

possible. That is what we have to teach our kids. They can take risks but they have look at how they can minimise the chances of failure or injury.

CHAIR—You mentioned earlier the idea of task oriented and vocational education tasks in the school environment. Are the kids that you are dealing with coming from schools where these are not provided generally? Obviously some kids are always going to be in trouble as they will be as adults.

Mr Thexton—I think most schools provide some sort of camps and the like but those sorts of things have to be more structured into the curriculum. They cannot be just seen as something off to the side. They have to be part of their mainstream learning. I think we should be trying to explain what they are getting out of it or what they can get out of it.

CHAIR—Finally, once the kids get into trouble with the law whether or not they are still at school, what generally is the attitude of parents? Do you find that most parents are concerned about it and want to help address the problem or do you find that a lot of the parents in this situation do not give a stuff?

Mr Thexton—I would say the vast majority really care about it. They just do not know what to do or where to go about it. Obviously if we are going to intervene at these times, there is probably a lot more that we can do both with parents and helping them out on how to cope with these things and with the kids. It is no good just dealing with the kids. You have to deal with it as a whole. You have to involve the whole family.

CHAIR—Do the parents in that situation normally have a relationship with the school? A lot of parents seem to park their kids in kindergarten, at school and then pick them up in year 12. Do parents of the kids that you have to deal with generally have a relationship with the school?

Mr Thexton—Some people certainly do—it varies across a wide spectrum. I spoke to a young fellow the other day who had robbed another boy on the train. The communication between his parents and the school had broken down. They said that the school had not told them that their son had been missing from school for a number of days—in fact, that boy had not been in school for about six months. We have to intervene. We intervene early, but we do not make a concerted effort.

If I may make an analogy. About three years ago I was standing on a hillside with the captain of the Wattle Glen CFA. It was about 40 degrees, there was a north wind blowing and everything was particularly dry. A fire had been deliberately lit and it was heading towards Warrandyte, which is an outer bushland suburb of Melbourne. I thought that if the fire kept going it would certainly have the potential to become another Ash Wednesday. I watched from the top of the hill as the CFA initially attacked the fire with everything they had. They had 20 fire trucks and three helicopters were water bombing the scene. They had good resources, good communication and they were well trained. They were able to get that fire under control within half an hour. But it did not stop there: they went back and spent the next number of hours blacking out the area and making sure it did not recur.

That is opposite to the way that we approach our social problems. That type of approach was learned only from fairly tragic experiences when people's lives were lost and so on. We have

not taken that approach to social interventions: we are not well resourced, we do not intervene early and we generally do not talk to each other.

CHAIR—On that point, we will stop talking to you. Thank you. We value very much your coming to speak to us today and all the thought and effort you have put into your presentation. We thank you especially for the work that you do in day-to-day life—it is very much appreciated.

[11.43 a.m.]

DAY, Mrs Hazel, Executive Assistant to the Chairman, Association of Heads of Independent Schools of Australia

DONALDSON, Dr Gordon, Immediate Past Chairman, Association of Heads of Independent Schools of Australia

CHAIR—I welcome to the hearing representatives from the Association of Heads of Independent Schools of Australia. Please give us an overview of your submission, which we can then discuss.

Dr Donaldson—I thought it might be helpful if I took just a moment to explain what the AHISA organisation is. It is an association of heads of independent schools, as the title implies. There are some 280 schools in Australia whose heads are members, and between us there would be something like 230,000 students educated in our schools. As it happens, the schools are split evenly between single-sex and coeducational schools. One of the things that independent schools really cherish is the fact that they are different from each other in their independence as much as they are similar, and we celebrate our differences. It is also important to say that the organisation would not have a single position on a matter of this nature. We really are a group that tries to encourage each other as colleagues in the task that we face educationally.

In order to put our submission together, we circulated to all heads of schools inviting them to make a contribution to it. About three-quarters of our schools would have boys attending them, and therefore they would have a keen interest in the matters to do with the educational welfare of boys. Hazel Day, our executive assistant, brought together contributions from many of our members around Australia, and these have been put together in the form of the submission that you have before you.

I just reaffirm that this is not a discussion on the efficacy of single sex education or coeducation as far as we are concerned, but rather a concern that is driven by observations of inequalities in achievement by boys and those are widely acknowledged. They are not just issues in Australia; they are in fact being considered around the world. Tony Blair not long ago in the United Kingdom put together a similar sort of thrust to try to remedy the lack of relative progress of boys compared with girls. There has been quite a lot of work done in the United States in recent years on the same sort of topic.

In general, the observation would be that perhaps being male today is not such a good thing. We get frequent comments about the statistical situation. Ninety per cent of schoolchildren with behavioural problems are said to be boys as are 80 per cent of those with learning difficulties. It is said that 90 per cent of the gaol population is male and three-quarters of the unemployed are male. Statistics like that do create an impression that being male is the problem in itself.

I would like to make a comment that all of those statistics refer to a minority and that the majority of boys and the majority of girls do not have behavioural problems or learning difficulties and are managing pretty well on the whole. But the general picture for males is less than encouraging. I think we should also take some note of the fact that the agenda to improve educational outcomes for girls which received quite a lot of energy in the past 15 years or so

would appear to have been very effective and that is very encouraging. No doubt there are lessons to be learned from that in trying to remedy the issues that are facing boys.

Our submission makes a comment that I think is quite central to all of this and that is that we should be seeking to affirm for boys that it is okay to be a boy. That is perhaps not as silly as it sounds because there are some who would encourage the feminisation of boys as the response to the situation, and that somehow if we could make boys more like girls things would go away. My starting point and those of my colleagues would be that boys and girls are not the same creatures, they are different. They behave differently, they think differently, they communicate differently and they learn differently. Any policy that would enhance the education of boys must start from that realisation and from that point. That means that there must be an understanding of what it means to be a boy and of what boys' needs are, especially for the learning and development of things like valuing oneself. Therefore, I think it is clear that schooling needs to include experiences for boys that optimise their opportunities for learning and for self value. We would also be keen to develop coping skills that would help boys deal with anxiety which is an issue that is linked with depression. The growth of resilience as a strength amongst boys I think would go some way to tackling the issue that many of us have read about and are concerned about of irresponsible risk taking and in some cases self damage.

I was interested to hear the police inspector speak about the importance of role models. I think all of us in education would agree and encourage the understanding of the importance of a role model in the life of young people. Perhaps the younger the person the more important that is. There is, I believe, an issue in primary schooling where the vast majority of teachers would be female and perhaps there could be a situation where a boy could go through his schooling experience at primary level without encountering a male as a teacher. There may well be messages within that for the boy about his attitude to learning and that it is a girl's thing and so on.

In all the role modelling, mentoring and the involvement of adults, be they teachers, parents, family friends or within the community, I think the issue there is for boys to hear a message that learning is all right and that it is okay to learn, to study and to tackle hard things. Learning needs to be within a situation where the boys' learning styles are taken into account and they are different from girls' learning styles. It is a challenge for educators to understand that and to build appropriate opportunities into the way they function. Boys prefer to be dealing with facts, details, heroes, stories and things that they can picture themselves doing. Boys are compelled by stories of people being honourable, courageous, valiant and that kind of thing, and they like problem solving. We make a point in our submission that information and communication technology can assist in that arena, where problems can be created and solutions found in a way that boys enjoy.

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Some things are not easy for boys to do. Expression of their feelings is something that boys find really difficult to put into words. If they are faced in a learning situation with having to

express how they feel about something, I think most boys when put to it would say, 'I don't know. I can tell you what I might do or what I did do, but don't ask me how I feel.' That is something that males have to learn to come to grips with. Imaginative writing and expressing ideas are also quite difficult for boys on the whole, so they need to be helped to gain those skills. That could be done by programs that are rich in experiences. Drama, for example, is a very strong tool that can be used in the curriculum, where you are forced to express someone else's emotion, and that might help you understand that emotion, or you are forced to put yourself in someone else's situation and you must then personalise that to be able to do that well.

The other aspect is that, when we hear about studies of literacy and the fact that boys are not showing up as well in the development of literacy skills, it is well known that boys and girls develop those skills at different rates and I think that is something that we need to factor in. Rather than just wring our hands and think it is dreadful what is happening to boys, it is programs that would meet their needs in those areas that are of great importance. I would like us to encourage the understanding of what it means to be a boy and encourage schooling to take that into account, not only in the curriculum but in extracurricular activities, where there should be a range of activities that will enable boys to develop themselves, grow in self-confidence and learn the ability to become useful citizens. That is the gist of our submission. There is a lot more detail there, of course.

CHAIR—Thank you very much.

Mr BARTLETT—Dr Donaldson, one of our earlier witnesses made the point with regard to higher school certificate outcomes that girls have always outperformed boys and that the widening gap is not really a significant problem. He went on to make the point that the best way of raising educational outcomes for boys at that school leaving level is to focus just on quality educational issues generally and not specifically on educational approaches to assist boys. How would you respond to those two comments?

Dr Donaldson—Are you talking now about boys in years 11 and 12—that sort of schooling?

Mr BARTLETT—Yes.

Dr Donaldson—I find it hard not to place substantial expectations on people in my school. I think young people flourish when they are expected to do well. It would be my personal point of view on the concept that we should not worry about the growing gap between girls and boys. The boys that are being left behind are in a situation where the future is beckoning them and they have very little to offer in terms of the skills that the community demands of them if they are going to become useful contributors.

We need to take into account the fact that we have changed a lot over perhaps the last 20 or 30 years. Students used to go through our schools and finish at the end of year 10 and find employment without much trouble if they were reasonably adept. That scarcely happens now. There are very few realistic careers providing opportunities for students who leave school at year 10. Nowadays, to get into a whole range of things you need a tertiary qualification. People are encouraged if they want to work in the hospitality industry to get a tertiary qualification. Tertiary institutions need some sort of indication as to who is best able to move into those and

that is where the outcomes of schooling have a huge role to play. I would be concerned about that matter, rather than say it is not a concern.

Mr BARTLETT—So it is your view that quality education generally is the best way to tackle the disadvantage of boys, rather than policies directly aimed at reducing the gap?

Dr Donaldson—Yes, it would be.

Mr BARTLETT—You made mention of the shortage of male teachers, the imbalance in the gender of teachers. In the independent schools that you represent, is that imbalance similar as to what it is in the public system? If so, are the schools in your system undertaking any pro-active or affirmative measures to try and increase the number of males you have teaching within your system?

Dr Donaldson—I cannot your answer your question quantitatively, I do not know if that is the situation. I can simply report that I am not alone in being concerned about the difficulty of finding good males to enter teaching, particularly in the primary area. I guess as organisations or as schools, we really do not have much impact on encouraging people to enter teaching. We really have to employ those who have made the decision that education is what they want to do. It is an area of concern but one that we feel a little bit disempowered about in terms of dealing with it. We do consider from time to time means of promoting the whole concept of an educational career, but that is not so much gender, it is a matter of just encouraging able people to enter the teaching profession.

CHAIR—Thank you very much.

Ms GILLARD—I feel the need to do the feminist fightback here, given the composition of this committee. I agree that there is a problem with boys' education, but I think we need to be careful not to overput that in terms of the images that we sending about men in our society. It remains true that men will out earn women over their lifetimes, men will disproportionately take leadership positions in our society, men will be more likely to get higher degrees in education, all of those sorts of things. So I think there is the other side of the coin in terms of the message that our society sends to boys and girls about their prospects. You would have to say most leadership success models in our society continue to be male, so I just make that statement.

Mr SAWFORD—Do you feel better?

Ms GILLARD—I do, and I think that needs to be on the record as well.

Dr Donaldson—Can I just make a comment there. The inquiry is to do with the education of boys, and these are people who are up to the age of 10, 12 or 14. I think we need to focus on the picture that is being created for them. I do not believe they need to feel any sense of guilt for what may have happened before, nor that they are going to be the whipping boys in terms of correcting what no-one would dispute as being an inadequate situation.

Ms GILLARD—That is absolutely true, and I accept that the statistics would show us that disproportionately boys in primary school will encounter female teachers, though I suspect it is also disproportionately true that they will encounter male principals. But school is not the only

influence on life, and one would have to say that in terms of our mass media and societal images that we still see disproportionately men as leaders, whether that be in political life, whether that be in the defence forces, or whether that be in the judiciary. All of those sorts of images tend to be overwhelmingly male, so there is that factor. I put that because it would concern me if we basically ticked the box and said, 'All matters about girls' advancement have been completed and now we need to switch to boys.' I think that is not the message we want to get from this inquiry. And when you are still seeing gender segregated outcomes in relation to patterns of study at post-school institutions that are very hard to explain—men disproportionately going into trades, men into engineering—then there is still a job there about opening up opportunities for girls that has not been done as well. We have got to keep that in our minds too.

Dr Donaldson—I am sure you are right. I am sure, too, that there are other professions that are dominated now by women that may once have been dominated by men.

Ms GILLARD—Increasingly, law will be an example of that.

Dr Donaldson—I just hope this inquiry is not about what you have been talking about.

Ms GILLARD—No, this inquiry is about boys education, but I suppose we have to see it in that setting. I know that you have not dealt in your submission with single-sex education versus coeducation but we do need to have a look at that and see whether or not single-sex schooling for boys for all or part of the curricula leads to any different educational outcomes. I think we do need to have a handle on that if we are talking about boys education. From the experience of the schools in your sector, are you able to make a comment on that?

Dr Donaldson—It is a contentious issue. I am the principal of a boys school that has been a boys school for almost 150 years. We believe we specialise in teaching boys, and we do; I think we do it very well. I have colleagues who are in coeducational schools who believe, similarly, that they are doing the best they can for all students in their school. It is an area that is lacking in realistic research, and that is the biggest problem. To personalise this again, I have said in the past to my own school community that if there were irrefutable evidence that students did learn better in a coeducational environment than a single-sex one, then we would be duty bound to change the nature of our school and to move in that direction. That evidence does not exist. It depends on one's background: I could draw evidence that would suggest that boys do better in a single-sex environment; others would claim they could find evidence to counteract that. We would want to say as an organisation that this is not, as we see it, a debate about single-sex or coeducation. I think the real issues would get lost within that.

Ms GILLARD—You are not aware of any reliable comparison or any statistical study, the methodology of which you thought was appropriate, that homes in on that point? You could not point us in the direction of anything on that? I agree with you that it is only one element of a whole range of things we have got to look at and not get dominated by.

Dr Donaldson—In Australia probably the only type of study one could do would be on the basis of year 12 outcomes, at the end of schooling, where there are examinations that all students undertake and where some sort of study might demonstrate that one gender benefits

from a single-sex environment. That, I do not think, has been done satisfactorily. Are you aware of any, Hazel?

Mrs Day—No.

Dr Donaldson—It is a big question mark. It is preference: the preference of school, the preference of parents. I have been involved in both types of schooling and I would be perfectly happy to be the head of a co-ed school. The job really is taking students as far as you can take them in the developmental process.

Ms GILLARD—The evidence we have had today, and it is the flavour of many of the submissions, is that when we talk about boys education there are other influences in any cohort of boys—socioeconomic status, race, remoteness. Can you give us a comment about the influence of those factors in creating unequal educational outcomes? I am trying to get a handle on the weighting to be given to gender versus SES, versus remoteness, versus race.

Dr Donaldson—I am not aware of any realistic study that could help with that, and I think you would then be dealing with people's perceptions. Our submission, because we are heads of schools, is a school related thing to try to help determine what schools can do better to recognise the needs of boys within the schools. You had the police inspector talking about other issues that apply particularly beyond the school situation. I thought what he said about risk taking, for example, was very important. Boys are risk takers. In order for a boy to know that he is taking a risk he has got to know where the boundaries are. And if you are pushing the boundaries, then you are taking risks. If those boundaries are allowed to get further and further away, then you are going to get more and more extreme behaviour.

But I guess there are families, communities, or schools where you are taking a risk by getting your hair dyed. In the whole scheme of things that is no big deal, nevertheless it does create an environment in which you can try this risk taking thing and find out that there are consequences and find out how you deal with it and so on. I would be arguing in favour of a greater understanding of what boys are like and trying to create learning environments that take that into account. That, I think, is the hardest thing to do.

Mrs Day—I also believe that what the police inspector said was so important because he was saying that if we can encourage positive risk taking, like in outdoor education and so on, then boys will do that rather than go to the negative ones. I think that is very important.

Mr EMERSON—Are there are some lessons that the government school system could learn from the independent schools? It seems to me, picking up from something that Rod Sawford said at the beginning this morning, that the state school system has been designed basically for an industrial era as a mass production schooling system. So you churn these boys and girls through the state school system, metaphorically into the assembly lines of the industrial era. Schools just go and do their work with a fairly standard curriculum, with standard teaching methods, and really no differentiation, whereas the independent schools—and this may be an overgeneralisation—seem to tailor their courses and their teaching methods more to the circumstances of the kids who come into the school. In Queensland they are now trying to move away from that and they are actually calling it 'differentiation,' which I think is a horrible term to try to communicate something to the community. They are trying to get government schools

to specialise or to adapt themselves to the socioeconomic circumstances of the kids who are around there. Do you think that is a way that the state school system should evolve, or move?

Dr Donaldson—I would be very hesitant to tell the state schools what they should do. You may gather from my accent that I am not an Australian by birth. I am a proud Australian citizen I should say, but I have really very little experience of the state schools situation. I was very much encouraged in Victoria where self-governing schools were really encouraged and created some years ago because that did that very thing, it encouraged school communities to look at themselves and to decide to be a school that specialises in maths and science or that specialises in music or whatever. That created that sense of community whereby people said, 'This school does these things really well.' I know that that had significant success in several schools but I cannot really comment on how widespread that is. What that does do is exactly the thing you were talking about, it enables an educational community to take a look at its students, its clients, if you like, and tailor what they are doing to meet the needs of those students.

Mr EMERSON—If we then go on logically to the education of boys, in the area that I represent, in a couple of suburbs there is unemployment of 25 per cent. With the boys who are going through those schools, the biggest challenge for the teachers and principals there is to demonstrate to those kids in practical ways that excelling at school is cool because the kids think, 'What do you want to be a brain for?' There is a lot of peer group pressure against kids who break out and try to excel at school. What they do at award nights at those schools is make sure that lots of boys get lots of awards, not just for dux or for sport, but for trying. That is one of the ways of trying to break through that mentality that you are a sissy or it is just uncool to do well at school. It is a very tough task.

Dr Donaldson—I think you have put your finger on a huge problem. In areas where there is enormous unemployment, kids are likely to say, 'What is the point in all of this?' Schooling is hard. We require kids to learn things that they do not take to naturally and, if they do not see the point in that, then it is going to be tricky. That type of philosophy that helps create a situation where you are encouraging effort and recognising effort is exactly what is needed.

Mrs Day—Also, the push towards structured workplace learning, where they go out to work one day a week and then they have four days at school, is very good for boys. That one day a week out in the workplace helps them to get through their four days at school. We are finding that many students are not truanting anywhere near as much as they did because they can manage four days if they know they are going to be out working for one day. There has been a huge increase in the number of students doing structured workplace learning, and I think that is an area that really helps boys.

Mr BARRESI—Dr Donaldson, I note the comment you made about not wanting to make this a boys school versus girls school debate. Nevertheless, is there evidence in schools that have moved into coeducation—particularly if they were traditional boys schools that all of a sudden took on girls—of a significant change in the educational levels of boys?

Dr Donaldson—I regret I am not able to answer that; I do not know.

Mr BARRESI—I know, anecdotally, that the feeling in one school—I will not mention the school, but it is just out of my electorate—is that the quality of education has actually declined

as a result of going co-ed. I am not sure whether that is simply parents griping or teachers lamenting the loss of it being a boys-only school.

Dr Donaldson—I really cannot comment on the accuracy of that. I can see no fundamental reason why that should be the case.

Mr BARRESI—It would be interesting, though, if there was any evidence at all of changes in the literacy, numeracy and achievement levels of the boys when the girls moved in. On Thursday the committee is going to an independent school that had traditionally been a girls school. They have now taken on boys, not in a co-ed format, more as a parallel school, adopting the curriculum and the principles of learning which they built up over a number of years as a girls school and transplanting them across to the boys. This is very early on, and we will hear from the principal and the students on Thursday. Are there any other examples of that, and what is your feeling about that as a model?

Dr Donaldson—I think there is quite a lot to be said for that. Not long ago I was fortunate to be able to go to South Africa and I visited a famous school in Johannesburg that is now a parallel school. It was a boys school. They have huge grounds and were able to create a girls school. Most of their curriculum work is done separately, where the teaching styles specialise in providing the best learning experiences for the different genders that they are dealing with, but opportunities exist all the time for them to easily come together to do those interacting things that are good for adolescents to do together. There are schools that I am aware of here in Victoria that are considering doing that or have taken the initial steps in that direction. A boys school, for example, announced not long ago that it will provide a parallel girls pathway within the school.

Mrs Day—One of our schools has certainly gone into parallel education, but the boys school part only started in 1999 so there is not enough research yet to show what the effect will be.

Mr BARRESI—It might be the same school we are going to.

Mrs Day—Probably.

Mr BARRESI—You also made mention of fathers having a huge effect on their sons' thinking and behaviour—and I think there has been other evidence today about the separation and breakdown of families and the effect that has in terms of an adequate role model. Does that really explain it all or are socioeconomic factors also important? I would imagine that in independent schools the kids are not quarantined from family breakdowns. There would be as many family breakdowns in independent schools as anywhere else. What effect is that having on the achievement levels of boys?

Dr Donaldson—A trauma like that in any child's life is huge, and it is not unusual that their behaviour, their achievement levels or their interest levels go backwards. Some are remarkably resilient. I guess that will depend very much on the attitude of the parent who is still looking after them, the family circumstances or whatever. It is a major factor, but not all troublemakers come from broken homes and not all of those who are in despair come from broken homes. If just one thing were identified to fix this, we would have known it a long time ago. The real problem is that it is a multidimensional issue.

Mr BARRESI—Extending from that, a number of the schools that you represent would have boarding facilities—boys who board—and there is a significant lack of a father or a male presence in that situation. Once again, what evidence is there that that is having an effect on the boys' outcomes?

Dr Donaldson—I am sorry. Is the question about boarders who do not have a father at home?

Mr BARRESI—No, just that by the very nature of boarding they are isolated from family, isolated from their significant male figure?

Dr Donaldson—In a boys boarding school they are surrounded by other males.

Mr BARRESI—So there is a substitution of mentors?

Dr Donaldson—If you like. It is in loco parentis; that is how the teachers see themselves for a large amount of the time. In a boarding, residential situation the adults who are responsible for organising and running those boarding schools have a huge responsibility to consider the sorts of things we are talking about.

Mr BARRESI—In answer to Mr Bartlett's question about whether or not you thought it was necessary to have a boy-specific curriculum, you said no to that—just that general educational levels should be increased—but in your submission you do make mention of a number of areas which have improved boys' learning skills. You talk about creating a boy-friendly curriculum using contracts worked out and agreed to by the teacher and the boy. I am not sure whether these are simply comments that have been fed back to your from your schools, so I just want to explore some of them in terms of how they are actually applied. Are you able to answer that or do we need to go back to the schools that made those comments?

Dr Donaldson—We could try. I am sorry, I may have misunderstood Mr Bartlett's question but I did not think I gave that sort of answer. I thought he was asking whether we should be concerned about the growing gap and that you had heard from someone who said that you should not really be concerned about that—that it is a thing that is happening.

Mr BARTLETT—The other witness said that was going to happen anyway and we would be better off not trying to focus on the gap but to just focus on raising educational standards generally.

Dr Donaldson—I agreed with that aspect of it. I hope I did. If I did not I had better read *Hansard* and restate it, because certainly the educational outcomes are important.

Mr BARRESI—You have an excellent list of bullet points here of how the boys' learning skills can be improved.

Dr Donaldson—They are created—and Hazel could tell us—by putting together what many schools have suggested.

Mrs Day—Yes.

Dr Donaldson—From experience, that seemed to work quite well with boys.

Mr SAWFORD—Give them diversity. One of the great strengths, it seems to me, of the independent schools system in the last 20 years is that you have offered the parents and their children a diversity that was pre-existent in the public education system but which is no longer existent. It seems to me that diversity is an educational strength, not a weakness, and one of the reasons for the success of independent schools is that you offer that diversity. One of the reasons that public schools are going through a particular crisis is that in some ways they send across a message of uniformity, conformity and lack of diversity.

In other words, prior to the implementation of the Karmel report about the single comprehensive secondary school, there were academic technical schools, academic high schools, agricultural schools, area schools, boys' schools, schools that specialised in music and the arts, schools that specialised in industrial—at the time it was called technical—whereas that does not exist anymore. Of course, it attracted a whole range of different staff and principals who believed in that particular style, and they made it work. They were often encouraged by the bureaucrats of the day in terms of incentives. For example, in the 1970s, technical schools generally were better funded than high schools, because they had bigger expenses in terms of the programs they offered.

Some people argue that that lack of diversity which has occurred over the last 25 years has unfairly impacted on boys—although it has not been deliberate at all. What is your view of that? I know what you are saying, Gordon, in terms of public education, but as an educationalist, in terms of value, it is the quality of the educational program that counts and the quality of the people who present that program. If you do not have diversity in a structure and in the administration, it is quite likely you will not have it in the programs that you offer. Would you like to comment.

Dr Donaldson—Your argument in favour of diversity is a good and a strong one. It really does reflect the fact that people are so different, and the students entering our schools have a wide range of interests and abilities. We do need to be able to offer them experiences that are best attuned to those differences that they have. The comment you make about the independent sector creating greater diversity in the past couple of decades is accurate. The interesting point is that there is no-one sitting there saying, 'We are the independent sector; we need to do something here and here.' All of these are responses by individual groups of people who create a school. They start a school believing it is appropriate to do this kind of thing, and it flourishes or it does not, according to whether it is meeting the needs. The outcome of that is, as you described, a great diversity in the types of schools that exist.

Most schools are increasingly diverse in the curricula they offer. The range of subjects that are offered now in my own school, for example, is much wider than it used to be. That goes back to the point I made earlier: 20 years ago, maybe 15 to 20 per cent of students would leave at the end of year 10, whereas now they stay until the end of year 12. Their needs, if you think of it as a group need, have not changed. We must therefore offer a more diverse program that meets their needs as well as the more academic needs of the mainstream students who would have stayed until the end of year 12 anyway. If we can make the state system more diverse and therefore more attuned to the needs of its students, so much the better.

Mr SAWFORD—You said we should take into account how boys learn. Sometimes, in the last 20 years, particularly in the public system, we have forgotten how boys learn. For example, if I were a teacher and I wanted to bias a result in favour of girls, I would ask for people to describe feelings or views and to give opinions, and I would put a great bias on presentation skills, because girls would effectively do better in that particular regard. If I were mischievous and I wanted to bias the result in favour of boys, I would ask them to identify concepts, to list processes and to identify the contents of the attributes in terms of a problem, and I would get a biased boys result. In terms of the way in which boys are educated largely by women, do you think that in many ways there is not an acknowledgment of the way boys learn?

Dr Donaldson—That concern lies behind what I said earlier: the big issue for educators is to understand the needs of boys and to develop programs that help meet those needs. It would not be at the expense of the girls, obviously.

Mr SAWFORD—No, I understand that.

Dr Donaldson—That is not well enough understood. The way in which boys like to learn is not always available to them. If a boy is faced year after year with a situation where he does not like the learning style, and he is not learning very well, then he begins to think, 'I am not good at this learning business,' and that could create a long-term problem.

Mrs Day—There is one other problem. The world is changing so much now that boys have to learn to be good communicators. Literacy and so on is so important to them that we really have to work on those areas that in the past have been considered more feminine areas. In the future, boys are going to have to be able to communicate better, have better literacy and so on.

Mr SAWFORD—I am not arguing that those feminine skills of presentation and being able to express feelings in a logical way are not valued. I think they are valued. What worries me is that perhaps the skills that boys are sometimes better at are not valued. They are not examined in the examination system. If you look at examination papers, they are not there. That is very different from the examination papers of 30 years ago when there were far more visual, spatial questions in the mathematics-science area. The questions now seem to ask, 'What are your views about the environment?' or 'What are the environmental consequences?' In other words, it is a different sort of question. Gordon, you and I both know that in education you can quite deliberately—and unintentionally too—have a gender, rich-poor or race bias. You can do this unintentionally by not being aware that there are ways in which certain people learn more effectively. It seems to me that the independent schools have found ways in which their client base learns effectively and have met that accordingly. In my view, public education has failed that over the last 20 years.

Mrs Day—A lot of schools have programs in place such as 'Care about boys'—those sorts of programs—within coeducational schools where they do concentrate on how boys learn. In the last few years, many more of these special programs have come in.

CHAIR—With regard to boys who have problems—and I understand we are talking about independent schools here—to what extent is the problem with the boy, with the parent or with both?

Mr SAWFORD—Or with the school.

CHAIR—Yes. Craig mentioned that there is a culture that has developed amongst boys, particularly in middle schooling, I understand, where it is fashionable to not do well—something that is not confined only to the government sector. I have three category 1 schools in my electorate, and I often find that the kids are materially indulged but emotionally abandoned, that the parents are frequently projecting their own unfulfilled ambitions onto the kids and that the kids are having all sorts of problems, with school performance being predominant. Is that anything new? In your respective careers, has that always been the same when teaching boys?

Dr Donaldson—I do not think it is very new, but I certainly recognise what you are saying. It is an issue in the lives of some students. In a general sense, a boy or a girl needs to know that they are making progress and that that progress is being valued. If they are in a circumstance where the expectations are that, unless they make it into a law faculty, they are not going to succeed, for some that is obviously a very difficult thing to achieve and the vast majority of students are not going to be able to achieve that. Against that measure, doom is almost inevitable. That can have an impact on the whole sense of wellbeing of young people. It can be family created or it can be created somewhere else.

CHAIR—Is that a significant problem in the school sector that you represent? For example, if you have kids in years 8 and 9 who are clearly unlikely to get a high tertiary education score, are there vocational education training programs for them?

Dr Donaldson—That broader approach is certainly what we would be offering and what we would be suggesting is appropriate. There are times when it is more difficult to persuade a parent that that is the right thing to do for the student than it is to persuade the student that that is the right thing to do.

CHAIR—Can you tell me the experience that you have had with the vertical house pastoral care systems? Have they been successful and, if so, how did you measure the success of the programs?

Dr Donaldson—I can only speak on my experience at my own school. We have been through the cycle of these things—we have had horizontal pastoral care and now we are reintroducing vertical. I know of other schools that have done it the other way around. I am afraid there is no easy answer to this. Whatever system one has requires a fair amount of work to keep it going and for people to understand why it is there. One of the main ways for a young boy to feel valued is for a boy who is a little bit older than him to be encouraging him. So cross-age activity is of great importance. Some schools achieve that through the house system or the pastoral care system. If that can be done, that is of great value.

CHAIR—Can you identify a couple of schools in your sector, for example, that run what you consider to be model ones, apart from Scotch College? Are there ones that we ought to be looking at as good examples of vertical integration?

Mrs Day—If you are going to Perth, you could look at Christ Church Grammar School, which has a very good vertical system and pastoral care system interwoven. That is one good one. What I found from talking to various schools—and this is really only anecdotal—is that it

seems that in boys' schools the vertical house system is more popular and successful, and the horizontal is often more popular and successful in girls' schools.

CHAIR—I want to ask you about teachers having a genuine vocation. Almost everybody seems to be concerned about those who are going into teaching from the undergraduate level. We are told that the tertiary education scores that are required are relatively low and that the expectations of undergraduates are not what they would have been 30 years ago. Is that something that you are concerned about? You alluded to that. Secondly, I was very impressed with the point that you made about the schools not being involved in any way in that question of recruitment. What could we do? They clearly should be. I have a background in health and we have made some efforts to deal with that in recruiting people into medicine, but we ought to be doing similar things in education.

Dr Donaldson—If we could find a mechanism that would attract more able people into the teaching profession, that would be a terrific thing to do.

CHAIR—I presume money is a part of it.

Dr Donaldson—Money is a major part of it. My school, as you probably know, is a category 1 school in the current system. I would be surprised if any boy would at least admit to be considering teaching as a career. And I am not sure how his parents would react to that if that was the case. I think you can all understand part of the reasons behind that. That is not to say that they do not become teachers in the passage of time, but as they are going through school it is not on their agenda.

CHAIR—We did an inquiry in the last 18 months into mature age career transition. The ACT government and now the New South Wales government are trying to pension off older teachers—'older' being over the age of 45. Should we be trying to recruit people in middle life into teaching, rather than just targeting school leavers?

Dr Donaldson—There is a lot to be said for that because one of the great weaknesses of schools is that too many teachers have never experienced anything of life outside going to school, going to college or university and then going back into school as a teacher. Their ability to influence young people's outlook as to what the whole world is like is clearly diminished by that. We do not have a mechanism where we attract experienced people who know their way around the commercial world or whatever. Very few of them make the transition into teaching. That can be quite a hard thing to do. I have had to talk to some people who have had careers elsewhere and who want to teach. I say, 'Well, to do that—in this state, at any rate, there is no alternative—you must do a postgraduate certificate in education.' The prospect of doing a one-year, full-time course without pay is not a great incentive at that stage.

A lot of people are in teaching because they like the interaction with young people, and that is the sense of vocation that we meant. It is not easy being in a classroom filled with adolescents who would rather be somewhere else—most of them—and trying to inspire those people. That is not an easy thing to do; you need special people to be able to do that consistently and well, and we do not have enough of those. They need to be folk who understand why they are there and who are doing this because they know it is a very important thing that they are doing and it is something they want to do.

CHAIR—Could your association give some thought to how schools—and I am not asking you to speak on behalf of the government sector; I will ask them the same thing—could be involved practically in recruiting people to a vocation in teaching? What are the practical barriers to people of mature age coming back into teaching, and what innovative approaches could we take to help them do that? Could you please give some thought to that?

Dr Donaldson—We would be pleased to do that.

CHAIR—I—and I am sure it is the same with my colleagues—know people of my age, 40-odd, who would love to go and be a teacher, but some of the practical problems are such that they will not even begin.

Mr BARRESI—In response to a question that Mr Sawford asked you about diversity, you made the comment that independent schools have not achieved diversity in their curricula and in their teaching styles as a group, that it has happened by individual schools taking this on. That makes me wonder if it is possible for government schools to be able to do this, because government schools by their very nature are controlled by a central body. There is a bureaucracy that is in charge. You made mention of the self-governing schools concept, and I am not sure whether that is going to create the diversity in curriculum as much as what was intended. Is it too much to expect government schools to be able to create the diversity that independent schools have, because of the very nature of the organisational structures and the political regimes that control them?

Dr Donaldson—If the bureaucracy prevents that growth of diversity, then the bureaucracy should be changed in some way. It is a very important matter. We are talking about the future of the young people of this country. I would have to say that it is a tragic consequence of something that a diversity that is necessary for the young people's benefit is not possible because of a bureaucratic situation. The solution is that local people who know the students, who know the strength of the community and who know the talents of the teachers are given the ability, the authority and, in some cases, the resources to develop those skills. I am sure you will find plenty of examples of where that is happening within the state system, certainly in this state. It is perhaps not as widespread as it needs to be, and it does require a mindset change in those folk who are in that situation.

When I came to Australia and met colleagues in the state system and we talked about our various experiences, I was horrified at the prospect of being at the head of a school that could not appoint teachers, that was told who would join my teaching staff. The key job that any principal does is appoint teachers. You interview people—you know the needs of your students, you know the needs of the school—and you pick the person you think is best able to meet those needs. Over a period of time you create a team that has got a sense of vision, and a shared vision, for the community. If a bureaucrat in the city sends you someone, the chances of that being a good fit are, I think, pretty limited.

Mr BARRESI—I do not want to put the blame totally on the bureaucracy. The bureaucracy, to a large extent, responds to political pressure as well. I can see that it is a very difficult process for them to move towards creating that level of diversity and independence of thinking at an individual school level.

Dr Donaldson—A degree of autonomy is necessary at individual school level to allow that to happen.

CHAIR—I am sure that at times Mr Beazley and Mr Howard would like to choose all the people they have with them too!

Ms GILLARD—I am trying to get a hold on this question of the difference between how boys learn and how girls learn. There is some material, not in your submission but in another submission, about tested and objective differences between boys and girls on visual, spatial stuff. With regard to the exchange you had with Mr Sawford—and I defer to you on this because both of you have taught and I have not—what is the objective source of the contention that girls have better communication and presentation skills? I know there is a tested difference in literacy, but I am looking for the source on communication and presentation. How do we know that girls are generally better at that? Is there anything statistically verifiable that gives us that proposition, or is that your impression or the impression of your member schools and teachers just from years of teaching?

Dr Donaldson—I cannot quote you a resource on that, but I am sure there would be plenty of them.

Ms GILLARD—So that is a tested proposition?

Dr Donaldson—It is the ability of females with the whole communication thing; it is not just being able to read, it is the ability to process variable information. The faster rate of that development, that that happens much more quickly for girls than for boys, is well understood. Boys catch up, they say, eventually—but not until they have left my school!

Ms GILLARD—Which would not be a function of the schooling—no, I am teasing you. So that catch-up is after the end of schooling, when somehow the lines converge, but we do not know at what age?

Mrs Day—It is certainly much later; they mature much later for those things. Basically, boys are much better at visual things, graphics and things like that. This is why information technology will help them terrifically because it provides various ways for them to learn: they can choose which way they learn and so they do not have to go by text all the time but can actually use visual images, action and practical skills. Whereas in the last 15 years what we have done with girls is encourage them in all those practical skills and given them opportunities to do things rather than be told how to do them, now it is time perhaps to help boys to present and to communicate well, to write well and so on.

Ms GILLARD—Can you give me a feel for when you think there is that convergence between boys and girls in terms of verbal communication skills—is it 15, it is 25?

Dr Donaldson—It is more like mid-20s, I think.

Ms GILLARD—There is a literature on that in the education field?

Dr Donaldson—Before I speak with any authority I had better find out if there is any authority for that. I cannot quote you anything.

Ms GILLARD—I would be interested in that because, not coming from a classroom teaching background, I find it is hard to get across the difference between how boys learn and how girls learn. I am struggling to understand that and particularly to understand what is verifiable about those differences as opposed to what is impressionistic, because what is impressionistic could well be influenced by gender role stereotyping.

Mrs Day—There are a lot of people who have done research on it. Ian Lillico is probably the latest. On a Churchill Fellowship, he spent all last year working on research all round the world. I could take that on notice and give you information about it, if you wish.

Ms GILLARD—That would be great, thank you.

CHAIR—As there are no further questions, thank you very much for providing us with such a comprehensive submission and taking the time out to come and speak to us about it. I know it is something which you both have a lifelong interest in. We have made some requests of you on notice and I will ask the secretary to formalise that by following it up in a letter. As we go through this inquiry, if you hear things said or there are things raised in other submissions and you wish to make comments or to add anything, please send them on to us. And I will look forward to reading in tomorrow's *Herald Sun* about all these kids at Scotch College that do actually want to be teachers!

Dr Donaldson—We would like to thank you very much for the opportunity to meet with you and speak to you.

CHAIR—It is our pleasure.

Proceedings suspended from 12.45 p.m. to 2.01 p.m.

HUMPHREYS, Mr Andrew Stanley (Private capacity)

CHAIR—I welcome both witnesses and observers to the parliamentary inquiry into the education of boys. I welcome to the inquiry this afternoon Mr Andrew Humphreys. Could you give us a precis emphasising what you think are the most important points in your submission? We will then discuss your submission, using a question and answer format, until a quarter to three.

Mr Humphreys—Thank you. I am a social worker in private practice and I am basically employed counselling high-risk young people. I am also a former teacher and a former juvenile justice worker. I have written a short introductory speech that I hope most of you have a copy of—I think it should be there—which I will read from if I may.

Thank you for the invitation to address the committee. The opportunity to remedy the educational deficits that are our legacy to many children is fast slipping away. I am afraid the good intentions of this inquiry will be lost in the radical feminist backlash which already denies the existence of any significant social health problems for our young men. The submissions to this inquiry from government departments, bureaucrats and education unions expose the roles these entities have played in what is now the greatest avoidable social catastrophe in Australia's history.

Australia and New Zealand have experienced the highest consistent increases in young male suicide observed in an OECD country. Increased younger male suicides is a critical indicator of a more difficult pathway into adult life for our young men. We have made the early life journey significantly more difficult for young men in Australia than most other countries. These impediments to the progress of young Australian men, combined with high levels of drug and alcohol use and some of the strongest and cheapest heroin in the Western world, has led to a rapidly unfolding social disaster. A generation of less advantaged young men has now been lost to society, dragging less advantaged young women with them. Federal government programs such as the LAP tests and the New Apprenticeship scheme are powerful indicators of how serious the breakdown of education for some Australians in this country has become.

Many of the educational reforms of the past 20 years, particularly those related to a biased form of comprehensive year seven to 12 curriculum, can now be shown to have caused poverty of a type that has become entrenched in a new and supposedly mysterious way. The proponents of these policies were, and remain, educational academics of no merit. Educational discrimination against boys is also limiting academically talented young men from all socioeconomic backgrounds. Declining numbers and standards in Australian tertiary engineering, mathematics and physical science courses are a direct result of the declining representation of men at university and will limit the living standards of Australians for many years to come.

I have taken the time to read most of the submissions to this inquiry. I am particularly concerned that submissions from recognised bodies openly stated that school based disadvantages for boys are acceptable because of supposed advantages men experience later in employment. In developing these quite fascist concepts, schools are being used to implement social engineering policies about which the Australian people have not been asked or informed.

This process continues. In Victoria, for example, I fully expect the new curriculum body appointed by the Bracks government to replace the Victorian Board of Studies will implement assessment and curriculum changes to senior computing based subjects. These changes will be designed to improve the performance of girls in this critical subject area. I hope I may be able to assist the inquiry.

CHAIR—Thank you very much for that non-controversial opening statement. In your submission looking at educational outcomes you said that the educational reforms of the past two decades in Victoria were the greatest avoidable social catastrophe in Australia's history. You just reminded us of this in your opening statement. You said the decline of school based male role models is most damaging for working-class boys. Could you explain why it is more damaging for boys at one end of the socioeconomic scale as distinct from the other?

Mr Humphreys—This is a generalisation. However, what I am suggesting is that in families where there is less experience of formal education to a higher level, it is of more importance to have the possibility of access to an adult role model to stimulate interest in education. Very often when I was teaching at Year 7 I was the first male teacher that young boys had ever had. I witnessed the expansion of access to higher education for people in working-class suburbs. But for many, particularly boys where things like reading or a higher level of learning were not experienced, it was irrelevant because there was not a home based model to fall back on when school based models failed.

CHAIR—Can you give the committee more specific examples of educational policies that vilify boys—this was an expression that you used in your submission—and the sort of inappropriate teaching methods as you would see it that have militated against boys achieving their potential?

Mr Humphreys—There are a number of different components to that; I will start first of all by looking at the VCE. When the VCE was introduced it had a number of compulsory components to it like Australian studies, which I certainly found a lot of pupils, particularly boys, did not like. However, the assessment methods in the Year 12 subjects which devolved assessment on home based tasks, on more oral tasks, and more written based tasks were all things that we knew boys were going to do less well at than girls. Combined with their delayed development—it is not delayed, it is a natural development delay compared to girls—there are critical impediments to boys doing well in the Victorian VCE. Many other systems of assessment have gone part the way down that path around Australia, but Victoria seems to have gone the furthest and most complete and, coinciding with the shutting off of access to early vocational education which was the closure of the technical schools, it was a disaster. It not only became more difficult for boys to academically achieve in Victorian schools, but it closed off the early pathways to employment for boys, and some girls too, who were often educationally alienated.

CHAIR—You said in your submission that it was known in advance that the adoption of the whole reading method would disadvantage a proportion of boys. If it was known that a particular reading policy was going to disadvantage a significant number of boys, then why was it implemented?

Mr Humphreys—There were a number of concerns that were actually raised in the 1980s about the recommendations of a whole variety of reforms that had already occurred. I wrote an essay in my final year Dip. Ed. in 1984 that these things were happening and that the Blackburn report changes were likely to cause the sorts of problems that I have seen. I was told in my course that if I submitted an essay like that I would do poorly and if I discussed those sorts of issues in the interview to be employed by the department I would not be employed. The exact line was, 'You had better like working in the Catholic and private system.'

Mr SAWFORD—Andrew, in the last couple of sentences that you read in your opening statement, you said, 'I fully expect a new curriculum body appointed by the Bracks government to replace the Victorian Board of Studies,' et cetera. That is a big call.

Mr Humphreys—Yes.

Mr SAWFORD—What evidence have you got to substantiate that?

Mr Humphreys—It was mentioned in some of the Labor Party policy speeches before the election that there would be attempts to address the increasing 'overrepresentation of boys in information technology and computer subjects'. Later, I will supply the committee with some of the policy documents if you wish. I rang the Board of Studies and was told that this was not to occur. Now that the Board of Studies is to be abolished, I believe that is how that is going to be engineered. I have made other inquiries that would suggest that a committee has already been formed and has been meeting to discuss those potential policies.

Mr SAWFORD—Can you produce that information for this committee?

Mr Humphreys—No, I cannot yet and I do not know if what I am saying here today will prevent this now occurring. What I do know is that this was a significant policy area for prominent women in the Labor Party before the election. From the information I have, there have already been some committee meetings concerning this matter.

Mr SAWFORD—You have nothing to back that up though?

Mr Humphreys—Not at this stage.

Mr SAWFORD—Can I go on to another area? You mentioned the Blackburn report. You also mentioned the closure of technical schools. You said it was catastrophic. Would you like to expand upon that?

Mr Humphreys—I was working in the outer eastern suburbs of Melbourne, not only as a teacher but also in the evenings and on weekends with very serious young offenders who were still in the community. They were all males and a number of them were attending local technical secondary schools with varying levels of success, but still attending. First of all, the imposition of a new curriculum in the 1980s to include girls and make it a more academically based curriculum started to water down the technical component of these schools. Their enrolments declined and, with the schools provision policy, the schools were actually closed or modified completely into mainstream comprehensive schools.

I saw four or five of those schools close and I saw the impact on those particular young boys that I was working with. They did not make the transition to the local high schools, which were either too far away or just totally failed to address their educational needs. Their offending often escalated after that. I believe that I was able to provide fairly good support to the boys I supervised. Many of their mates got into a lot more serious trouble and a number of them were killed in motor vehicle accidents, suicides and drug overdoses in the two or three years after that—for some of them, not long at all after that.

Mr SAWFORD—What happened to those subjects in those areas? When they set up single comprehensive high schools in this country, many of them adopted technical education subjects. How successful were they in the context of a single comprehensive high school?

Mr Humphreys—First of all, Victoria was different from the rest of Australia. We had an inquiry in 1901 to address the impact of the 1890s Depression. Theodore Fink went all around the world looking at different schemes for manual arts and technical education. They decided that a separate technical division that addressed the education needs of kids that were going on to industry, in particular, was going to be very important. It is a most interesting document. Victoria had a much more integrated and comprehensive technical system than any other state and almost anywhere else in the world. It went right through to serious tertiary level with things like the Working Men's College that became RMIT. The destruction that was wrought in Victoria was comparatively greater because what we had was state of the art. There was manual arts instruction in New South Wales and in some boys high schools and technical high schools in other states, but it was never integrated or as comprehensive as what existed in Victoria which, after the disadvantaged schools programs, had become a very well-resourced system.

Mr SAWFORD—The Karmel report was where you first get an instance—and thank you, Kerry, I got the Karmel report in. Some people are in denial about reports that are put up.

Mr Humphreys—It is a very important document.

Mr SAWFORD—One of its recommendations was the abolishment of technical high schools which, in Australia then, were resourced better than academic high schools so maybe there were some other reasons why it changed. That recommendation, along with a lot of others—the failure to recognise the need for resources for primary school was also part of the Karmel report—was in what was otherwise probably a very well accepted report. Do you believe that public education has denied the fact that single comprehensive high schools have not worked?

Mr Humphreys—Yes. It is not a recent thing. The opposition to this document in 1900 came from exactly the same sorts of people down the track that we are seeing in recent times and were represented in the Karmel report. There was long-standing opposition first of all in Victoria where the education bureaucracy did not like having a separate technical division. That was one thing here. Nationwide there was an intellectual snobbery that you could not use manual arts instruction to teach further education—and of course you can. The technical school system here in Victoria was just wonderful at retrieving educationally alienated kids and kids who had not enjoyed formal instruction. The greater resources that they had, I believe, was one of the few examples of positive discrimination towards these lower income kids, in particular, that we had in the state.

Mr BARTLETT—Returning to the question of approaches to teaching literacy, are you aware of any research that would compare the relative effectiveness of a whole of language approach versus a traditional phonetic approach to teaching literacy to boys?

Mr Humphreys—There are a number of documents that have made comparisons like that. When I mentioned that, I was drawing from something I had written a very long time ago but I would certainly be able to extract some of that stuff for you.

Mr BARTLETT—Could you do it? We would appreciate it.

Mr Humphreys—Yes.

Mr BARTLETT—Could you outline very briefly why intuitively you think the more traditional approach is more effective?

Mr Humphreys—I would suggest there are a whole number of reasons why boys find it more difficult to learn to read. For a number of biological reasons they are less cued to verbal instructions and things like that. They are far more likely to be things like colour blind. They are far more likely to suffer various types of dyslexia and other innate impediments to reading so there is a whole range of reasons why boys will make up, nearly every time, the three out of four kids who have got literacy problems, one of which we compound then by using a type of learning that they are less likely to relate to.

Mr BARTLETT—Wouldn't you think that issues such as dyslexia might be more of a problem with a traditional approach than a whole of language approach?

Mr Humphreys—Yes, but we should have been looking at using a number of approaches and detecting every kid that had failed to learn to read. Whatever method we used, it does not matter, so long as you detect the kid and remedy the problem in grade 1 and 2. When I start talking to boys with offending behaviour later on in life and find they are illiterate—95 per cent of the young men with high level offending that I worked with were functionally illiterate—I find a trauma in grade 1 and 2 rather than a specific learning disability. It will be something like persecution by a teacher at that age, family break-up or maybe peers picking on them at school, and it will not have been addressed. The boy then shuts down to whatever form of literacy he is offered and then the behavioural problems compound themselves so that by year 8 he is in real strife.

Mr BARTLETT—So it is more a problem of barriers to learning, motivation, early intervention, et cetera, rather than the approach to literacy?

Mr Humphreys—As I said, it would not matter which approach we used so long as we detected the kids that did not learn to read and then fixed it when they needed it.

Mr BARTLETT—So, early intervention?

Mr Humphreys—Yes.

Mr BARTLETT—You said before that it was openly acknowledged that the whole of language approach was more of an obstacle for boys. You mentioned that that was raised in the context of your Dip.Ed. but is it acknowledged anywhere in writing in research publications?

Mr Humphreys—It will be and I will certainly track it down for you.

Mr BARTLETT—If you could, that would be helpful. Thank you.

Mr Humphreys—What I was looking at were the results of studies on the comprehensive schools in England where many of these problems were outlined long before we encountered them. There is actually a lot of intellectual heritage behind the comprehensive school movement here and what occurred in England.

Mr BARTLETT—We would be interested in that. Thank you.

Mr EMERSON—In your opening remarks you said:

A generation of less advantaged young men has now been lost to society, dragging less advantaged young women with them.

I think it is true that the state schooling system has failed young people in disadvantaged areas, as we can ascertain from the outcomes such as educational attainment of kids on average in those areas and the lower retention rates. I am not aware of any policies. I think it is just a lack of effort and resourcing into those areas where needs are more acute and they have special needs but I am not aware of any differential funding effort between boys and girls in those schools. I do not think that they said, 'We'll put some effort and resources into girls, but we won't into boys.' It seems to me a lot of what you are saying seems to rely on that sort of thing. I do not know that a couple of programs that have been applied over the years would have made such a difference. It seems to me that it is not boys versus girls, but it is disadvantage versus advantage.

Mr Humphreys—There are certain specific examples of misdirection of policy and I would point to the safe schools policy which first of all included gender based harassment as a form of violence. The next stage was that gender based harassment of female teachers and students by male students became the most consistent and concerted form of violence in schools. That is the national policy. It meant that when I was trying to argue for funding for counselling services for boys who were victims, it was simply written off the agenda. There was a fundamental policy direction that came out, in particular the federal reforms of the 1980s that overlay the whole country. As to what each state has done in terms of policy direction, I would have to look much more closely at Queensland's policies to be able to pick up on things for you.

But, as I said, what has happened here in Victoria has been a moving of the goalposts in terms of assessment and a blocking off of the alternative avenues that existed for boys of a whole variety of abilities in the past. As I mentioned in my submission, there were a number of senior feminist academics at the time who were quite open about the process that was occurring. I quoted from Dorothy Broom there. They were quite open about what was to be done in terms of change within the system to address the disadvantage that they saw existed. We have now got the situation of twice the number of young men who are unemployed compared to young

women. Yet we have shortages in very many areas of skilled technicians and no people to do tasks that traditionally we could have provided skilled young men for.

Mr EMERSON—I would still contend that women in disadvantaged areas have not got a particularly good deal out of the funding arrangements.

Mr Humphreys—At no stage in my submission am I suggesting that that is not the case. What I am suggesting is that there have been dramatic changes to the psychosocial health of Australian young men and it is indicated by a quadrupling of the young male suicide rate. When I started working with young offenders in Victoria on the youth attendance order program, we were hoping to effectively close the juvenile imprisonment system and to have it down to 50 kids. At one stage we had it to 110. It is now 337; we have got 3,000 men in prisons in Victoria, whether they are private or public. Of the prisoners in Victoria, 98 per cent of them are male. These are indicators that something is wrong in terms of the preparation of these guys. If you talk to them, you find they are nearly all illiterate.

Ms GILLARD—I am interested in some of the statistics because obviously in the area of social policy it is difficult to draw causation. Unfortunately we do not get to do the controlled experiments which would allow us to forensically determine causation. But I must admit I am struggling. Your hypothesis is, as I understand it, that the increased incidence of youth suicide, about which we would all be very concerned, is in some way related to the closure of technical schools and you have produced a table in relation to that. I just find the table a bit obscure. Is it inherent in the table that you have selected the urban and rural local government areas that most disproportionately relied on the technical education system?

Mr Humphreys—I am not quite sure what you are trying to ask me here. I have looked in those local government areas for the ones with the highest disproportion between young male and young female suicide rates.

Ms GILLARD—So, that is the recording of the statistics but it does not make out the case that young male suicide rates are in part explained by the closure of technical schools, does it? That table does not make out that case.

Mr Humphreys—No. What I am simply suggesting there is that these are the sorts of proportions that exist in those areas. When I have completed my masters, I will have 10 years data and what it will show—and it already indicates this—is that rates of change for young male suicide in those areas have been greater than most of the other areas in the country. I found that there was international concern about this issue when I met a Norwegian academic who was coming out here to see the impact of the closure of the technical schools in Victoria. I was already starting to do some research on this. What I am saying is that, in terms of an increase in suicide, we need to look at classic sociological research techniques, a la Durkheim, and we therefore need to look at an increase in feelings of anomie by these young men—feelings of dissociation and disconnection with society. We therefore need to look at things that we know with young men: for example, that the things that cause an increase in suicide are not sudden upsurges in the incidence of mental illness but are impediments to that step into adult life. The vast majority of the young pre-suicidal men that I work with are not mentally ill; they are distressed. What I am suggesting is that the closure of the technical schools was a very powerful precipitant for feelings of anomie amongst the most disadvantaged boys in Victoria and we

seem to have seen an elevation of Victorian young male suicide rates since that date that is quite remarkable.

Ms GILLARD—It was just the way it was presented under the hypothesis, I presumed that it was the table that proved the hypothesis but you are still working on that. You have made a number of comments about the post-compulsory schooling system, recognising that the most disadvantaged do not get to the post-compulsory schooling system, which I think we would all recognise. Just to recap, so we are working off a common information base in relation to the post-compulsory schooling system, it is true to say that, currently, of those in post-compulsory schooling, 49.9 per cent are men and 50.1 per cent are women? That is right, isn't it?

Mr Humphreys—Where are you getting that from?

Ms GILLARD—These are quoted in another submission that has been presented to this inquiry but I think they are taken off the ABS data.

Mr Humphreys—Is that nationwide?

Ms GILLARD—Yes, it would be.

Mr Humphreys—With education, it often helps to look at state based policies, because I am suggesting that the feelings of anomie will respond largely to state based policies. The suicide rates in different states have varied markedly. Tasmania's young male suicide rate has come down dramatically in the last few years, whilst Victoria's has continued to increase. Rather than looking at national retention rates, I would look at them on a state by state basis.

Ms GILLARD—No, they are not retention rates, they are just the percentage of—

Mr Humphreys—Sorry, post-compulsory schooling.

Ms GILLARD—You made a number of comments about the declining presence of men in post-compulsory schooling and when you look at the statistics, it is basically the fit between those in post-compulsory schooling—

Mr Humphreys—I think I talk about men at tertiary level of education.

Ms GILLARD—Looking at tertiary level, the statistics would say that 52 per cent of undergraduates are women and the rest are men, which is about the line of fit to the population generally. The statistics would say 60 per cent of higher degree students are men, which is not a line of fit to the population generally. In relation to those areas where I agree with you that there is a need for more attention in the political debate at the moment—in the areas of science and engineering—those courses are still disproportionately taken by men. That is true, isn't it?

Mr Humphreys—I think they probably always will be. I think that is a reflection of innate—

Ms GILLARD—When you have referred to declining numbers of men, it is not borne out by the statistics.

Mr Humphreys—I would like to see the statistics, and there are a number of things that are being done with statistics. I am particularly concerned that suicide data in a number of countries, including Australia, is less accurate than it was in the past. I would like to see an accurate state-by-state analysis of those sorts of figures and rates of change over time before I would comment on that.

Secondly, I would suggest that we are all well aware that—for example, as I mentioned, the Birrell report—the social dynamic that exists in Australian society today is that most women still desire to marry men who earn more than them. We have not changed that social dynamic at all. The reflection of that is that the poorest men in our society now are unpartnered.

Ms GILLARD—All of that, as it may be, and given the earning statistics, their likelihood of finding a man who earns more than them is pretty good. But the proposition you put that—

Mr Humphreys—I would like to respond to the earning statistics comment. How earning statistics are calculated rarely ever take into account such things as overtime, the bulk of which is—

Ms GILLARD—I would refer you to some Western Australian data which engages in a regression analysis with controls for overtime, educational levels, gender segregation of the labour market, and still concludes that there is an earnings differential between men and women. So controlling for all other identifiable factors that could explain that difference, the survey still concludes there is a difference between men and women in earning capacity which is not explained by any identifiable fact rather than gender.

Mr Humphreys—Given the social desires of women, that would not necessarily seem to be a harmful thing.

Ms GILLARD—Moving back to education, because we are inquiring into boys education—so we put to one side the assertions about higher and post-school education because they are not borne out—

Mr Humphreys—No, I do not put them to one side.

Ms GILLARD—That the number of men are declining in those areas is not borne out by the statistics—it is just simply not right when you look at the figures. Moving to the focus of this inquiry, the schools based area and malparticipation in the schools area, I share your concern about the lack of diversity in the state sector and about the loss of vocational education opportunities that occurred with the end of some of the technical schooling. But your commentary in relation to the VCE is as if the VCE has been a completely static beast. I think we are all aware there have been changes in the assessment practices in the VCE.

Mr Humphreys—What is the question?

Ms GILLARD—I am putting to you basically that you cannot make an assertion that the VCE structure necessarily advantages girls without analysing each iteration of the VCE, because the assessment structure has changed over time to move it away from school based assessment and more towards external assessment.

Mr Humphreys—The performance of girls in the VCE has been greater than that of boys over time since its implementation. There has been a rate of increase with it. I cannot see the issue you are asking me about. Each iteration of it was only a change of the general structure. The introduction of things like much home based assessment—the old written components—not only advantaged girls but in particular middle-class girls. When I talk about the changing gender representation at university, in particular I am talking now about the under-representation of working-class males. So I think we need to see the impact of the VCE in particular on one group that had the fewest educational advantages. What I am suggesting, also, is that it is a more general discriminatory assessment tool and it has disadvantaged boys of all classes. I do not resile from that one bit.

Ms GILLARD—Yes, but what I am putting to you is that you are talking about the VCE as if it has remained unchanged. If your contention is—

Mr Humphreys—Its impact has remained unchanged; it is still doing the same thing.

Ms GILLARD—But how can that be right if your contention is that home based assessment tasks advantage girls, given their percentage—

Mr Humphreys—We have not yet seen the impact of the new class based assessment tasks introduced this year. We do not know what the impact of those will be.

Ms GILLARD—But I am just making the point to you that the section of the assessment model that you thought most advantaged girls has actually been a declining part of the assessment model as the VCE has evolved.

Mr Humphreys—As community concern has continued to agitate about the VCE.

Ms GILLARD—As the VCE has evolved; that is right.

Mr SAWFORD—In your submission—and following on from what Julia said—you said you have documentation of ministerial correspondence concerning the closure of technical schools. Can you provide that to the committee.

Mr Humphreys—Yes.

Mr SAWFORD—Thanks very much.

Mr BARRESI—I share Julia's concern, to some extent, about trying to link the increased suicide rates with retention rates. I heard the answer you gave to that, but in your submission you say:

> ... the ending of an early secondary school state supported pathway to employment for low income young men has exacerbated social problems. This is reflected by increases in the suicide rate amongst young men.

I feel that you are searching for evidence of a hypothesis that you have created, rather than having specific evidence of that.

Mr Humphreys—I came to that conclusion because my initial interest was in observing the actual change that I saw happen. I believed that this would be observable in the data—that there would be an increase in Victorian suicide rates, particularly in disadvantaged areas amongst low income young men—before I started harvesting the data. The young male suicide rate in Victoria has over the last 15 years been one of the most alarming social statistics in the OECD. The areas where this has occurred, in particular, were the areas where I expected it to occur. My hypothesis will not be that the technical school closures caused an elevation in young male suicide rates. From my study, young male suicide rates do not reflect the occurrence of mental illness. However, it is one of the factors that I believe—along with the VCE and a number of other discriminatory policies with different age groups—has led to the elevation of male suicide rates.

Mr BARRESI—What about the impact of programs which have come forth since the closure of technical schools? I refer to vocational education training programs in schools, the ASTF program and putting kids into traineeships for a period of time. Some of these things are Commonwealth based programs, others are state based programs which are being implemented at the moment by the Victorian government. Surely they are having an effect and are picking up some of the slack which has been let go by the closure of the technical schools. Are you starting to see evidence of this having an effect on the very things that you are looking at?

Mr Humphreys—Yes. The first of the kids who I have seen attracted by some of the programs you are talking about are starting to enter them now. I am very pleased to see the start of those things. But they are addressing issues that we created: we removed the services that once provided a very seamless approach to education for these kids. For example, one of the concerns I have with the TAFE system was that wonderful facilities were concentrated in huge monolithic sites. But the kids I am talking about cannot jump in the back of mum's Volvo and get there. The tech used to be at the end of the street.

Mr BARRESI—You have given some examples already in terms of how the educational system is advantaging girls, or putting them in a position that is far more advantageous than that of boys. Can you give us some far broader examples of how education policies are vilifying boys, apart from the changes to the VCE that you referred to earlier on.

Mr Humphreys—Most programs with any type of vilification are subtle at the outset. They will come from the wording of policy and what is permissible by people in various settings. A number of the submissions raised quite specific issues concerning the treatment that their boys had received in schools. There were a number of submissions from parents, who were told that boys were useless after grades 2 and 3. It is a feeling; a philosophy that permeates the system. Boys then feel that they are awkward and smelly, and by the time they get to secondary school they are very turned off from education. It is more specific in some policies, and I have outlined the safe schools policy as an example. It is a matter of what is permissible and is not picked up. For example, when boys are at physical or emotional risk, we are less likely to detect it as well. In terms of direct vilification, all I can refer to is what boys have directly told me and what a number of families in their submissions have told you has happened to them.

CHAIR—I do not often miss opportunities to attack my Labor colleagues, but in your submission you say:

I have found this year that amongst post-graduate students at La Trobe University women comprise 74% of the student body and yet my fees and Federal Government funds are used to employ a Women's Officer whose role is to further increase the representation of women in post-graduate studies. This approach reflects the strong radical feminist control of both the present State Cabinet and of health and education policy in Victoria since 1981.

Then you go on to say:

In fact female students in schools have always enjoyed significant advantages when compared to same age boys.

Those statements undermine the integrity of everything else you say.

Mr Humphreys—The statement about the control of health and education policy comes from Marian Simms's book on the public sector unions in Victoria. I am sorry, what was the second point you made?

Mr EMERSON—I was wondering what you thought about that radical feminist Jeff Kennett!

Mr Humphreys—The bureaucracy did not change.

Ms GILLARD—I think it did.

Mr Humphreys—The bureaucracy in terms of these policies did not change. The VCE was not abolished, and the technical schools were not reopened. So the fundamentals of the system that was put in place were not altered at all. In terms of the present state cabinet, there are seven women who are members of Emily's List. So eight out of 18 in the cabinet are openly members of that body.

Ms GILLARD—What is the significance of that in relation to your argument about boys' education?

Mr Humphreys—All members of Emily's List have a certain number of criteria which they espouse.

Ms GILLARD—None of them relate to disadvantaging boys in the education system. I can recite them to you if you like.

Mr Humphreys—No, sure. But what I am saying is that the policy makers that introduced the policies that I am concerned about are part of that organisation. It is part of the same milieu, that is all.

Ms GILLARD—Isn't it true to say that each and every iteration of the state cabinet since 1981 has been overwhelmingly male dominated? Isn't it true to say that, apart from a couple of years when Joan Kirner was Premier, each and every premier of this state since 1981 has been a man? Isn't it true to say that throughout that period the ministry of education has predominantly been represented by men—Phil Gude being the most recent example of a long-term minister for education? In view of that, isn't it completely ridiculous to contend that there is some feminist conspiracy that obviously is so powerful it can make each and every man, regardless of political

party background, do their bidding, and that has gone out of its way to discriminate against boys in education? It is laughable.

Mr Humphreys—It is not what I am suggesting.

Ms GILLARD—If you look at just that statement, 'the state cabinet since 1981', it is a nonsense.

Mr Humphreys—No, I did not say the state cabinet.

Ms GILLARD—Brendan read it to you.

Mr Humphreys—I did not say 'the state cabinet'; I am talking about the education—

Ms GILLARD—Your submission says:

This approach reflects the strong radical feminist control of both the present State Cabinet and of health and education policy in Victoria ...

Mr Humphreys—The present state cabinet and health and education policy in Victoria.

Ms GILLARD—Right. So under Phil Gude education policy was controlled by radical feminists, was it?

Mr Humphreys—Of course it was. It did not change one iota in terms of the main issues for these disadvantaged boys. The VCE stayed in place, the technical schools were not reopened and discriminatory education policies were not changed. What I am saying is: the bureaucracy and the school system did not put in place things to address the issues that we were already seeing coming forward, and that represented the continuation of the same sorts of control. Whether the man at the top was unaware or too stupid to respond is not what I am inquiring about.

Ms GILLARD—I do not think we should have a debate about Phil Gude's intellectual capacity. But isn't it true to say—

Mr Humphreys—I am talking about a number of them.

Ms GILLARD—Isn't it true to say that the bureaucracy in education was very greatly changed during the years of the Kennett administration? And if you track the number of public servants that remained—

Mr Humphreys—The policies were not.

Ms GILLARD—I think the policies differed significantly, too.

CHAIR—I think the points that have been made from this side are self-evident. Mr Humphreys, I understand you work as a counsellor with boys?

Mr Humphreys—Yes.

CHAIR—Through Here for Life?

Mr Humphreys—A number of different agencies. Rather than have agencies I work for bandied about, let me say that I work as a private consultant, in particular with high-risk young men, and with a number of female clients, too.

CHAIR—That is okay. You work in the area of suicide, which is evident from the work that you have done.

Mr Humphreys—Yes.

CHAIR—The issue that you raised about the closure of the technical schools is one we are also concerned to look at. I used to work in a public housing estate. I remember a former Prime Minister saying that in the next decade we would not have people working in jobs where they were sweeping floors and pushing brooms. That was a way of saying that everybody was going to be educated and was going to be driving computers and things like that. There is an element of truth in that. But for many of the people with whom I worked a fulfilling life was one in which they were doing what many others would feel to be menial tasks. It seemed to me that maybe it is not just the closure of technical schools. We went through a period where we said to kids, 'If you don't get a tertiary education you're a failure,' and the kids in some way have said, 'There's no place for me in modern society if I don't do well at school and certainly if I don't get a university degree.' Is it possible that, rather than it just being the tangible thing of closing technical schools, we have moved into a period where the expectations placed on children, and boys in particular—at least that is how they feel it—are such that they will never be met and that part of their reaction to that is a whole range of self-destructive behaviours, of which suicide is at the extreme end?

Mr Humphreys—I am suggesting that the closure of the technical schools is only one example of a particularly dramatic change to a state health or education system. There have been a number of changes. I agree wholeheartedly with your concept that we tended to say very powerfully to kids: 'These are the new set of benchmarks that you are to operate by.' I do not think they were good benchmarks to set. I think that improving the access to technical and skills based education and improving the impression in society that we have of those sorts of vocations are important. I do not say that the technical school closure was the sole problem that young Victorian males experienced. What I am saying is that it was a particularly dramatic and sad change that Victoria experienced, because it was a unique system.

Mr SAWFORD—You identified some watersheds in a positive sense, but then applied almost a conspiracy theory to explain why they are there and what happened afterwards, which I think is unfortunate. When bureaucrats make decisions, like after Karmel and after Blackburn, that you question—and, I must say in front of this committee, that I question too—they are more likely to have been stuff-ups than conspiracy. I do not think the Karmel report can be interpreted as a report that was going to try and do harm to public education; I do not think the Blackburn report did harm; nor do I believe that bureaucrats have unduly, by almost a form of conspiracy, got us to this situation. I do agree that there have been a lot of stuff-ups in the last 20 years and that there are people in denial about those stuff-ups. But I would think your

submissions and your work would be far more valuable if they became a little bit more objective, rather than concentrating, as they have so far, on a whole range of conspiracy theories which I think have little evidence to support them.

Mr Humphreys—Firstly, the concept of a conspiracy against Victorian technical education goes back a long time, and I point you to *Visions and Realisations*, which is the history of education in Victoria that was written in the 1970s. It outlines the longstanding opposition there has been, in a number of quarters, to a separate technical division. So the closure of the technical divisions most certainly was not a stuff-up. It was the end product of a very long chain in the attempt to overturn the recommendations of this document from 1901.

In terms of the Karmel report, and whether it was meant to be bad for Victorian children, I am not suggesting it was. Nor was I suggesting the Blackburn report set out to be bad for Victorian children. By focusing their attention and the innovation they were going to bring in on advantaging only one group, it ipso facto disadvantaged another group. I am not suggesting that there was a conspiracy to harm boys. There were longstanding plans to implement these reforms to education that had this impact. I am not suggesting that there are evil ogres out there wanting to do these things. People have forced very misguided policies, and they have attempted to address social policies with a sledgehammer. The impact on the most disadvantaged young boys has been disastrous.

CHAIR—At that point, we might conclude. Thank you very much, Mr Humphreys, for going to a lot of trouble. If nothing else, you have made some members of the committee think, which is always an achievement. You are obviously following the inquiry, so if you have any supplementary thoughts, ideas, suggestions or anything, please send them on.

[2.53 p.m.]

KENNEDY, Ms Janette Elizabeth, Manager, Professional Development, West Education Centre Inc.

WARD, Ms Glenda, Honorary Treasurer, West Education Centre Inc

WINSTANLEY, Ms Loretta, Executive Director, West Education Centre Inc.

CHAIR—Welcome. Do you have any comments to make on the capacity in which you appear?

Ms Kennedy—My role at the West Education Centre is to arrange training programs for both teachers and parents. My background is in early childhood and children's services, so education mainly in the early years.

Ms Winstanley—My background is in primary, special education, vocational education training and English as a second language. As we said, we provide professional development to teachers and the wider school community.

Ms Ward—I am on the board of management of West Education Centre. I am also a teacher at Taylors Lakes Secondary College and hold the position of literacy and learning coordinator.

CHAIR—Please commence your opening statement.

Ms Winstanley—The genesis of our submission was the fact that the West Education Centre was funded in the beginning by DEET, then DETYA, to look at professional development for teachers in the areas of their quality outcome program and also the adult literacy-numeracy component. There are 22 centres around Australia, which have each followed the directions of its community, but the West Education Centre has tended to concentrate on the areas of social justice and antiviolence, and we have held to that over the period of time. We are now working to move the program beyond bullying to the realisation that bullying is violence and then moving to the wider areas of family violence and child abuse. That is the agenda that we are following at the moment.

We did a lot of work, when the pendulum was on the other side, with girls' education; now we are focusing on boys' education. As the submission says, we have tried two strategies that seem to have worked. We have developed a series of modules for motivating boys. These are delivered through schools around Victoria and we also have a licensing arrangement with some of the education centres in other states or regions.

We are also working on a different need: ongoing maintenance for teachers and an expansion of their skill base for dealing with the problems boys are bringing into schools, either through their behaviour or the fact that they have really bad literacy problems. One thing we tried was the Boys Education Network, which was held in Melbourne. We had teachers coming from all over Melbourne to the meetings. They had a chance to network and discuss issues that were of concern, and speakers were arranged. It raised the issue that we were not able to do anything with regional areas or country areas, so we raised the notion of taking the Boys Education

Network, or BEN, to the bush. At the time of writing this submission we had set up two clusters: one at Bacchus Marsh, which is in the outer suburbs of Melbourne, and one at Craigieburn. There was a lot of interest in this.

I have the names of the schools that are participating in the project, which I will leave to be tabled. Since this submission was made, we have entered our last year of funding from DETYA. Under Learning Network Australia we are required to deliver a project where we are looking at collegiate models of professional development and at being able to develop models so that we can take professional development training for teachers, spread it wider and get wider community involvement. It is all very well to whistle into a school to deliver PD, but there is no way we can quantify the benefits of the involvement of the teachers in a program. So in this project we are doing a long-term study involving the schools and then being able to qualify the outcomes in the areas of literacy and numeracy with boys. In essence, that is what the project is about.

CHAIR—Thank you very much. Janette and Glenda, do you have anything to add?

Ms Winstanley—Could I also mention Glenda's work on the books and the conference, representing her special area of expertise in literacy.

Ms Ward—Yes, we have developed some professional development modules for teachers that help explore the issues that have been raised about the best ways for all students to learn in those early years when they are developing their literacy. I think it is a shame in some ways that Mr Humphreys has gone, but certainly one of the things that has come through very strongly—particularly here in Victoria under the Early Years program, also known as Keys to Life, that was instituted by the former government—is that early research is indicating that there are many different styles of learning and that they are not gender based, although there may be certain groups who like one particular learning style. What has really made a difference in primary schools in Victoria has been the devotion of two hours every morning to literacy and the proper resourcing of teachers to do that—there was lots of professional development. I think that that provides us with a template for the way professional development should be instituted: the way that we can achieve real long-lasting change is to resource it properly. Of course, that means that we still have lots of boys and girls going through the not so early years whose literacy teaching and learning has not been of the quality that it should have been, and we still need a lot of research and work in that area.

CHAIR—Thank you. Perhaps if we could start with that point. The 1999 literacy benchmark testing for year 3 in Victoria found the boys 7.3 percentage points behind the girls. You just mentioned professional development as perhaps being one of the causes for that. What other causes would you identify and what do you do to try and address that—or what could you do if you had all the resources that you thought you need?

Ms Ward—There are a number of reasons why boys seem to be seven to 10 per cent behind in that kind of testing. One is a sociological reading of it, if you like: the idea that boys do not believe that reading is important; that seven-year-old boys have worked out that they do not see dad reading—dad might read an incredible amount, but he will do most of his reading at work—and that the reading that they might see dad do at home is of the sports pages. Research into who does the reading of the book at night with the child shows that it is primarily mum.

Then they go to school. Who teaches them reading? A female. Some people have been drawing conclusions that there is a sociological influence on boys—that they believe that reading is something that women primarily do and that if you are a real man you do not read. Of course, there are lots of programs that have been investigated and resourced to try and get over that. One of the issues that comes up time and time again when we are talking with teachers—particularly in regional and country areas—is their concern that, in the smaller primary schools, there may not be a male teacher. That is one of the issues. I think that we need to investigate—although I am certainly not prepared to go down the road that says that 50 per cent of teachers in primary schools should be males—getting males back into primary schools. It is certainly an area that has to be looked at and will take some time and some resourcing to do.

There is also the teaching and learning way of looking at this whole area. As Mr Humphreys pointed out, there are more boys who present with learning difficulties. I think that will always be the case. We tend to be getting closer and closer to saying that there is a small biological reason why some boys do not read, just like there are biological reasons why more boys than girls present with intellectual and physical disabilities. Good teaching will maximise the chances of those people who are in that situation.

What we do in our professional development is to get teachers to explore the reading that they expect their children to do. There is a nice little activity that we do where we look at the writing of a year 7 girl and a year 7 boy. The year 7 girl writes very well but she, in fact, retells a fairytale where they live happily every after at the end, and she has got blonde hair and things like that. The boy writes very poorly in English terms. His sentence structure is terrible. He changes his verb tense a number of times. It is obvious that he is retelling something that he has received visually—either a video game or a cartoon. Teachers like to investigate and talk about the kinds of readings that they give, particularly to younger children. There is not a lot around for young boys that is specifically linked to, for example, things like video games. Whether you would want it to be or not is another issue, but that is certainly what they want to tell you about when they are retelling their reading.

CHAIR—Within that 7.3 percentage points differential, obviously there are going to be some areas where there is not much difference—I presume this is the case—but in other areas, there is a huge variation between the boys and the girls. Is it a case of whether they are at the top of the range non-government schools or whether they are servicing high income areas or whether they are in rural and remote areas as to whether the boy-girl differential is about the same?

Ms Ward—Socioeconomic status is the greatest predictor of literacy development.

CHAIR—The differential between the boys and the girls in the poorest SES areas is worse. So the boys are doing far worse in the poorer areas than the girls?

Ms Ward—Yes.

Mr SAWFORD—Let me put that another way. In the poorest areas, while perhaps the boys are doing less well, maybe the girls are also doing less well because they have poorer teachers and poorer quality educational programs. Socioeconomic background is irrelevant if you provide quality education and good teachers. You do not have discipline problems or you have marginal discipline problems when you have good teachers. We should be asking about the

quality of the educational program that is offered and the quality of the teacher rather than the copout that it is very easy to blame a socioeconomic background. I have taught in areas where 40 per cent of kids have got to university from socioeconomic deprived areas because there were specific policies in the education department of South Australia to advantage and have the best teachers in the poorest areas. That no longer exists anywhere in Australia. Do you think that might be a better reason?

Ms Winstanley—I think that there needs to be programmed professional development for teachers because—

Mr SAWFORD—I do not dispute that.

Ms Winstanley—You cannot go back to the days of saying, 'You are a master teacher, therefore you teach in that area.' It just does not work like that. We have to look at the system that we have got and be able to provide quality professional development.

Mr SAWFORD—So the quality of teachers has fallen?

Ms Ward—No.

Ms Winstanley—No.

Mr SAWFORD—It has risen?

Ms Ward—I would think that there is research that indicates either way. TER scores are lower.

CHAIR—Everyone who is telling us anything is saying that the quality of people going into teaching is not what it was—in the sense that it has deteriorated.

Ms Ward—I think that needs to be quantified because there are a lot of people making a lot of generalisations about things. This area in particular lends itself to generalisations. We certainly know that enter scores have dropped. I am not sure if that is nationally, but the enter scores for people going back to education are low at the moment. I work in a school that works very hard to address the disadvantages of its student body. I think I am a good teacher, but I am not always going to achieve success. I think socioeconomic status is a predictor and maybe that is what you should be looking at.

Mr SAWFORD—You also say in your statement that boys usually have positive attitudes to schooling until year 5. What happens then that changes that circumstance?

Ms Winstanley—It is many things. You can look at their physiological development and at the impact of media and of their family, but mainly at about that time boys are busy growing and working out where they are and that is where the turn-offs seem to occur.

Mr SAWFORD—Do you think this has always been so?

Ms Winstanley—I used to teach grade 4 a long time ago, and by the end of grade 4 we had started to lose them—it has just been forever.

Mr SAWFORD—Do you think they got lost forever more after then?

Ms Winstanley—No. With the work that we do and the research that is being done, we find that boys come back. With year 7, there is the anticipation of new challenges and a new school and so that enthusiasm is rekindled.

Mr SAWFORD—Do you think the learning pedagogies of the last 20 years have been so narrow that they have been broadcast as being broad and inclusive? My observations, when you go to schools, are that the pedagogies that are used in private and public schools are very narrow and exclusive. When you go into classrooms and ask teachers, 'How do you organise your class?' you get singular answers. You do not get answers such as, 'We have programs.' 'We have curriculum where we treat the kids as individuals.' 'We have small groups constituted in different ways.' 'We have whole class methods.' Teachers tend to respond with singular answers.

Ms Winstanley—Behaviour management?

Mr SAWFORD—That is one; you said it.

Ms Winstanley—I would say that teachers are spending an enormous amount of time trying to cater for the needs of children. Getting back to the issue of boys' education and the number of strategies that are being implemented, there are inadequate numbers of male role models. Female teachers are being very clever in that they are ensuring that young boys have exposure to successful readers amongst the male population. A lot of this stuff is just starting to be documented now.

Mr EMERSON—You said that socioeconomic status is a predictor, and it might be worth our while trying to separate correlation from causality. If you wanted to identify 'at risk' kids, you would ask, 'What are the lower socioeconomic areas in Australia?' and you would pretty well have identified the children who are at greatest risk of not having good literacy and dropping out of school earlier. We will go through more statistics in the course of this inquiry but I would be surprised if it showed anything other than that.

I think what Rod is getting at is that that does not mean that low socioeconomic status causes poor performance, and that might be where we are getting a bit tangled up in our terminology; I am not sure. I just wanted to put that point. I think what Rod is saying is that, if you had the best teachers, the best resources and the best education effort and concentrated—at least in the government school system—on the most disadvantaged areas, you would not necessarily have any great differential in outcomes. What we seem to be doing in the state system at large is having our worst effort in the areas that need it most. Have you got any observations to make on that?

Ms Ward—It is about resourcing, isn't it?

Mr EMERSON—I am not saying that they are the worst teachers. I do not know; I have no basis for saying that. But, in terms of funding policies, they do not seem to be really very strongly needs based—or have not been lately.

Ms Ward—No, they have not been needs based for a long time. For example, I am at a school with 1,300 students. It is on the northern borders of Melbourne just near the airport, and it has a low socioeconomic status, generally. We are meant to be aiming for four computers for every one student. We are up to 13 and getting worse, because our computers are getting so old that when we resell them we hardly get any money for them. The whole IT thing is also—

CHAIR—Four computers for each student?

Ms Ward—I am sorry, four students for every one computer.

CHAIR—Right. I was going to say that I wish I had your problems.

Ms Ward—Sorry. I think who is a good teacher and who is not is certainly one area. That is why in early years it was actually said, 'You do this. As a teacher, this is what you should be doing in your classes.' People got almost evangelical about it, and I think that is the kind of PD that you need to really change teachers' perceptions so that they actually do start changing the way they work when they get in there at 9 o'clock on Monday morning. But the other side to that is the resourcing.

Ms Winstanley—It comes back to anecdotal evidence we are getting from teachers and from some schools that there is a growing awareness of the school's occupational health and safety responsibilities for the teachers, that we are expecting teachers to be dealing with very difficult workloads, and that the system is not doing very much to provide the emotional support and the resiliency training that the teachers are doing. Our job as teachers, in essence, is to provide modelling for kids of successful ways of learning and behaving in positive relationships. If you have got teachers stressed to the max and they are not being resilient, the situation perpetuates itself.

Mr EMERSON—Therefore, those teachers who are very well disposed are not likely to gravitate towards the low socioeconomic areas, presumably because they become frustrated and full of stress about the sort of classroom behaviour and everything else.

Ms Winstanley—I would say no, because teachers who are feeling strong and positive about the way they are teaching and the way they react to a challenge will go to schools like that where they can see they are making a difference. We ran a professional development session last night which focused on the resiliency of the teachers. They would not move to another school; it is just that they want to do their job better and the resources are not there.

Mr BARTLETT—Regarding that issue of different approaches to teaching literacy in the early years, we would all agree that there are horses for courses, that different children respond better to different approaches. But in general terms, would you tend to agree with the assertion of the former witness that the whole of language approach disadvantages boys more than girls?

Ms Ward—I think that using one system and one system only disadvantages a whole range of people.

Mr BARTLETT—Sure, but if that one system is the whole of language approach, has that had a more harmful effect on boys than girls?

Ms Ward—I do not know. What I can say is that I do not think there is any school in Victoria that teaches whole language approach anymore; they teach a whole range of strategies.

Mr BARTLETT—We went through a couple of decades there where that really was the fashion.

Ms Ward—People talked about it an awful lot, but when you actually got down to what people were doing in their classrooms, if the word was 'cat' and you could spell it out, then you used the phonetic system, but if the word was 'thorough', there was no way you could spell it out and you used another system. I think we tend to simplify what an amazing thing learning to read is, and you need a whole range.

Mr BARTLETT—Of course you do, but it is true to say, isn't it, that we are taking more of a holistic approach than we used to? There was a period of time where it became perhaps a bit too narrow in focus?

Ms Ward—Yes. Most people now would really not want to say they are using whole language as their major approach.

Mr BARTLETT—Sure. But in the time when it perhaps was narrower than it is now, did that have more of an adverse impact on boys' ability to become literate than on girls'?

Ms Ward—All I can say is that you would have the earlier results, and some of those earlier results did not divide into genders, but there certainly were some kids who did not pick up on whole language. We are beginning to see an improvement, and it may well be that it is largely boys because their learning style suits another way of looking at the initial stages of reading.

Mr BARTLETT—So you are saying boys are benefiting more from the development of a broader range of approaches?

Ms Ward—Yes.

Mr BARTLETT—So, by inference, they were more disadvantaged by the whole of language approach?

Ms Ward—Possibly. I do not know and I do not think anybody will ever be able to say because particularly in the seventies, when they first started the whole language approach, the statistics were surprisingly not broken up by gender, so we will never know.

Mr BARTLETT—I am surprised that there was no real research done on that.

Ms Ward—I was surprised. I am sure somebody might be digging around, particularly in New Zealand because that is where Marie Clay started a whole heap of things on literacy. Certainly from the research that is presented to teachers, we do not know.

Mr BARRESI—How can we attract more male teachers into the profession? There seems to be a universal view that there are fewer male teachers, particularly at primary school level. Have you looked at this issue in terms of the factors that are causing it and how we can either attract them or retain them within the system?

Ms Winstanley—We were talking about this, would you believe, at lunch before we came here. It is going to take almost a generation, seven years, before the current cohort of people leaving the tertiary system and teacher training come through, so that is when we need to start working on getting more males to enter the profession. It comes back to the perception that boys have that school is a girls' thing, and if it is a girls' thing they will step back from it. That is why it is so important that we start on this work of providing proper strategies for boys to learn and model.

Mr BARRESI—It is a girls' thing because there are not enough male teachers, so they do not see the male teachers to get those role models.

Ms Winstanley—A book that has just been put out by the Institute of Family Studies is called *I Can Hardly Wait Till Monday*. That has fabulous strategies that teachers are using. It is not necessarily using the people from the football club but other men. It is more difficult in the regional and country areas to find those people so there are very inventive strategies. You do not have to be wearing a football jumper to be able to read. It is looking for other role models that we need.

Mr BARRESI—We cannot wait for a generation, can we? You are saying there has to be a generational change. If what people are saying is true, that there is a correlation between the male teacher and the role model that male teacher is in the classroom for boys' educational levels, then we cannot wait. How can we rectify that? Earlier on—and you were not here at the time—the chairman suggested to a previous witness that maybe we can encourage people to come back to or to enter the teaching profession later on in life. They might have had a career but they have looked at it and realised that the stereotypical male career that they have been set on since boyhood is not all that it is cracked up to be and that maybe they could now be teachers. Is that one way we can approach it: by encouraging people to return to the profession or to enter it for the first time midway through their career lives?

Ms Kennedy—One of the biggest choices is the salary of teachers. My background is in early childhood. When I went to a reunion it was incredible to see the number of people who were earning more money in retail, telecommunications or something else and who thought, 'I cannot believe that you are still working in children's services'.

CHAIR—Dead right; spot on.

Mr BARRESI—What about the role that parents play in a school? Certainly from my observations and experience of my family and extended family situations, it always seems to be the mum who participates in the education process with the children: 'Look at my boy'. Mum is

very much involved in the school. The teacher is a female and the scout leader is a female—it is women all the way through the process. That is fine, but is there some way that we should be encouraging male parents to play a more active role or is that a lost cause because of the nature of work?

Ms Winstanley—The awareness is there and proactive programs are being looked at and funded. The groundwork is there. We attended a meeting last night of the reinvigoration of NAPCAN, the National Association for the Prevention of Child Abuse and Neglect. NAPCAN's next national initiative for the year 2002 is the fathering program. The save our children group is also very much involved in that. We are saying that parenting is critical. The submission alludes to the fact that we need to have a synchronisation—if that is possible—of the funding released from the various state and Commonwealth programs to get the funds to do parenting work. It is really hard to track it down.

We have a little book *Supporting Our Sons In School* that I put in the original submission. That is a parent book, which costs $5.50. It is an amazingly good resource that we can give to parents. Things like that need seed funding. We also have one on bullying. There is a need to start translating that kind of material into the Horn of Africa languages. There seems to be no advocate for sourcing funding in this area of parenting. Parent education is vital. There are initiatives in Victoria to try to get parents back into the schools because somewhere along the line they have disengaged. Declining interest levels are apparent in the decreasing number of parents at primary school parent nights. At high school the kids enter into conspiracy theories: there is no way that they want their mum or dad to come to school and be seen to be involved. We have to work with the holistic approach that it is okay for parents to be involved. Once again, that funding needs to be readily available and identifiable.

Ms GILLARD—How many schools are currently involved in the Boys Education Network?

Ms Winstanley—With the metropolitan one, there were upwards of about 16 schools. We had people coming from the eastern suburbs to the western suburbs which, for the out of town people, is quite a haul. The Craigieburn cluster is the Craigieburn South Primary School and the Craigieburn High School. They are on a similar campus, and we are looking at extending that model to the other schools in Craigieburn. Bacchus Marsh cluster is Bacchus Marsh Grammar, which is prep to year 12, Darley Primary School, Melton South Primary School and Sunbury Secondary College. But it is very recourse intensive—our time and the ongoing support of doing the training for the teachers and then rolling that model out to get the parents in. We are not going to do a one-off parent education thing with those projects because, to get the parents back into the system, the schools need to be helped to be able to really work with the parents on their needs; not just a one-off on how to stop bullying but to work further through the issues with them on what they can do if they are the mother or the father of a bully—those concrete examples.

Ms GILLARD—I note you say in your submission that your centre's funding is ceasing in the middle of next year. What will happen with those sorts of initiatives when your funding has ceased?

Ms Winstanley—We are in the throes of trying to become self-sufficient, and we close the doors. It is a case of either closing the doors or working in very strategic relationships with other people.

Ms GILLARD—You are wholly DETYA funded at the moment?

Ms Winstanley—No. It has been on a sliding scale for the last four years, and this is our last payment.

Ms GILLARD—What are the other sources of funds?

Ms Winstanley—We are identifying them: philanthropic trusts; wide publication—we think it is wide; and also the income from professional development.

Ms GILLARD—On a fee-for-service basis?

Ms Winstanley—Yes, but that is difficult in itself because our program is virtually Victoria-wide. We need to be on the road doing the regional areas, because the strongest need is with regional and country Victoria.

Ms Kennedy—The funding helps to maintain equality between the city and the regional areas. If we are charging $350 to a school in Williamstown, we will charge $350 to a school in Bendigo. What is being subsidised is the expense to go that far or to go Bairnsdale.

Ms GILLARD—If you have core funding, you can do that.

Ms Kennedy—That is right.

Ms GILLARD—But if you do not then you have to—

Ms Kennedy—If you do not, you have to charge the schools that are further away more because it costs more to get there.

Mr BARRESI—There is no state government funding?

Ms Winstanley—No.

Mr BARTLETT—Again, on those early encounters with literacy, you said that a range of approaches is best for most children. Is there any evidence regarding whether a range of teachers is best? For instance, are female teachers better than male teachers for teaching literacy in, say, kindergarten? Has any work been done on a combined approach of male and female teachers, a team teaching sort of approach?

Ms Ward—No, not that I am aware of, because, of course, there are very few male teachers in kindergarten.

Mr BARTLETT—Is there any research or evidence on the success rates with male teachers versus female teachers in kindergarten or pre-kindergarten?

Ms Ward—No, I do not think so.

Ms Kennedy—I do not have the statistics here, but there are very few male kindergarten teachers. As Loretta said earlier, parent involvement is quite high in kindergarten. I found that I was actually able to engage both fathers and mothers quite readily in kindergarten.

Mr BARTLETT—Was there any difference in ineffectiveness where the father and the mother were involved rather than just the mother?

Ms Kennedy—No.

Mr SAWFORD—I have a couple of definitional questions on your section on motivating boys. Would you define 'gender construction' for us? While you are at it, do the curriculum form for gender equity at the same time.

Ms Winstanley—There are different ways of looking at gender construction. You can have—

Mr SAWFORD—I am serious about this. When people use this term, they have different definitions. I want to know what your definition is.

Ms Kennedy—We talk a lot in professional development about the vision of masculinity in gender construction, what it is to be a man and where that comes from. We talk about it being genetic in part but also environmental. It is influenced by things like the projection in the media of what it is to be a man and also by the home environment and the expectations at home. It may be that the expectation for a boy at home is that you can sit and watch television or put your feet up and watch a video while your sister washes the dishes. What are the expectations and roles within that?

Mr SAWFORD—And the other one—gender equity in curriculum reform?

Ms Ward—The national framework for Australian schools, which was produced in 1997, had five strategic directions: understanding gender construction; curriculum reform for gender equity—schools have picked that up in interesting ways; in my school, girls are always at least 50 per cent of classes in which they appear, which means we have all-male classes as well because we have fewer boys than girls; combating gendered violence and sex based harassment; expanding post-school options; and supporting change. This was published in 1997 as the framework around which schools were to develop their equal opportunity policies.

CHAIR—Thank you very much. I appreciate all the effort you have put in to come to see us today and speak to us. It was very good. If you have any other thoughts or comments to make on anything else that you read or hear as we go along, please send it on to us.

Proceedings suspended from 3.37 p.m. to 3.52 p.m.

GARDNER, Mr Scot, Consultant, COOL Consulting

LITTLE, Mr Peter John, Consultant, COOL Consulting

CHAIR—Welcome. I invite you to give us a precis of your submission which we will then discuss, finishing at about 4.30 p.m.

Mr Little—I am a consultant but, in broader terms, I am also a bloke. I have set up my own business—COOL Consulting—and that offers a range of programs for boys, such as social skills, counselling. I work with Scot delivering the Footy, Beer and Girls program.

Mr Gardner—I work as a consultant with Peter. We have a fairly amicable relationship most of the time, and we do what we can to improve the lives of the young men that we come in contact with. Would you like me to give a quick overview?

CHAIR—Yes, if you would just go through things, that would be great.

Mr Gardner—Our submission looked at the fact that boys' education is going through a period of change. Some fairly significant change is needed to make school a more attractive place for young men. Lots of young men are finding other places to go to and other things to do that might not be quite as socially advantageous as we would like. We have been working in schools for about 2½ years and running programs like the Footy, Beer and Girls program, which is named a little illusively just to suck the young fellows in. You have got to have something that they feel they can identify with. The whole idea is a bit of a slippery eel. We are still not quite sure what we want as adults, let alone what we want as young people, so we are asking a fair bit of young people and educators to create an environment that suits both.

FBG is a forum for discussion and activities designed to pull away some of the veils of masculinity. Issues dealt with include violence, drug and alcohol use and misuse, risk taking behaviour, fathers and mentors, relationships, stereotype gender roles being male and the transition from boyhood to manhood. We are there to reduce aggressive and bullying behaviour by supporting the development of young men through discussions and activities.

Mr Little—I have to be careful with my language; we use straight language. We are up front; we do not bullshit. We get onto their level of being real and, I guess, show a bit of us so that they enter our lives. They see us for who we are. We do a bit of a gig—I guess we call it We want to break with tradition; we are not squareheads. I am not saying that people are. Scot, do you want to get out your didgeridoo?

Mr Gardner—We can do that as part of our overview.

Mr Little—It is not intended to offend anybody; that is not what it is about.

CHAIR—I presume that is a musical instrument. You start off by saying that you are a man and then there seems to be some challenge to that.

A didgeridoo was then played—

CHAIR—We should record in the *Hansard* that that was very good and that the committee members applauded.

Mr Little—Some people ask, 'Why the heck do you do that?' Why do you still have your tie on?

Mr Gardner—That is a good question. The tie is a symbol for the garrotte and for our willingness to comply and sacrifice what we need to sacrifice in order to become a man—whatever that is.

Mr Little—We say that the symbolism of a tie is that it cuts off the circulation between the head and the heart. Men are not very good at heart stuff. That is not intended to offend. We relate at a heart level with the boys our trials, our tribulations, our excitement and our good stuff.

Mr Gardner—The program encourages and challenges young men to be emotionally challenged: to sometimes not cop it so sweet. Sometimes we push the boundaries with them and challenge ideas that are perhaps antisocial, personally destructive or harmful in any other way. In a nutshell, our goals are to reduce the physical and non-physical violent behaviour that happens in schools. We do not do that by pointing a finger. We try to get in and talk about the games that we can play in life and can get away with without offending or hurting anybody; and about creating a safer school community by doing that and developing problem solving skills that do not include risk taking behaviour of a destructive nature. A lot of the information that is available today, like last year's inquiry into risk and protective factors and the survey by the Centre for Adolescent Health, shows that the programs that work are those that deal with young people as people first and as members of an institution somewhere way down the line. Our experience relates to our work. Perhaps you could talk a little about yourself, Pete.

Mr Little—I am Peter. I am married to Donna and we live in a big house.

Mr Gardner—Two big houses joined together with sticky tape.

Mr Little—I live in a place called Boolarra in Gippsland. It is a beautiful place. I live next to a pine plantation. I live in a yours and mine and our family. When I met Donna she had four children and I had two and we made Sam. Now I shoot blanks. We talk in that language to the kids expressing who we are. I have seven children and three live with us. There are a lot of comings and goings. I am passionate about what I do. I am interested in what affects boys and their lives, how that affects men and the impact on women. I am 45, but I do not feel 45. I play cricket because I enjoy it and I need to get out.

I am involved in a men's group, where a bunch of ordinary guys get together and chew the marrow out of life. We talk crap and bullshit, but we talk from the heart-speak level. For me, it is soul food. It has enriched my life and my family as well—they can see that I benefit from that. That is what we are on about: spreading the seed and enriching young people's lives.

Mr Gardner—Not a nice metaphor, mate; considering the context.

Mr Little—That is a little bit about me, and it is a big risk to say who you are, because it is not cool to do that.

Mr Gardner—I play a lot of music, not just didgeridoo. The work that we do in schools is supported by studies that I have done in massage and counselling. I work as a teacher with mentally ill people, teaching English and mathematics. That presents its own challenges, but it also supports the work that we do in conventional schools. For lots of boys, we believe the school environment is not an attractive place. This might be stating the painfully obvious. In terms of having a sense of association with the place, a sense of community, their education does not meet their physical, emotional or spiritual needs. It certainly—under duress sometimes—meets their academic needs, and we are not in a position to say, 'Throw the baby out with the bathwater.' We do feel as though the greatest reforms in education will come from inside, using infrastructure that is there. If any of the stuff we present to you is too far left field, accept our apologies and place it where you think it might fit.

Basically, the program is a social constructionist program. It is helping young men identify a place within the local community as well as a place within the school community. Our intention, and certainly our practice, is to involve people from the community who are experts in a field. When I say 'experts in a field' I do not necessarily mean high academic or high business achievers. I mean getting people who have had an amputation because of a road accident to talk about road trauma, or getting someone who is an ex-sex worker to talk about safe sex practices—people who can speak their own truths and their own stories from their hearts. We also include a young lady who suffers from drug induced psychoses to talk about the problems of excessive drug and alcohol consumption, and where the fine line is—and it is a fine line. So the idea of getting the community involved in whatever capacity we see fit always enhances the program.

We do a lot of rough-and-tumble with the young men, too. I do not know if you have ever sat in on a PE class. Generally, in a PE class there is a guiding teacher who sits aside from the process, and the young ladies and the young men rough it out in whatever they are doing—be it ropes, gymnastics, team sport or what have you. We can see a really nice symbol in the physical education environment, where the teacher actually gets involved physically and plays the games—does not just play the games from the sideline but is physically part of the team and can rough-and-tumble. The students, especially the young men, respond really well to that whole process. They like to bounce off us—I got a busted rib last year when we were playing a kind of combination between rugby and basketball with a group of young men. It is also a big debrief for us. It is a period of time when, if we have been discussing stuff that is a little bit heavy and a little bit heartfelt, the guys can go and let off a bit of steam. So that is an important part of the process.

Mr Little—Part of the content of the program includes, 'Who takes you seriously? Who listens to you? Does your dad give a shit about you? How much time do you spend with him?' We talk about sexuality, so it is really up-front and in their face. And they challenge us as much as we challenge them. We talk about, 'What does it mean to be a man? What do you have to do? How do you know when you're a man?' I ask the men here: how do you know? How did you know when you were a man? What told you; what was the defining moment? John Marsden talks about, 'You've got to go to war, you've got to kill an animal, you've got to have sex, you've got to get drunk—does that mean you are a man?' We challenge the boys about that.

I believe the school environment is where boys are learning how to be male, how to be men. If you look at the models—and this is not a criticism of the teaching profession—how are they learning to be men? This is crucial, and we actually do not assist them. We have a bit of a sign post: 'This is where we think you are going, and that will mean that when you get out to the work force, or whatever you are going to do in your life, you will be equipped to be a dad.' What do you have to do to be a dad? Fathering is actually a product of whole manhood: I am still learning how to be a dad and I will be for the rest of my life. We have a guy, Paul, who is in his seventies and he is still learning how to be a dad. So we are looking at this stuff as a continuum, and the boys deserve and need this stuff. I believe we have an ethical or moral responsibility as men in what we are teaching boys about being a man or about malehood. I am really passionate about that: boys need help, and they need to be surrounded by men.

Mr Gardner—During the process of a Footy, Beer and Girls discussion group—they normally run for about 10 weeks—we will say a lot of the things that are left unsaid, and try and get young men to commit to how they feel about certain things. That is really hard work at times. Generally they are not interested in committing. 'How do you feel about the idea of euthanasia?' 'Oh, I don't know.' We sometimes take a really extreme approach to getting them to react. Again, it is going down to their level, asking them something really stupid like: 'Should people fuck cows?' or 'Is it appropriate to hang-glide without a hang-glider?'—those sorts of ridiculous questions—just so that they will respond and integrate.

We are working with the group of people that are defined in the risk and protective factors survey as the 20 per cent that are very much at risk of antisocial behaviour and the variety of things that are associated with at risk teenagers. We believe that a lot of what we have to offer is also useful to the broader community, but we are dealing with the sore toe of education at the moment. Certainly in Gippsland, where we live in a rural environment, the statistics support the fact that delinquency and issues around the home environment are higher in our region, as well as in other regions in the state, than in the metropolitan area, although many things are very similar.

We try and foster silence for the young men. Some of the blokes that we are dealing with have one earphone in even when they are in conversation with us. Sometimes we have to accept that because it is part of their pressure relief valve: if something gets a little too heavy for them, then they will pretend that they are listening to the music. That is an acceptable thing within our group. We foster reverence for their bodies and talk about ways that we have damaged ourselves in our youth—drinking to excess and those sorts of risk taking behaviours that we embarked on when we were younger.

Mr Little—What I learnt from my dad—I was brought up on a dairy farm—was that you work hard, you do not get sick, it is not cool to get sick as a man, and you do not talk about your feelings—with working hard, and not getting sick, you have not got time to talk about your feelings. I love my dad dearly; he is still alive. But I did learn something very valuable, and that was that I have got his passion or drive. This work with boys and men is a passion for me. It is something that I want to instil in my own boys and in other men as well.

Mr Gardner—I guess a lot of the things that we are talking about at this stage are anecdotal and based on our empirical observations of the young men that we are dealing with. There have been studies in the States and, more recently, in Victoria that have found some interesting things

about pro-social and constructionist type programs: that they are more supportive and constructive to learning and wellbeing than the programs that go out wholly and solely to give information to young people. Getting them involved is the thing that counts. I will read a little from an article by Robert Blum in the *Journal of Adolescent Health*, Vol. 22, No. 5, 1998. It states:

Jessor and Jessor, Schorr, and Little are among those who have extensively analysed youth programs to identify the key elements for success. The following represents a synthesis of their finds as applied to the PCAP model. Resiliency-based programs are built upon communitywide intersectoral collaborations that are not bounded by traditional agency roles or administrative constraints; are focused on enhancing competence in young people at least as much as reducing a given risk behaviour or undesirable outcome; see youth as part of the solution, not just the focus of the problem; start early in the life of young people; are intensive, continuous and developmentally appropriate; have staff who are collaborative, interdisciplinary, and not overly professionalized; are willing to do what it takes to be successful; and values young people.

I did not know what to expect when we were coming here. I guess, to give us a stereotype, we are hicks; we do not spend a lot of time in the city; our life is based in rural Victoria. I did not know whether there would be young people involved in the committee, and I wondered whether it would be appropriate that we were trying to help young people to learn. Surely, they would be more sensitive than us to the things that peak their attention, the things that would sound interesting to them or that might be constructive ways of changing the system. I am a little disappointed that there are no young people here, but I understand it is part of the process and that perhaps they will be involved a little further down the line.

CHAIR—Can we ask you a few questions at this stage? Otherwise, we are going to run out of time.

Mr Gardner—Sure.

CHAIR—Firstly, the way the system works is that this is a parliamentary committee. It is like a subcommittee of the parliament, and the convention is that a member of the government chairs the committee—at the moment, that is me—the majority of us are government members and the minority of us are opposition members. So, by definition, we do not have any kids here unless we get kids into parliament at some stage—a kid, to my way of thinking, at least being under 18, so it is not likely to happen soon. But we have already arranged to talk to kids in different sorts of settings during the course of this inquiry.

The other thing is that, basically—with some obvious exceptions—we reflect society itself; we have our own experiences and so on. Kerry is the member for Macquarie and used to be a teacher in the Blue Mountains of New South Wales. Phil Barresi looks after the electorate of Deakin in the eastern suburbs of Melbourne and is also a member of the government. Rod is a Labor member from Struggle Street in Port Adelaide and is a former teacher.

Mr SAWFORD—That is where all the good people live.

CHAIR—There are a lot of battlers down that way. It is the same for Julia, who is the Labor Party representative for the electorate of Lalor here in Victoria—Barry Jones's old seat. Craig represents the Labor Party in typical outer metropolitan Brisbane where a lot of people are doing it really tough. My electorate is in the upper North Shore of Sydney which is one of the most affluent and highly educated electorates in the country.

Firstly, how do you get your funding? I presume that schools engage you on a consultancy basis to do a job for them. What sorts of schools have you been to?

Mr Gardner—We have been to government schools and non-government schools. We have done a couple of presentations in the Catholic school system, and we have worked in all the schools within the Latrobe Valley. We have been to about nine schools or something like that.

Mr Little—The funding is mainly through either the schools themselves or what is called the School Focused Youth Service that is set up in Victoria.

Mr Gardner—But we have been funded by community service organisations as well to run the programs in conjunction with youth type support settings: a refuge and a place like a youth refuge where they can come and play pinnies and be in a safe environment.

CHAIR—So you are basically dealing with kids who are still at school but are really on the edge, and they are boys?

Mr Gardner—Yes. The majority are boys, and the program is designed to work with boys.

Mr Little—But we are also working with kids who are seemingly okay, well-adjusted.

CHAIR—In your submission—and you have alluded to it today—a lot of the kids you deal with are fatherless, there being all sorts of causes for fatherlessness. Is that, at least in your experience, one of the themes that run through the lives of boys that are having trouble, or is it not? Some have suggested that among the reasons why boys are not doing well are the complications of divorce, marriage breakdown and all that sort of thing.

Mr Gardner—That would certainly hold water from my observations. Until we started working in the Catholic education system, we had not come across one young man—and we are talking 150 or perhaps 180 young men—selected for the course by their peers and by their teachers who actually had a father figure in his life. So, in our observation, yes, it is very much associated.

CHAIR—A hundred and fifty to 180 kids without a father?

Mr Gardner—Not one father figure. They were selected by the teachers as being ones who may benefit.

CHAIR—It just happened—they were not chosen for that reason, obviously?

Mr Gardner—No.

Mr Little—I would also be aware if there is a dad figure, whether it is dad or step-dad or an uncle, of just what input they are having into the young man's or young person's life. If dad is off working and doing a whole lot of other things, he is not really having much input. So you could argue the other way.

CHAIR—I strongly support the concept of what you are doing, and over the years I have worked with kids in this sort of area myself. Footy, Beer and Girls is clearly a very attractive concept to a significant proportion of boys—it is an accessible, boy-friendly kind of thing—but there are a couple of issues. One is that part of the problem, as some people have said to us, is that we are actually trying to change concepts of masculinity away from V8 Toranas or the Daiwoos or whatever they are interested in now, to cover other concepts of masculinity and male role models—for example, that some good male role models wear ties. The second issue is: is it doing more harm to kids who might be gay or kids who might be more interested in music and drama than they are in tuning up their V8? Do you know what I mean?

Mr Gardner—Sure—great insight. The naming of the program is pretty subversive. In order to get the young men engaged, sometimes you really do have to stretch. Some of the blokes we are dealing with are really not interested in much schooling at all, so in order to make the program stand out we gave it the name. We are very conscious of making our presentations in a non-stereotypical way. We are providing role models and certainly the people we are selecting from the community are providing role models that do not follow that 'footy, beer and girls' path. Although there is a lot of ocker association with the whole deal and we do a lot of banter associated with it like, 'When are you going to bring in the pornos?' or, 'When will you be bringing in the beer for us?' and that sort of thing, it stops there and the work that we do drags them into a deeper space where they can be more communicative and more honest regarding the concept of a child or a young man coming to us that is homosexual.

Pete's brother is homosexual. When I was 18, I was picked up hitchhiking by a gay guy and I learnt through the experience not to fear homosexuals. Although at the time it was very nauseating and I felt horrible about myself, I realised that it also reflected on the way that I would relate to women. A lot of the presentation we do with Footy, Beer and Girls is based on our personal experiences. To engage young men telling personal stories rather than drawing from textbooks or from other sources has a lot more power for us.

Mr Little—I like one of the things you said about changing masculinity. What does it mean to be male anyway, whether in the 1960s, the 1980s, the year 2000 and beyond? Do we have to be locked in? That is what I am saying and that is what we are about: do you have to be locked into what being male is about? That is what we are encouraging boys to consider: if you want to get in your fast cars, okay; but if you want to do something that is a bit different or not considered male, okay.

Mr SAWFORD—For me, the essential part of the quote you used from Robert Blum was confidence. If you can teach boys or girls confidence, all the rest will follow. You talk about a connect that is basically emotional. In a trinity of human behaviour, there is an intellectual connect, there is an emotional connect, there is a physical connect. Some people would argue there is a spiritual connect, and you could add a technological connect and all the rest of it. You focus on one. What do you do about the others?

Mr Little—I would not necessarily say we focus on one. We will talk some head stuff. We will relate on a head level, an intellectual level, with the boys.

Mr Gardner—We certainly engage on a physical level with the boys and we connect on that level. One of the things that happens after five or six weeks in a program is that the young men

will spot us in the school before we actually get to our classroom, and one of the classic communication gestures is a hip and shoulder hug or they will jump up and scruff our hair or something like that. Is that the sort of thing that you are asking about, the levels of connection? No?

Mr SAWFORD—I am just saying that we are all different and that people connect in different ways. Just because someone does not connect in a strong overtly emotional way does not mean they cannot connect.

Mr Gardner—Precisely.

Mr SAWFORD—People connect in all sorts of ways. There is no right or wrong way. In terms of masculinity, it is what you think: if you think you are okay as a man, fine. It is when you have doubts and when those doubts then start to impact negatively on your behaviour that you have a problem. That can be because of what other people say. Let me make sure I have got this right: you have dealt with 150 to 180 young people, not one with a father figure?

Mr Gardner—Not one with a father figure—that is correct.

Mr SAWFORD—In rural Victoria?

Mr Gardner—Yes.

Mr SAWFORD—And basically you have concentrated, as I understand it, on trying to make an emotional connection. I am not making a judgment; I am just trying to feed back what you have described to us.

Mr Gardner—Yes, but the emotional connection is not the only way that we are connecting. We do lots of discussions and games that allow young men to connect in lots of other ways. I am not quite sure of what you perceive as a 'connection'. We may have a connection just through telling a story that does not have anything to do with the emotion. For example, this morning I was talking with the group that we are working with about brush-cutting a black snake at the weekend—I ran my brush-cutter over the top of a black snake. It scared the life out of the snake and it scared the life out of me. A young fellow and I had a discussion for about 15 minutes afterwards about snakes and about his sensitivity towards snakes—he is frightened of them, but enjoys them as well. There was a certain amount of rapport there. Often, as you said, all that we need to do is develop a confidence. If the confidence can be developed by any sort of rapport, then good and well.

Mr SAWFORD—Are you essentially just developing relationship skills and calling it something else?

Mr Gardner—We are certainly doing that.

Mr Little—That is part of it, not all of it.

Mr Gardner—Is a relationship skill self-confidence?

Mr SAWFORD—Definitely—it would be the first one, wouldn't it?

Mr Gardner—Yes, so relationship with self.

Mr SAWFORD—I am not sure where you are going. I know where you are coming in and I have got some idea that you have a view about masculinity which is an in-your-face view. That is fine, there is nothing wrong with that. I am not too sure where you are going.

CHAIR—Port Adelaide supporters are always like this—or should I say Port Power.

Mr SAWFORD—I am not sure where you are going.

Mr BARRESI—I am not sure if this is what Rod is referring to, but certainly I am wondering what happens after the program. What have you left the kids with so that they can walk away and handle whatever relationship they are going to be confronted with thereafter?

Mr Gardner—That is a good question. It is pretty intangible in a lot of respects, though we definitely increase the level of communication between the staff members selected by the students. One of the things we do when we go into a school is ask young people, 'What are the teachers like in this school?' And they give a pretty honest and axe-like appreciation of what the teachers are like: 'Ah, they're wankers; they don't give a shit about us. Except Sando—he's all right.' 'What's different about Sando?' 'Ah, he gives a shit about us—you know, he doesn't crack at us all the time.' And that sort of thing. So we will draw on the connections that they perceive and increase the level of communication that is happening there. We will report to the teacher that he is the one or she is the one that they think are the best teacher within the school system. So the program is involved in increasing the level of communication between staff and students—there is no doubt about that.

Mr BARRESI—Has that made them more confident and more able to handle the curriculum aspects of their education? That is what this inquiry is about: boys education. You may very well be filling a gap in their lives—not having a father—and also getting them to question that whole issue of masculinity, but at the end of the day, what happens to them? Are the retention levels in the school increasing and reflective of their new-found knowledge?

Mr Gardner—I wish we had $100,000 to spend on research for that sort of thing, or the places to go and do that.

Mr BARRESI—Even anecdotally.

Mr Gardner—Anecdotally, certainly. The whole idea of education being an academic pursuit ruffles my feathers a little, because there are a whole lot of connections that go on in school. Most of the programs you see on television that are about school are not about the academic pursuits; they are about socialisation—there is a huge amount of socialisation that happens in the school that does not happen anywhere else. The education and academic merits are paramount, in our experience, and it is trying to wrestle with the idea that these young men just want out, no matter what: there is nothing in school that satisfies them. Giving them something that is a little more heartfelt, a little less academic, is sometimes just enough for them to realise they have a place.

Mr BARTLETT—If you could make some specific policy recommendations to the government to address those motivational problems to overcome disengagement from the educational process and educational disadvantage, what two or three things would be on the top of your list about the sorts of things government should be doing?

Mr Gardner—One would be the possibility of employing teachers on the basis of personality rather than academic achievement. This is not a besmirching; it is just the idea that there are some things that are not covered in academic achievement that are needed in schools.

Mr BARTLETT—What if we respond to that by saying that the problem is really getting enough teachers there anyway. It is not that there is a great waiting list of people bashing at the gates trying to get into teaching.

Mr Gardner—Do you feel that there is a lack of teachers within the system?

CHAIR—Well, for example, the principal of Scotch College said to us this morning that he doubts that there is a single kid in his school who would want to be a teacher—he, of course, has spent his whole life committed to teaching. What he is basically saying is that no kid in their right mind—as the kids see it—would go into teaching. They do not see it as an attractive career—particularly boys going into teaching. So, as Kerry is saying, if we culled out the ones who we thought had the wrong personality—whatever sort of personality you might be looking for in teachers—we would have even less.

Mr Gardner—I guess it is not a case of—

CHAIR—I know what you mean.

Mr Gardner—culling the ones that do not have the right personality; it is the idea of including people who do not have an academic background in schools.

CHAIR—We have just spent over a year looking at career transition and mature age unemployment, for example. Two state and territory governments in Australia have been trying to pension off teachers who are over the age of 45 when, in fact, we ought to be recruiting people of that age into teaching from other walks of life. Maybe that would help: people who have life experience.

Mr Gardner—Absolutely. That is right. It is high on the list, that is for sure.

CHAIR—If you were talking to the state education minister or to Dr Kemp or if the Prime Minister was here, apart from some of the colourful language you guys use with the kids, what would you say that you would like to see happen which would help address the problems you work with on a day-to-day basis?

Mr Gardner—I would talk about the idea of pre-vocational training for teachers that might accommodate a personal interactive sense to give them the tools to communicate on levels other than an academic one. Teachers are fulfilling the role of super parent in a lot of ways. The teachers that are there sometimes have 20 very unruly students in one group and each one of those students is giving their parents hell. They come to school and they are clumped in with

this one teacher. I would talk about the idea of preparing a teacher for that sort of situation—pro social and emotional development type programs.

Mr Little—Part of it as well is that kids learn teachers not subjects, as you were saying before. They identify with Mr Bloggs or Mr Smith or whoever. Part of the deal is to make the curriculum a bit more attractive. Kids do not actually enjoy going to school. They go to school to socialise, as Scot is saying. We need to be a bit smarter in that, just in some of the stuff that we do.

Mr Gardner—As an experiment, we asked what a young person would develop as a curriculum. Excluding things like alcohol consumption at school and Internet pornography, which were right at the top of the list, there were things like pyrotechnics or learning how to blow things up, putting cars together, enterprises that earn money, how to do burnouts and survive, bush riding with your motorbike, first aid for the underage drinker—which probably has some merit—PlayStation cheats and tournaments. Some of these are a bit tongue in cheek, obviously, from the students. Those are the sorts of things that are motivating the young men that we are dealing with. Sometimes it seems like an insurmountable gap within the system.

Mr Little—Maybe part of it is the competing interests of an adult perspective of outcomes and performance levels. I am not saying that governments are set up, but are kids really interested in retention rates? In their life, at their time—14, 15 or 16—what are they more concerned about? We actually need to get a bit smarter at that.

CHAIR—I am sorry to say this but being the conformists that we are, it is 25 to five and we have to finish. Thank you for coming. It is funny: I often tell kids that the most important things I learn in my own life are when I least expect to and are from the people who I would not expect to learn anything from. In a strange way, I think that you have had quite an impact today. I mean that in a positive sense. I think we all appreciate that there is a particular group of kids that you work with and for that we are very grateful.

Mr Little—I respect what you are saying and I guess we did that intentionally, not with a view to impact or high performance but because we are passionate about what we are doing. We are not saying that we will change the world but we believe that we can have some influence.

CHAIR—It was very good of you to openly tell us a lot today but there was a reference to your brother, Peter, and to Scot's experience trying to get a ride from one place to another. Would you like those two things removed from *Hansard* ?

Mr Gardner—Certainly not in my case.

Mr Little—No.

CHAIR—That is fine. Thank you very much and good luck. Please keep us up to date, even after this inquiry has finished. It is like watering plants—it is hard to judge the impact that it has had but you know that it does good.

[4.36 p.m.]

MARGETTS, Ms Kay (Private capacity)

CHAIR—Welcome. If you have any comments to make on the capacity in which you appear today, please do so, and then give us a precis of your submission.

Ms Margetts—Thank you for giving me the opportunity to speak with you. I am appearing in a private capacity but I do work at the Department of Learning and Education Development, which is in the Faculty of Education at the University of Melbourne. I am currently undertaking a PhD, which has involved the studies which I will be referring to in the submission.

CHAIR—You are not a didgeridoo player?

Ms Margetts—Women should not play the didgeridoo, so as much as I would like to be a didgeridoo player, I feel that that might not be appropriate. I have prepared a summary of my submission. In my submission, I tried to address the terms of reference of the inquiry related to the social, cultural and educational factors affecting the education of boys in Australian schools, particularly in relation to the social skills and the behaviour of children as they enter school. So, children in that first year of schooling.

I presented my research findings, which suggest that the transition to the first year of school is perceived as one of the critical factors or major challenges that children have to face in their early childhood years and that this transition and how well the transition is handled can be a critical factor for children's adjustments to the demands of the school environment and in determining future school success. We know that, when children experience social and behavioural problems in those early years of school, they are likely to continue to experience those problems throughout their schooling. Therefore, the first year of school is really very critical. We believe that the absence of or difficulty with social or cognitive skills and the presence of problem behaviours generally impact on children's adjustment to school and are seen to indicate maladjustment.

Gender is one of a number of factors associated with children's adjustment to that first year of schooling. Gender has been associated with adjustment to schooling with boys generally having significantly more difficulty adjusting to school than girls. Given the pervasiveness of these school adjustment problems in having a lasting or cumulative effect and the potential costs to the individual and to society, I think there is a need to better understand the early school adjustment process and to identify predictors of children's adjustment to the first year of school and strategies to assist children in addressing any problems.

Just briefly looking at adjustment to school, it requires children to meet academic and social or cultural standards of personal independence and responsibility and to behave in ways that are acceptable to the classroom teacher. Of course, this is going to vary from school to school and from teacher to teacher.

Children are at risk of not adjusting easily to school when there is a mismatch between the skills, attitudes and knowledge that children bring to school and the expectations of the school itself. A range of social skills associated with cooperation; initiating interactions or assertion;

self control; low levels of frequent aggressive, anxious or restless behaviours; and comparative reading and mathematical skills are seen to influence adjustment. These have been identified in a study that I conducted using a process we call structural equation modelling techniques for explaining and exploring the direct and independent and indirect effects of the observable variables. It was worth noting from that study that social and behavioural adjustment impacted on academic competence.

An earlier study that I conducted identified factors that impacted on children's adjustment to the first year of school in relation to similar measures. The results of this study suggested that children who attended schools that conducted a higher number of transition activities—that is, those experiences that are provided to help children bridge the gap between preschool and school—adjusted significantly better to school than children who had attended schools that conducted more limited transition programs.

We also found that a number of other factors affected children's adjustment. These included gender, with boys having more difficulty than girls in terms of social skills and behaviours in adjusting to school. Relative age did contribute but only in terms of children's academic performance and not in terms of the behavioural or social skills that children possessed. Children's home language was a critical factor, with children from homes that spoke English adjusting significantly better in all domains of adjustment compared with children who did not speak English at home or spoke English in conjunction with another language.

Attendance at preschool services was also seen to impact on children's adjustment to school, with children who attended preschool for more than 13 hours a week having more difficulty adjusting to school. Linked with that, too, was a difference between the children who attended sessional kindergarten and those who attended long day care, with the children attending long day care experiencing more difficulties, or being rated as having more difficulties, in relation to their problem behaviours. It is interesting, too, that in the study I conducted very few schools actually approached child-care centres in relation to children's adjustment to school, so there was not a link that might be seen as quite critical in terms of children having school visits and things before they start, especially those children attending child care.

A factor that was very significantly strong was having a familiar playmate in the same class. Where children had a familiar playmate in the same class in that first year of schooling, their adjustment was significantly better than children who did not have that familiar playmate in the same class. That then led to a further study, and I briefly presented the preliminary results from this current study that explores factors predicting children's adjustment to school. These included things like family background, prior to school contexts, arrangement for the parental and non-parental care of children and school transition experiences. Preliminary results indicate that gender is the significant predictor of a number of social and behavioural constructs when first entered in regression analyses and also in the final step.

While gender significantly contributed to academic competence at the point of entry in these regression analyses, this significance was not maintained when it was included in the final step where we had those other significant factors included. Basically, these results suggest that being a girl is significantly associated with higher scores for measures of social skills and lower scores for problem behaviours, after allowing for the contribution of a range of personal demographic

and school factors and indexes of childcare. It is worth noting here that, in these preliminary analyses, comprehensive transition programs mediated negative factors.

In my submission I also made a number of recommendations or suggestions in relation to the knowledge skills and abilities needed for successful adjustment to the first year of schooling. Taken together with the discontinuities or challenges facing children as they commence school, it is important that children at preschool are encouraged and supported to interact with their peers and adults in positive ways. This should include support in conflict and non-conflict situations. It is important also that children have an awareness of letters and numbers and are able to concentrate and complete simple tasks.

In addition, it is important that teachers in preschool and the early years of schooling are aware of and skilled in identifying the knowledge, skills and attitudes that may assist children with the transition into the first year of schooling, and that they are adept at implementing appropriate strategies and teaching techniques to support positive outcomes, particularly for mediating children at risk or having difficulty adjusting to school. Furthermore, the implementation of programs for effective transition to school, which are designed to address the difficulties and challenges facing children as they commence the first year of schooling, and including a focus on continuity of experience, should also support children's adjustment to school, and may help address the imbalance between boys and girls in their adjustment to school.

Given the significance of other factors—particularly father occupation, relative family income and school factors—on adjustment outcomes, further exploration of demographic impact should be undertaken, and their implications for intervention articulated. It is my belief that teachers should be trained in and skilled at identifying children experiencing social, behavioural and academic difficulties, and in the implementation of appropriate strategies that respond to these difficulties in such a way as to support the child in strengthening the desired skills and abilities. This includes that continuity of practice from preschool to the early years of schooling. This also requires professionals to be aware of societal and their own gender based stereotypical responses to children of each gender, that may actually contribute to the social and behavioural difficulties to which boys are more vulnerable. Therefore, these teachers need to modify their responses accordingly.

Whilst not overtly mentioned in my submission, the more holistic, individual and flexible approach to learning and teaching that we see exemplified in the preschool sector accounts for the more positive child outcomes at the end of preschool. The lack of this approach in the primary sector accounts for the widening and significant gap in the behavioural and academic performance of boys and girls in the primary school sector.

CHAIR—Thank you very much, that was pretty comprehensive. It all sounds complex, listening to it. How would you explain it to parents in plain language? For example, are you telling us that the more time kids spend in preschool, the less well adjusted they are when they go on? What advice should be given to us?

Ms Margetts—If parents are presented with facts then they have the opportunity to make their own judgments. So from these preliminary results it would appear that children who attend

preschool are adjusting better to the first year of schooling than children who are attending centre based child care.

Mr SAWFORD—In the language you used in study 1, you described boys as having 'lower scores for cooperation, assertion and self-control'. I would have thought the assertion one was a bit questionable, but let us accept what you are saying. Then you described boys as having higher scores than girls also for negative behaviours: 'hyperactivity and externalising problems'. Then in study 2, you say gender 'emerged as a very significant predictor of cooperation', but you do not mention competition. You use it as 'summed social skills', but you do not use it as summed physical skills or technological skills. You describe 'externalising behaviour', but you ignore internalising behaviour. You describe 'hyperactivity', but ignore passivity. And you include 'summed behaviour', but ignore disaggregated behaviour. Do you think that is not taking everything into account when children are in their first year of school?

Ms Margetts—I do not know what you mean by 'disaggregated behaviour'; I do not think I have used that word. Can you tell me which page that is on?

Mr SAWFORD—Cooperation is often viewed by some people in our society as a very positive model and competition as not positive. But not everyone sees it that way. People often regard social skills highly, which girls are much better at. But I would have thought boys are much better at physical skills in that first year of schooling. They are much better at technological skills as well. So in terms of gender differences, boys and girls are different in that first year of school. Sometimes, if you value cooperation and you do not favour competition, your judgments about the gender or the person are affected. So I am suggesting that in your studies you have described some behaviours as positive, and yet not everyone would agree that some of those other behaviours are not also positive. There are no positive behaviours about boys at all in their first year of school—I find that remarkable. Not one positive behaviour. Do you think you might have a bit of a problem with the language in how you are describing boys' behaviour?

Ms Margetts—All I am doing is reporting the results of the study that used, as a tool, an instrument that has been tested, 'normed', has good validity and is a recommended instrument. My study was looking at measuring children's adjustment to school. Gender was not part of my criteria. It just happened that it is very easy to determine gender—we are either male or female. I certainly agree with you that boys and girls are different. All I am reporting are the results of the study. If it appears that boys are more at risk than girls, then this is what this study is revealing. I find that a useful thing. The purpose of the study was concealed from the teachers. They ranked children according to 'very often', 'sometimes' and 'rarely'—the terms regarding when they saw these behaviours being performed, and then they were analysed and so forth. All I am doing is reporting the results. If there are no positive results from boys, it is not for a lack of looking for them or wanting them to be there.

Mr SAWFORD—Why aren't they there? Surely, boys that have come from a preschool centre would exhibit some positive behaviours in their first year of school. Surely, some girls from a child-care centre, according to your study, would exhibit some negative behaviours in their first year at school.

Ms Margetts—They do, but what we're looking—

Mr SAWFORD—You do not mention them.

Ms Margetts—The purpose of the study was to identify factors that influence children's adjustment to school. We looked at gender. Certainly, we have identified what the main findings were in terms of gender.

Mr SAWFORD—Problems with boys.

Ms Margetts—There were also positives for girls, but they were—

Mr SAWFORD—Yes, there were positives for girls. That is exactly the point that I am making.

Ms Margetts—There were no other significant statistical findings. I cannot report something that was not there. If there was no significance, it means that there was not a difference between boys and girls. What is not reported is where there is not a difference between boys and girls. What you are getting are the results that were significant statistically.

Mr SAWFORD—Who interpreted the results?

Ms Margetts—My supervisor and I did. We used Pearson correlation procedures for that.

Mr SAWFORD—I do not wish to be provocative, but it is not a new thing to say that some women—many women—have a problem coping with boys.

Ms Margetts—Are you implying that I have problems coping?

Mr SAWFORD—No, I am not making it personal at all. I am making a general statement that throughout our history—if you go back and look at 4,000 years worth of Jewish or Christian history—women have had trouble with boys. Do you think these studies reflect more of that than actuality?

Ms Margetts—I have not got those results for you. As a matter of interest—because I thought this question might be asked—I went back to some of my present data and I looked at the gender of the preschool teacher in determining children's adjustment to preschool. It would appear from some initial investigations that, in terms of cooperative behaviours, female teachers tended to rate boys differently from girls. I would not like to be quoted on that as such. That is just a quick initial look because I had pre-empted that that might be a question that you would ask. I certainly think that that is something that we need to look at. I believe that. That is why I made the recommendation that we look at our own stereotypical behaviours as teachers, become aware of them and implement strategies in teaching to overcome some of those. I think it is very important that that happens. I would agree with you very much on that statement.

Mr BARTLETT—You mentioned that, aside from gender, relative age was one of the biggest factors impacting on academic performance—presumably literacy and numeracy skills and the development thereof. How significant an impact does it have? Are there measurements

in terms of months of age difference and relative levels of literacy and numeracy? Secondly, and related to that, is that regardless of attendance or not at preschool?

Ms Margetts—Those results are regardless of attendance or not at pre-school. They were looking at children's adjustment in terms of rated academic competence by the teacher. The particular factors that contributed to that domain of academic competence were particularly mathematical and reading ability.

Mr BARTLETT—So whether or not a young boy, for instance, had attended preschool, his age was one of the biggest factors in determining ability to perhaps literacy and numeracy skills?

Ms Margetts—Yes. It was not by gender; it was just by relative age.

Mr BARTLETT—I am focusing on boys because that is what I am worried about. Equally, we would say—and most studies would seem to show—that, developmentally, boys at that age are behind girls in any case in terms of physioneurological development. So presumably then that is a factor as well.

Ms Margetts—That is not something that I have looked at. What we do know is that experience is important and influences children's development. So neurophysical characteristics are one aspect, but we also know that the environment and the experience interact with our genotype to express our phenotype. It is a very complex system.

Mr BARTLETT—Generally what you are saying then is that boys starting younger have greater difficulty developing literacy and numeracy skills?

Ms Margetts—I have not said that.

Mr BARTLETT—You are not saying that. You are saying relative age though?

Ms Margetts—I am saying relative age. The younger child—and it is only at the slightly significant level—has more difficulty than the older child in terms of academic competence.

Mr BARTLETT—Presumably if you are saying that, then you would be saying that boys starting younger than boys starting older have relative difficulty then?

Ms Margetts—You could say that but you could also say that girls starting younger would have relative difficulty. But in terms of adjustment to school, certainly, when you take the combination, it would appear that boys would have more difficulty in having a smooth adjustment to school.

Mr BARTLETT—Both in terms of social behaviour and academic performance.

Ms Margetts—Yes, when you look at that, you are getting a better picture.

Mr BARTLETT—Is there an argument then, both in terms of social behaviour at transition and academic performance, for boys that are borderline in terms of age of entry to school—parents who are ambivalent about starting their boys at school—for delaying their commencement at school for that year?

Ms Margetts—It is a complex factor—we are humans, not objects. I think that the issue of when children are ready for school depends on the individual child's characteristics. It really does not matter whether they are a boy or a girl. If they have the skills and abilities to cope with the challenge of the new environment into which they are going—and those are going to vary from school to school—should be more the criteria than age.

Mr BARRESI—Sure, but you are saying that the study shows that relative age is a factor?

Ms Margetts—In terms of children's academic competence.

Mr BARTLETT—Given that children fall behind in that first year or two in terms of literacy and numeracy and find it very hard in later years to catch up, presumably then adequate screening needs to be done to ensure that particularly those who are borderline in terms of age are socially and academically ready.

Ms Margetts—I would suggest that it is the social and behavioural skills that are important. But I also think that it is the teaching. I do not think it is just the child. There seems to be a widening gap as the child progresses through primary school. I have a sense that our primary schoolteachers have a different approach to teaching, that it is more a group approach rather than an individual approach. I think the individual approach is very critical, particularly in relation to our boys and our girls. As Mr Sawford commented, boys and girls are different. He also mentioned that he felt females have a difficulty with boys. I believe this may also impact on the progress that our boys are making through school. I do not think it is just what happens to them at transition. I think it is part of the teaching process.

Mr BARTLETT—Sure, but success or failure in that first year is very significant.

Ms Margetts—What we are saying is that how well a child adjusts to the first year of school seems to be critical for future adjustment.

Mr BARTLETT—Is it your view that screening processes are adequate or that we ought to be erring on the side of caution in terms of the commencement age?

Ms Margetts—No, I would not do it on age. I think it is about skills.

Mr BARTLETT—Even though you say that age is a significant factor?

Ms Margetts—That is only on academic competence, and academic competence is only one part of our whole life.

Mr BARTLETT—But in developing ability to grasp literacy and numeracy skills, that is certainly significant.

Ms Margetts—Yes, but also the relationship between academic competence and behavioural and social skills is very strong. In fact, that is stronger. The age and the academic competence are only at your 0.05 level of significance, whereas your behavioural and social skills and academic competence are right up at almost the 0.00 level.

Mr BARTLETT—Behavioural development is a bigger problem with younger boys than with older boys?

Ms Margetts—No, because age did not impact on behavioural or social skills. There was no significant correlation between age and behaviour, which was very interesting.

Mr EMERSON—I want to start with a clarification. I thought you said earlier on that kids who had more than 13 hours per week of preschool actually found it harder to adjust to school?

Ms Margetts—More difficult, yes.

Mr EMERSON—Are you saying that we should not send kids to preschool?

Ms Margetts—No, I am not saying that at all. It is just that the results of that study showed that children who had these 13 hours or more had more difficulty adjusting. Some further study was done, and the children who were attending more seemed to be the children who were attending long-day child care That was investigated as well, and that is where that factor came in.

Mr EMERSON—I am sorry, I am just a bit confused: long-day child care is not preschool?

Ms Margetts—No. Sessional preschool is usually attended for two or three hours a day—sometimes five hours a day—up to about 10 or 12 hours a week. The children are not there full time. They usually go home to their parents after that or they might then go on to a child-care centre. That has changed since that study was done, because more money is now being put into child care to provide what we call the kindergarten program for our four-year-olds.

Mr EMERSON—So there were potentially three categories: children who attended more than 13 hours of preschool, children who attended between zero and 13 hours of preschool and children who did not attend preschool at all. Which were the better adjusted kids in terms of going on.?

Ms Margetts—The children who attended zero to13 hours and the children who were at home—in that study. In a current study I am doing, that is not necessarily the case.

Mr EMERSON—Maybe one of the explanations for that is that that is not the root cause, that they got more than 13 hours of preschool and that scrambled their brains in some way and made them poorly adjusted.

Ms Margetts—No, we are just saying that there was a connection between more hours of care and the children's behavioural and social skills. It is really worth looking at.

Mr EMERSON—Maybe the greater than 13 hours of preschool was symptomatic of the fact that mum and dad were working and that they had to send them to preschool, that there was a bigger and wider social problem.

Ms Margetts—That is why the next study looked at some of the demographic factors.

Mr EMERSON—If a dose of preschool—say, zero to 13 hours—is a good thing and is better than zero and better than 13 plus, then is there merit in putting preschool teachers into child-care centres? There is some evidence that children from poorer neighbourhoods are underrepresented in preschool. Why? Because their parents' work commitments mean that they cannot come home at 2 o'clock in the afternoon and pick them up from preschool, they put them in long day care centres. Traditionally, long day care centres have not had an educational component, or, if they have, it would arguably be a less educational component than in a preschool. If that were all true, would it make sense, as a way of dealing with the shortage of preschool education for children from low socioeconomic backgrounds, to have, at the very least, some sort of education component mandated or put into childcare centres in those areas?

Ms Margetts—Not necessarily, because some current studies I have done, and also studies that other people have done here in Australia, show that longer hours and more days of centre based care are having adverse effects on children's development.

Mr EMERSON—Sure, but what are the options for those parents?

Ms Margetts—What are the options? Maybe we have got to look at the quality and the structure of that long day care program. Maybe it comes down to a big funding thing where we need more staff so that we have got good staff-child ratios instead of children being herded together and institutionalised. I think it addresses a much bigger issue. I do not think it is as simple as putting in a preschool teacher, because you could have a preschool teacher but you could have her in a very small room with a lot of children. The teacher is an employee; she does not have the say of how many children she is teaching or the setting. So it is a very complex issue, and it is not easily solved by just saying, 'Put in a qualified teacher.'

Mr EMERSON—I would not say it would solve it, but would that be an improvement that would be better than nothing?

Ms Margetts—Certainly, the level of qualification of staff in long day care has an impact on the quality of the program. Again, that is a whole big issue because a lot of our teachers do not want to work in preschool because of the disparity in salary between the preschool teacher and the primary teacher, yet they have each done a four-year tertiary degree. It is not an easy question.

Mr BARRESI—I am interested in your comment about the transition to school being a far more productive one if there is a mate that moves across with them. Yet kids make friends very easily and are able to break down whatever barriers there are in a new environment much faster than adults can. How much of an advantage is it to have someone go across to school with you, given that within a couple of weeks you are going to have an army of friends?

Ms Margetts—That is a generalisation; you may not have an army of friends. To draw an analogy, if you are on your own and you go somewhere new, you go to a big cocktail party or a big function where you are on your own—

Mr BARRESI—I am an adult.

Ms Margetts—You are an adult.

Mr BARRESI—I am talking about kids, though.

Ms Margetts—I am giving you an example. You go into that room and you do have butterflies in your tummy. When you look across that room and see somebody you know, you think, 'If things aren't working out, I can go and talk to them.' I do not know how old you are, but you look to me as though you are over 30.

Mr BARRESI—Just.

Ms GILLARD—That is the most charitable thing said on transcript today!

Ms Margetts—No, I said over 30. You have had six times as much experience as a child entering school; you have skills in being on your own, you have skills at being knocked back. Children coming into school for the first time have come from environments where there has been a very high adult content, where adults have guided them, led them, have virtually been partners in their friendships.

Children are coming into a new environment. They have not been away from home for six or eight hours a day. There is a whole lot of new children, a whole lot of new relationships and a whole lot of physical things to get used to. There is a new teacher—and not just one teacher but often eight teachers in a week. If children have somebody they know, they have a reference point. It is a highly significant factor.

Mr EMERSON—I accept that. That is why I couched my question in the terms: how much of an advantage is it after a short period of time?

Ms Margetts—It is an advantage.

Mr EMERSON—Sure, it is an advantage on the first day but those kids do not have the same norms, boundaries or expectations as adults or the same fear of rejection that we might have when we enter a room. A lot of kids will break down those barriers—in fact, they may not even see them—much earlier. It is an advantage on day one or day two but does it really determine whether there will be dysfunctional behaviour two, three, four or five months down the track?

Ms Margetts—You are generalising: not every child finds starting school easy. Certainly the research that has been done looking at the importance of friendships and continuity of friendships shows that across the schooling spectrum when children move in groups of familiar children—move with their friends—they perform better in school. So friendship is seen by

other researchers to have a very big impact. You might remember in the late 1960s there was what we called the 'sociological influence' in schools. Even then, schools were recognising the importance of children or students being with people they liked—being with their friends. That was seen to impact very much on their performance, and it still does. Studies show that when children are with their friends—with people they get on well with—they perform better.

An interesting point is that there have been studies of boys who seem to have more particular behavioural problems than girls—and even of some girls with behavioural difficulties. They found that when they were paired with somebody they liked—a similar person—they performed better in school than when they were separated from their mate or the person with the similar behaviour. There have been some interesting studies.

Mr BARRESI—That is over a period of time. Mr Sawford loves longitudinal studies.

Ms Margetts—I do not know how long they are, but such studies are certainly available.

Mr BARRESI—Okay. To follow on from Mr Emerson's questions, some primary schools have pre-schools. Have you looked at the transition of boys in that kind of a situation: the classroom environment has changed, but they are still going to the same complex? What are the results of those sorts of environments?

Ms Margetts—I have not done any studies like that, but the anecdotal evidence—I visit a lot of schools—is that some schools with pre-schools have those pre-schools separate from the school environment: the timetabling and the day-to-day things are different. The more I talk with schools—I do a lot of in-servicing—the more I see that schools are becoming aware of this need to develop links with pre-schools, have some visiting programs and so forth. So I still think it comes down not to whether the pre-school is collocated with the primary school but to how much experience the children have of visiting that new situation and then going back to what they are familiar with: developing that sense of knowing and understanding some of the things that are different about school and pre-school. And a lot of things are different.

Ms GILLARD—I have one query that stems from a question that Rod asked. In the course of this inquiry we have received evidence about the gender of teachers and discussed whether the fact that the teaching service, particularly in primary schools, is predominantly female has any effect on boys' education. We have heard arguments either way. I understood from your response to Rod that, when you went back to your original source research from which you have done the correlations, you found that there might be some relationship between the gender of the teacher and the way in which they scored boys' behaviour. I know that you have had only a quick look so that may or may not be right when you have a closer look. Do you intend to have a closer look? That will be fairly significant if it turns out to be right when you study it in a more forensic fashion than you have been able to date.

Ms Margetts—I think another study would be needed to do that. To strengthen the study it has got to be carefully planned and organised, and I would be loathe to do that, mainly because I have only preschool data. When I was doing my study the gender of the teacher was an important influencing factor, so in terms of schoolteachers I use only females. What I can say is that, in my first study, I actually did have one male teacher who was part of a school where there were three female preparatory teachers. The results for his class were more positive in

terms of children's adjustment to school than the results for the children in the classes where there was a female teacher. I have a sense, from my own experience—and I have not proved it—that male prep teachers have a very special quality about them. Males and females are different. I have been impressed by the teaching that I have seen in the prep classrooms by male teachers. I can give you only anecdotal evidence on that.

Ms GILLARD—It is hard to know what the causation is, though, isn't it?

Ms Margetts—It would be interesting to look at this particular issue. It think it would support what Rod has said—that there is a difference. That comes back to the training of our teachers, doesn't it? If we are training our teachers at the undergraduate level to address individuals and to respond to individuals, and to respond to individuals in ways that support particular types of behaviours, we may then find that we do not have those sorts of difficulties. A study has been done; I made some notes on it and I think I mentioned it in my report. There is a study by Good and Brophy and another one by Gash and Morgan. They found that, where the schools had actually clearly articulated philosophies of gender equity that pervaded all aspects of the school life, the behaviour changed accordingly, and when those standards were maintained those behaviours were maintained and children were performing better. Other studies also made an effort to have non-gender approaches to materials and to the experiences that children receive. They praised children for independence and persistence. They ignored the difficult behaviours and changed the things that they valued. That had a very positive impact on all the students' performances. There have been studies done that we could build on and use to inform inquiries such as this.

CHAIR—Thank you very much, Ms Margetts. I appreciate everything you have done. It is certainly complex but nonetheless interesting and informative work. This inquiry will probably be another seven or eight months before we draft a report. If during that period you complete more research that sheds more light on it then please send it on to us. It will not be too late to receive information.

Ms Margetts—I do have quite a set of complex data and facilities for having it analysed. I am finishing writing my PhD and when you get to that stage you do not really want to drag in all these extras but, certainly, if there are some issues or questions you want me to address, I would be happy to do that.

CHAIR—Thank you very much.

Resolved (on motion by Mr Sawford):

That the committee receive as evidence and authorise the publication of the submission received from the West Education Centre Inc. for its inquiry into the education of boys.

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

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

Committee adjourned at 5.20 p.m.