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Official Committee Hansard

**HOUSE OF  
REPRESENTATIVES**

STANDING COMMITTEE ON EMPLOYMENT, EDUCATION AND  
WORKPLACE RELATIONS

**Reference: Education of boys**

THURSDAY, 9 NOVEMBER 2000

CANBERRA

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**HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES**

**STANDING COMMITTEE ON EMPLOYMENT, EDUCATION AND WORKPLACE RELATIONS**

**Thursday, 30 November 2000**

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

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

**Terms of reference for the inquiry:**

To inquire into and report on:

- the social, cultural and educational factors affecting the education of boys in Australian schools, particularly in relation to their literacy needs and socialisation skills in the early and middle years of schooling; and
- the strategies which schools have adopted to help address these factors, those strategies which have been successful and scope for their broader implementation or increased effectiveness.

**WITNESSES**

**MURRAY, Mr Archibald Simon, Headmaster, Canberra Grammar School.....277**

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**Committee met at 9.07 a.m.**

**MURRAY, Mr Archibald Simon, Headmaster, Canberra Grammar School**

**OWNER, Mr Mike, School Counsellor (Senior School), Canberra Grammar School**

**STEELE, Mrs Anna Elizabeth, Head of Department, English, Canberra Grammar School**

**TERRY, Ms Jeanette, Gifted and Talented Coordinator (Primary School); Support and Extension Teacher, Canberra Grammar School**

**WINDEYER, Mr James (Jim) Brereton, Deputy Headmaster, Canberra Grammar School**

**CHAIR**—Good morning everybody and welcome to our public hearing today. I declare open this public hearing in Canberra for the inquiry into the education of boys. The purpose of the inquiry is to examine the social, cultural and educational factors affecting the education of boys in Australian schools particularly in relation to their literacy needs and socialisation skills in the early and middle years of schooling. We also aim to identify successful educational strategies and ways to promote their wider adoption in schools. Particular concerns which have emerged from the submissions received include, but are not confined to, the gender and state-by-state divergences in early literacy attainment identified by testing against nationally agreed benchmarks, the gender and state-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 now call the representatives of Canberra Boys Grammar School. I remind you that the proceedings today are proceedings of the parliament itself and warrant the same respect as proceedings of the House. The deliberate misleading of the committee may be regarded as contempt of the parliament. The committee prefers that all evidence be given in public but if at any stage you want to give something in private then please indicate that is the case and we will certainly consider acceding to that request. After you have introduced yourselves, could you give us a precis of the major points in the submission, then we will go to question and answer format until 10 o'clock, or earlier if we finish sooner.

**Mr Murray**—We are certainly pleased to have been invited to appear before the committee and to contribute to this most important inquiry. When it was announced that the inquiry was to be undertaken I think that many educators around Australia were delighted with the initiative.

The staff who are with us this morning have been carefully selected to cover a cross-section of the operation of Canberra Grammar School, and we hope that they will be able to bring before you important information. Thank you also for giving me the opportunity to make this opening statement supporting our submission.

I begin by saying that a number of staff have contributed to the submission, so in many ways it is an accumulation of ideas and understandings across the school. It could be considered as a statement of the collective wisdom of a number of educators who are all experienced in the education of boys. Our submission is based on what we have learned from practical experience, from our successes and indeed from our shortcomings and our failures, and it goes well beyond the theoretical into the practical.

I will give you a brief background. Canberra Grammar School educates boys and girls up to the year 2 level in a co-educational environment, and then we move through to only boys to the end of year 12. Whilst we recognise the importance of girls at the infants level, it would be reasonable to state that boys are indeed our business and much of our operation at Canberra Grammar School has this clearly in mind. That is not so much to state that we do not support the education of girls—quite the contrary; we are indeed committed to the education and to the enhancement of learning of all children.

I think it is important to state that we aim to educate the whole person. This holistic approach leads to a school in which emphasis is legitimately placed on academic, physical, cultural, spiritual and emotional growth, and we are able to translate this at Canberra Grammar School into a curriculum and an environment which can be specifically tailored to meet the needs of boys. We recognise we are fortunate to be able to concentrate and channel our efforts with this in mind—not all schools have that luxury.

We place a strong emphasis on developing a sense of connectedness between the boy and his school community. He is supported by staff with a genuine empathy towards those in their charge—good women and good men who engage the boys and promote an environment in which the boys feel safe to explore their masculinity. The boys know that there are many roads to manhood and that ours is a school culture in which they have many avenues to be themselves.

The connectedness at the school is reinforced by structures and also by people—houses and house masters, chaplaincy and chaplains, classrooms and teachers, budding of younger boys with older boys, a broad co-curricula program and, importantly, offered by teachers. So it is common for boys to be interacting with staff both in the classroom and out of the classroom. That is the norm. Each boy will know that he belongs and is a valued part of the school community, and of course this is all supported and underpinned by strong links between home and school. It is very much a partnership.

A strong emphasis is placed on the academic curriculum and the promotion of a culture in which boys are generally eager to learn and to achieve. They would feel safe to be doing their best on the academic front. They clearly do not need to be a fool to be accepted by their peers.

We successfully promote strategies that encourage reading and improved literacy in students and here we find ourselves working with parents, staff and boys. We work across the curriculum in addition to special programs which are centred on literacy and reading right from preschool through to year 12, so it is vertical as well as horizontal.

In this opening statement I have touched briefly on several aspects of our submission and I wish to state that it is the context in which boys learn which is important. If that is right, they will grow into fine young men able to lead healthy and fulfilling lives; they will be optimistic about their future.

As I conclude, I thank the committee for its focus on this important issue and I urge that the recommendations which form part of your report be supported with additional resources. The many positive and valuable programs currently supported by federal and state governments must be maintained. In particular, we would be totally opposed to any reduction in the support

given to the special programs which have improved the educational outcome of girls over recent decades. That is most important.

**CHAIR**—Thank you very much. Perhaps I could start on that final point. In terms of boys and having difficulties with them, to what extent is parental involvement or non-involvement a contributing factor? One of the observations that I have made is that a lot of parents seem to think that if they park the kids at the school in kindergarten and pick them up at the end of the year 12, that is discharging responsibility. Does that contribute in any way to the problems that you have? That is a sweeping generalisation I have made, of course.

**Ms Terry**—I believe it has a huge impact because I feel that parents—and this is a generalisation—often do not have enough time and energy to sit down and talk about major issues with their children anymore. They are both working, and they get home from work and they are extremely tired. I feel, as you have expressed, that quite often the school is held responsible, therefore, for the implementation of a lot of strategies that parents really need to work in partnership with the school on, rather than put it directly over to the school.

**Mr Owner**—I also think that there is another dimension to it. I think that a lot of parents out there are fairly confused about what is acceptable and what is not acceptable, and they actually look to their school to provide them with benchmarks of behaviour and those sorts of things. With a school like ours, I think a lot of parents send their kids there because the benchmarks are fairly well established and they can benchmark their own children against them. We seem to have a fairly vigorous parent community. I came out of the government school system, having spent 20 years there, and I have only been at the grammar school for this year. One of the things I noticed, coming across, was that we automatically, when having to make an inquiry of parents, would always ring mothers. I am not quite sure why we did that, but we would always ring mothers. Since I have been at the grammar school, I have made it an effort to get the old man involved. What I have found is that fathers probably were quite happy to be left to get on with whatever they were doing and leave it to mum, but once they are involved routinely, they pick up the cudgels and get on with it. They might do it differently to mum, but they will accept the invitation to get involved in their own sons', in our case, education.

**Mr Windeyer**—I think we start with the assumption that the parents are there and are interested. The extent to which they might have been able to provide the time to actually come to all the functions might vary, but the assumption is that if there is an issue, there will be a parent who is going to be interested in the issue. They might not expect daily information; they might not seek daily information. When you run a parent-teacher night, the parents will be there, the vast bulk of them.

**Mrs Steele**—I do not think you can underestimate the role parents play. My area obviously is literacy, and if boys come from a home where the father, in particular, does not read and there aren't any books, then we have got an uphill battle. Even with a privileged group of parents, shall we say, that we deal with, there are many homes where there are no books at all. Therefore, seeing adults sit down and actually read is something the boys do not see. They associate it with school, they go home, it stops. That is a part of our culture that we need to address.

**CHAIR**—One other issue I would like to ask you about, which you did mention in your submission, is that of the professional development of teachers. Many of us here, of course, are parents also. How do you know, as a parent, what is going on in a classroom? How can we judge the quality of it? For example, Ken Rowe, who would be known to you, said to us that it is not so much the economic background of the kids, or where they start—although that is important; it is what is going on in the classroom, the quality of the teaching. Parents make decisions for all kinds of reasons about where they are going to send their kids to school, but how can a parent ever judge what is going on in the classroom? Do you make any effort—you obviously make a big effort, but do you understand what I mean?

**Mr Murray**—Yes.

**CHAIR**—It is like choosing doctors, I suppose, or anything else, with which I am more familiar.

**Mr Murray**—I think that there are various levels that parents will know what is going on, and it will vary from one part of a school to another. Certainly there will be conversation from one parent to another as to the experience that they feel their child is having. At the primary level, and more critically at the infants level, there is a lot of involvement of parents at the school. It is less so as the boys gets older, and that is quite reasonable—the boys are not necessarily wanting the parents there; they are wanting some space. I think it is the conversations that parents are able to have with teachers, and they are available for parents to talk to and discuss progress where necessary. It is the stories that the boys themselves bring home to their parents about the experience.

**CHAIR**—That probably illustrates the point I made, that there do not seem to be external benchmarks for the standards of teaching that parents can look at and say, ‘Well, the teaching at Canberra Grammar, for example, is very good because the teachers are externally assessed and they meet these standards.’ Do you know what I mean?

**Mr Murray**—Yes, I do.

**CHAIR**—Is that something that ought to be adopted and supported? There would be, obviously, industrial relations issues attached to it and it would require resources, but someone said to us, for example, there should be a national system of registration for teachers, there should be external benchmarking of the quality of teaching against which teaching practices can be measured and, of course, appropriate remuneration and resources should follow that.

**Mr Windeyer**—I think the difficulty with that sort of thing is that it is almost inevitably going to become a question of looking at the outcomes of what the students achieve. So, in fact, you are going to be assessing what is happening in the classroom by some measurable external result. If we then get into the business of saying, ‘This school’s results are considerably better than that one’s are and, therefore, the teaching is better,’ I am not certain that that is really going to deal with what is important that is going on in the classroom a lot of which is, in fact—probably in the context of this inquiry—is a question of the relationships which exist between the school and the pupil, and the school in this instance is a variety of teachers. So what is going on in the classroom depends very much upon the relationships rather than whether 50 per cent of the boys get 90 per cent in the test.



**CHAIR**—I do appreciate that and in the hospital system it is the same. If you know you have a 30 per cent higher mortality prospect going to hospital A as compared to B to have your coronary arteries done, it is useful information but it is not the end of the story. Similarly, as Dr Rowe said to us, it is where the rubber hits that road that we need to be focusing on, and we appear not to be. Often as a parent it is an act of faith, I think.

**Mrs MAY**—I just want to go back to the literacy, which we touched on Mrs Steele, and parental involvement. In your submission you talk about workshops where you involve the parents. I just wonder if you could expand on the parents' involvement, particularly with the literacy. You talk about books at home and whether the children are exposed to the reading environment even at home. How do you encourage the parents and how do you use them in the workshops or working with those children?

**Mrs Steele**—I think the workshop must have been the junior school—the infants level. In the senior school our big push with literacy is in year 7 when they come into the senior school. We take boys, not only from our own junior school but also from many schools within Canberra, and also outside when they come into the senior school. We have a very carefully structured program of reading that the boys engage in with their teachers, and an extra teacher who coordinates the program. Parents are made aware of this and they are encouraged to encourage their children to read. They are also encouraged if, say, they have a boy who has not read a whole book before—and we do get boys like this in year 7 who have never read a book from start to end—to actually sit down and read the book with them.

We do not bring in the parents en masse and in-service them as such, but we do encourage them to be part of the process through the parent-teacher nights, through the parent briefings that we have. If it works, we have a very good system of contact between parent and teacher through the prep diary, and contact can be made that way. The program has been running for over 10 years now and there have been times when parents who do not read actually do not see the value of the program and have complained. This is true. This is something we just have to keep insisting on—that it is so important for them to read and to read a book in a set time and just to engage with the written word. It is not something that is easy, but it is something that is so worth while. The school has invested a lot of money in the program and we believe it works.

**Mrs MAY**—Would you interact with the parents of the children in the program? Would you keep them up to date with how that child is going, how they are progressing, or if they are not?

**Mrs Steele**—Yes, we do. They are expected to read a book a cycle, which is every eight days, and there is always a weekend involved in that, sometimes there are two weekends, depending on when the day in the cycle falls. The minute a child starts to develop a pattern where they are consistently not doing it then we ring the parent immediately.

**Mrs MAY**—Are there more boys than girls in the program?

**Mrs Steele**—It is only boys; we only have boys in year 7.

**Mr Murray**—They are all boys from year 3 onwards. We are co-educational down at the bottom end up to year 2, and then boys from then on; only boys.

**Mr Owner**—I did some work at the University of Canberra and went down and had a look at the topics of the masters thesis there. To find a masters thesis that was specifically addressing boys educational issues was indeed a rarity. An area of research that I have often thought has not been properly investigated has been the area of reading. We seem to regard reading as a generic task. When we talk about parents reading or not reading we often do not count some form of the reading that is particularly appropriate to men, for instance. I often say if you stood at the foot of my bed and had a look at my wife's side of the bed there would be three or four thick books and she would be reading them almost simultaneously, together with a bit of other stuff; and on my side there would be papers, journals, photocopied things. I might read books from cover to cover but generally that is recreational. I would not be doing that during the day. Whilst it is not solely restricted to men, it is a sort of behaviour that a lot of men engage in. They tend to read in a particular sort of way. I think our boys do that too. I would like to see some research on gender tendencies in the way in which kids approach the reading task. I have not seen any—that is not to say there has not been anything done; I just have not seen any.

**Mrs Steele**—I can inform the committee about a book, which has just been written, called *Boys and Books*, by James Moloney, which may well be worth having a look at. Within that he identifies the kinds of books that boys like to read. He says it is not that boys cannot read, it is just that they choose not to. I think that is a very important concept. They choose not to because often the things they are asked to read do not appeal to them for a variety of reasons. He identifies the kinds of books that boys do like but which, in fact, can be sanitised by teacher-librarians and parents who do not think they should be reading things like this. He goes back to the great favourite *Fungus the Bogey Man*, which, if you remember, was a book that boys would call gross—and it is gross, because he drips with slime, snot and sweat, he smells and he stinks, but boys like those kinds of books. So if we can find the kinds of books that boys like to read and will actually pass around, then—

I would like to raise something else. About five years ago I took a book that was a bestseller and persuaded the then head of English to buy a set of them. It was called *Miss Smilla's feeling for snow*, in translation, and we studied it as a year 11 set text. On page 172, I think, there is a very explicit piece of human interaction. I had complaints from the physics teachers that boys who were not even in my class were reading *Miss Smilla's feeling for snow* in year 11 under the desk. There are ways and ways to get boys to read. You find what they want to read and you introduce them to these kinds of things. You look at the fact that they read fantasy and they read Tom Clancy, and you do not give them books about feelings. You give them books which they can engage with. That is what we try very hard to do.

**Mr SAWFORD**—We are at very early days in this inquiry and already we have had the paranoia of feminist conspiracies on one side of the argument and political correctness gone mad on the other, so it was pleasing to read your submission, which I felt was very balanced. You acknowledge the attainment of confidence in boys, you identify boys' behaviour and learning styles, you recognise individual desires and so on, but you do not actually take things to extremes. I have about 10 questions but I will save my colleagues with about three and perhaps you could keep your answers brief. In section 4 of your submission you mention social factors and also some very negative behaviours of boys when they first come to school. What types of teachers can turn those potentially negative behaviours into positive ones?

**Mr Windeyer**—It gets back to my earlier comment about a lot of this being the relationships between teachers and pupils. It is something aside from whatever the content is—

**Mr SAWFORD**—What are some successful characteristics of teachers who are effective at teaching boys?

**Mr Murray**—They are able to engage the boys. The boys recognise that they are valued and the teacher is there for them. They have time for the boys. There is a significant degree of commitment. They enjoy teaching boys, and boys know that.

**Mr SAWFORD**—A sense of humour?

**Mr Murray**—It is going to vary from one class to another. Picking up Jim's point, it is about relationships, and they can be developed in many different ways. There will be classes that have a very strict and traditional approach, yet the boys will be doing some wonderful learning; and there will be others where it is more relaxed. It is for each teacher to identify their own teaching style, as long as it has clearly in mind the learning styles of boys, and that is going to vary from one classroom to another.

**Mr SAWFORD**—But surely there are some common elements in successful teachers of boys.

**Mr Murray**—Yes.

**Mr Owner**—The successful teacher of boys actually likes teaching boys and actually likes boys, that is a good start, but also they do not subscribe to the deficit sort of model of masculinity, that boys cannot do this, that boys cannot read because they have got something wrong with them, that boys are over endowed with testosterone, or that boys are aggressive, et cetera, and pathologise boys behaviour. They tend to focus on what boys can do and reframe these things. For example, boisterous behaviour remains as boisterous behaviour and is not classified as aggressive behaviour or bullying behaviour, so long as it is neither of those two. They tend to work with boys in a positive way. They pick them up and do things with them positively. They can take a larrikin, who might not be aggressive or a bully but a larrikin, and take those larrikin qualities and do something with them, turn them into something positive, get them working with younger boys and coaching a cricket side, for instance. It happens all the time where we are.

**Ms Terry**—I think successful teachers are genuine, and the boys know immediately if you are a genuine human being or not. If you are showing them who you really are and bringing your own worldly experiences to the classroom and giving them an opportunity to know you as a person, that is really important, which I suppose springboards off what Jim was saying before about developing relationships. A successful teacher has empathy with each and every student for a variety of reasons, and they understand the background of each of these students. They might understand their home situation, or some other personal characteristics that require some extra special care. Also, you have to be a very good listener, an active listener, not just pretending to listen to what a child is saying. You must truly engage with that child and ask them pertinent questions about their work, their life. Valuing individual difference is critical, and that can be done in a variety of ways. It can be done through co-curricula or through the

general classroom situation. And it is important to show other boys in the class that you value individual difference too. So you basically practice what you preach, your role modelling shows that you value it.

**Mr SAWFORD**—Is the converse also true, that when boys make instant judgments about whether you are genuine they make instant judgments about whether you are not?

**Ms Terry**—Yes, I guess so, and sometimes that can be—

**Mr SAWFORD**—More so than girls, or just the same?

**Ms Terry**—I have taught co-ed. I do not—

**Mr Owner**—We do not have a lot of experience of that because we are an all boys school.

**Ms Terry**—I have taught in co-ed schools and I would have to give that some consideration. Another thing is supporting boys' passions, knowing what their genuine interests are, and that goes into different learning styles and different learning capabilities. I agree also that humour does have something to do with it. Somebody might have a very dry sense of humour, and somebody might have a really outrageous sense of humour that can appeal to various boys, but it is providing a classroom environment that has a sense of lightness and joy rather than darkness and despair.

**Mr Murray**—Of course, these are many of the qualities you would have for a successful teacher of girls, full stop, successful teachers. Boys will have some special needs. They do need teachers who understand how boys tick, but many of the qualities are generic.

**Mr SAWFORD**—Can I just finish off that section you had on the social factors with just one other question, Chair? You mention in 1.2 educational conformity and not on individual excellence. Remember that point you made there, Simon?

**Mr Murray**—Yes.

**Mr SAWFORD**—That is an interesting dichotomy. Diversity is a strength in education, conformity can be a weakness, and maybe there is a lot of reaction that you get from boys who say that when they go into schools there is not an emphasis on individual excellence and maybe it appeals more to them and they resent the educational conformity. How do you deal with that dilemma at your school?

**Mr Windeyer**—I think the range of what is offered, both in the curriculum and in the sphere of the school, gives the opportunity for every boy to find somewhere he can feel comfortable and possibly excel. So there might be areas where he finds he has to conform because he has to do a particular subject, but in the range of his activities during a week or a day there is sufficient choice for him to get considerable satisfaction, and to reckon, 'I am pursuing what interests me from a large range, rather than conforming to some requirement.' I think that in a way that gets back to this question of relationships between boys and teachers. Our experience would suggest that quite often the relationship which pays dividends in the classroom is developed outside the classroom. That may be because you are coaching the boy in tennis, conducting him in the

orchestra, rowing with him or playing table tennis with him—we have that range. So in terms of conforming at Canberra Grammar, which says, ‘You must play sport,’ that does not mean a boy has to row and play rugby—he can play table tennis and squash.

**Mr SAWFORD**—Or any part of the expressive arts, for that matter?

**Mr Windeyer**—That is right. I think the dichotomy between conformity and excellence disappears if the definition of what you have to conform to is broad enough.

**Ms GAMBARO**—I am sorry I was a little late for your presentation. I just want to touch on some of the literacy issues—and Margaret May asked you about literacy. I had to chuckle when you were talking about sweat and slime. I have a 12-year-old, and they are exactly the kinds of books he likes to read. I would like to ask you about this traditional male role model of a father reading to a young preschooler. Fathers as a whole do not generally tend to do that. Is that why we are failing as a society—because fathers do not sit and read to their two- and three-year-olds? In your submission you talk about the sorts of things that boys like to do and most of them are sports oriented. How early should we read to our children in a home environment—and I take on board a lot of what you said about the lack of books in many homes? Also, recently I met with a group of principals and a few of them advocated a theory that boys, because of their lack of maturity, should start school a year later than females. Is there a lot of merit in that? I look at my 13-year-old daughter and my 12-year-old son and they are miles apart in every way. I just want to get some feedback from you with respect to your thoughts on that.

**Mrs Steele**—My personal belief is that children should learn to read as they learn to speak. I think that is when their brains are the most receptive. Far from saying children should start school one year later—I think that would be devastating for boys.

**Ms GAMBARO**—So you do not agree with that?

**Mrs Steele**—No, I do not know what that would achieve.

**Ms GAMBARO**—In relation to the maturity issue, is there anything that can be done when girls and boys enter their first grade of school? Can we work on some of those issues in some way? Would you agree that there is a maturity lag between a six-year-old boy and a six-year-old girl?

**Mrs Steele**—Yes, there is.

**Ms GAMBARO**—And how do we address that?

**Mrs Steele**—I have no answers for that.

**CHAIR**—You are saying that you would not address it by leaving them a year later to start school?

**Mrs Steele**—No, I would not; not at all.

**Mr Murray**—We are moving to start ours a little earlier, in actual fact. We are introducing a program for children aged 3½.

**Mr SAWFORD**—You accept the difference and deal with it?

**Mr Owner**—That is what I would say: rather than see it in the deficit model of masculinity—that sort of characteristic—and say that there is a lag or whatever, I think it probably comes down more to the fact that boys do it differently from girls and men do it differently from women. We should find out what those differences are and start working on them. One of the obvious things would be to try to get some blokes down there to work with young people—blokes who enjoy it and blokes who are effective. They will change things just by their mere presence.

**Mr SAWFORD**—What is the gender breakdown among the teachers in your school?

**Mr Murray**—Mainly female in the infants—that is up to year 2. In fact, there would be no males there.

**Ms Terry**—Maybe a music specialist.

**Mr Murray**—Right, the odd specialist teacher. In the junior school, from years 3 to 6, it would probably be fifty-fifty.

**Ms Terry**—It is fairly even.

**Mr Murray**—In the senior school it would be around sixty-forty, with 60 or maybe 70 per cent male. But, critically, there are wonderful role models of females in very senior positions within the school, so the boys are seeing staff in positions of responsibility irrespective of gender. We are fortunate the modelling is good.

**Ms GAMBARO**—So you get them in early to do reading programs at an elementary school level—is that what you are saying?

**Mr Murray**—Yes.

**Ms GAMBARO**—What about extending into other areas—for example, the tuckshop? I know that sounds rather strange but, again, it is to do with role models. It is not all about sport, it is about life generally and life skills. Do you think that would be a good thing or do you think that role models might be shattered if they saw their dad serving them sandwiches at the tuckshop?

**Mr Owner**—No, I do not think they would.

**Ms GAMBARO**—Do you think there is more room for it? I do it and the children's father does it. It is more of a rarity.

**CHAIR**—I do it.

**Ms GAMBARO**—There you go—it is extending. I remember reading to my baby at an early age and by the age of one she could speak in sentences. That is very unusual and rare. At the time people thought I was very unusual and strange, but we should get into that as early as possible.

**Mrs Steele**—I believe so, yes.

**Ms GAMBARO**—You need to just work on those maturity factors at elementary school in a variety of ways, such as bringing fathers in and a whole lot of other things.

**Mr Owner**—And maybe doing things differently. We are talking in great generalisations, quite obviously. It probably comes down to 75 per cent in one direction and 25 per cent in the other. Twenty-five per cent of girls will have difficulty picking up the reading and doing it with the prepackaged approach we have to it. If we start to look at different ways of getting kids interested in literature and have that as part of our curriculum, it seems to me that we are going to pick up a great variety of ways. Maybe we could even take the emphasis off being able to read in sentences, which might be part of the problem at the early stage, and get them interested in books of all makes, shapes and descriptions.

**Ms GAMBARO**—As a parent, I have limited contact with the teaching staff because of this profession, as you would imagine, but I always worry about the sorts of books my 12-year-old wants to read. Do you think there can be a more interactive role for teachers to send home a list of reading titles, even with some of the ghosts and goblins books that might have some reading value? Then I would know that my child is getting an adequate standard of literacy for his age level.

**Mrs Steele**—When it comes to 12-year-old boys, if they are reading anything, be happy. If they are willing to pick up anything and read it, go with it. If they are into the R.L. Stines and the *Goosebumps* get them as many as they want. Get them into Harry Potter, for all its problems. I would let a child read anything. I would not stop a child reading. Even if they were 12 or 13 and they were looking at a highly sophisticated book with things in it that perhaps you would not want them to read about, I would still let them read it. I would not have it as a set text in a schoolroom but as recreational reading.

**Ms Terry**—Conversely, I have started children off in sixth grade with cartoons, anything, to engage them in text.

**Ms GAMBARO**—Thank you.

**CHAIR**—We will really test them and send them some *Hansard* to read.

**Mr BARTLETT**—A number of our submissions have pointed to the rather alarming growing divergence between results of boys and girls at the tertiary entrance level, the HSC results. I know it is hard to compare that in an all-boys schools like yours, but if you compare their results at HSC level with, say, community wide norms, have you noticed any change over the last 10 or 15 years? Are you getting roughly the same percentage of your boys in the top decile, for instance?

**Mr Murray**—I believe we are. It may vary from one subject to another. As far as foreign languages are concerned, it would probably be the girls who would do better than the boys. This is probably because of a greater preparedness on the part of the girls to put in the time that a foreign language requires. I do not believe there is a divergence in results in boys and girls schools in regard to maths and science. Indeed, our English results vary from one year to another, but on the whole they are quite outstanding. It is the context in which boys or girls learn which will determine the quality of learning that is taking place.

**Mr BARTLETT**—And that is across the curriculum. Would you have as many boys doing three unit English as three unit maths or economics? Is there stronger performance in some areas? If there is, is that in any way related to what are normally perceived to be girls or boys subjects or is it related to the gender of the teacher teaching those subjects?

**Mr Murray**—The boys select their subjects and their enrolment in a subject will be based on the interest that they have in doing the subject and the usefulness they may see for it in further study. We have more boys doing physics than French or Latin. Nonetheless, it would be very difficult to compare the results that one is getting in physics with the results that one is getting with English.

**Mr BARTLETT**—In maths, physics and chemistry, languages, history and English, are your teachers men or women?

**Mr Murray**—Both.

**Mr BARTLETT**—There is no predominance one way or another?

**Mrs Steele**—To give you some statistics, we have just started the new HSC in which you can do four units of English. This year we have 130 boys doing the HSC. We have 32 doing the third unit and 14 doing the fourth unit, which is quite extraordinary. Next year we have got 64 boys out of 150 who want to start with the third unit of English. This says a great deal about the teaching of English at our school.

**Mr Owner**—There was some research done in the ACT a couple of years ago on this issue. It tended to show that, in spite of increased participation rates of girls in the non-traditional girls subjects like physics and chemistry examined at the year 12 end, at the UAI end, girls were still counting the traditional female subjects, the humanities, in their UAIs. Boys were still counting the traditional male subjects of maths, physics and chemistry. There was a debate that we have made some cosmetic changes at that level but, in fact, where the tyre meets the road, things had not really changed all that much. I have not seen anything later than that. Anecdotally, from talking to the boys, they still tend to gravitate towards physics, maths, design and those sorts of things.

**Mr BARTLETT**—As you are the senior counsellor, do you have many boys wanting to pursue teaching as a career?

**Mr Owner**—When I was in the state education system, boys would come in and you would ask them what they wanted to do. Quite often they would say, 'I am not going to tell you', and you knew for sure that they were going to be teachers. If they really did not want to tell you,



they were going to be a primary school teacher. Where I am now, we have quite a few boys who have a set agenda to do teaching. They are quite happy to talk about it and they talk about it to their mates. To me that is very interesting. I have not run across that before. There certainly was a stage a few years ago when boys preferred to run on a milk truck than go and teach.

**Mr SAWFORD**—And we are still getting that feedback from other witnesses and other schools, so it is quite interesting that you have a number there who are keen to pursue teaching.

**Mr Owner**—Quite often boys will talk to you about their second and third preferences—particularly, say, music students. They will say, ‘I’m going to give music a go and if I can’t make it I might go and teach’. But the stigma that I was very much aware of does not seem to exist. It does exist—some boys would not be a teacher if you paid them—but there are students who want to be teachers, which is good.

**Mr BARTLETT**—Of those, are they spread across the range of abilities? Do even some of your really brighter students also want to teach?

**Mr Owner**—No, I must admit I have not run into any of the top students wanting to be teachers.

**Mr Murray**—Two years ago one of our boys in a very senior position at the school was desperate and very keen to be a teacher, and he will make a fine one; he really will.

**Mr BARTLETT**—That is encouraging.

**Mr Murray**—It is, yes.

**Mr Owner**—Also a couple of years ago we had a boy who got 99 point something. He started off doing music and is now doing nursing. That is what he wanted to do, and he is now doing it.

**CHAIR**—It is interesting, because Gordon Donaldson from Scotch told us that there would not be a boy in his school who would want to be a teacher, and he would be surprised to find one. Anyway, you are obviously doing something right.

**Mr Murray**—I do not think we have large numbers.

**Mr BARRESI**—A couple of weeks ago *Time* magazine had a front cover story on the development of girls compared with boys. Did you read that article? To what extent do you—

**CHAIR**—Mike is reading the magazines and his wife is reading the books—

**Mr Owner**—Yes, that is what I reckon too.

**Mr BARRESI**—If that story is correct, to what extent do you believe that the advanced development of girls into puberty is contributing to the differences that we are seeing in terms

of educational achievement? It is a biological issue. I am just asking whether the rapid biological development is actually affecting the educational outcomes at the end.

**Mr Owner**—I just think that if you accept it then you may as well chuck the towel in. If you accept that argument then we may as well give up now and come down, start boys later and have a different stream. I think it is more a challenge of what we do with them, how we approach the teaching and the sorts of things that we do. You have heard Simon talk about a broad and inclusive curriculum; that is what we offer. We offer boys a thousand things that they can do at our school and we encourage them to get involved in a whole lot of different things. We have got boys with a range of abilities, and those boys in the lower end of the range of abilities quite often can find something in the school where they can develop their self-esteem. Once their self-esteem begins to develop they begin to develop and away they go.

**Mr BARRESI**—You talk about socialisation needs, and I would have thought that, if anything, the effect of that rapid development in one sex versus another would play itself out in terms of socialisation as well.

**Mrs Steele**—But something magical happens to boys at the end of year 10. I do not know what it is, but they go home at the end of year 10 and come back in year 11—and I know this is a huge generalisation, but there is—

**Mr BARRESI**—You have got me worried now; my boy is 10 next year.

**Mrs Steele**—No, year 10 into year 11. Something happens. They neaten, they smarten and they find deodorant—

**Mr Owner**—In gallons.

**Mrs Steele**—In gallons, yes, but they do. They come back with a different approach and they know they are at the serious end of their education. A year 11 classroom is quite different—even one with less ability—from a year 10 classroom. What I am trying to say is that there is a sense of a catch-up that happens towards the end. For the ones who do succeed, the catch-up works but, for the ones who do not, that catch-up perhaps has not happened.

**Mr BARRESI**—So if there is a catch-up why be concerned about this as an issue? This is a comment that was made by one of the education officials—I think it was—from Victoria who was basically saying, ‘It all evens itself out in the end, anyway. Boys will end up getting jobs. They may not have the scores on the board in terms of educational achievement, but they are more likely to get a job than girls, so what is the problem?’

**CHAIR**—Presumably, at Canberra Grammar, you are keeping them at school to catch up, which is not the case—

**Mr BARRESI**—That was a point that they made to us. What is your reaction to that?

**Ms Terry**—My concern is that there is a very strong focus on academic achievement and not the whole person when we talk about males and females. The paper that Mark Snowden and I wrote focuses very strongly on emotional intelligence and the fact that a lot of boys are just way

behind the eight ball in terms of being self-aware, able to control impulses, and handle stress and anxiety. I look at the education process as being a pathway into a much broader life when we leave. If we are look at it like that we have to look far more at the whole person than just at academic outcomes.

**Mr Owner**—What is wrong with that is that, if it was okay, you would expect to see some community data supporting that. All the community data seems to me to be supporting that it is not okay. Boys are not happy out there and are not doing well. I suggest they are probably more violent now than they have ever been and they are more maladaptive than they have ever been.

Just this morning a guy went through the main street of Goulburn at 200 clicks. The police did not chase him because they did not think they could catch him. He had five other kids in the car. These are stories we hear all the time. Horrific stories come out of America of schoolyard massacres. These are the little tiny tips of a very large iceberg. If it is okay for boys just to get a job then we would expect them to be contented and for that to be reflected in community data. It is not. As soon as they leave school they suicide.

**Mr BARRESI**—That is what I was impressed with in your submission. You do make the comment that teachers tolerate and accept poor interpersonal skills better than they tolerate poor work related skills. Maybe there is a role there for teachers to be able to identify those skills early. I sense you are saying that it is almost like you are preparing them for the work environment beyond just simply literacy and numeracy but also in being able to adapt to a team environment and work with other people, handling conflict and those sorts of issues. I was impressed with that. I sense what you are saying is that teachers are not able to do that at the moment and there is not enough emphasis on teachers being able to do that.

**CHAIR**—Not in our schools.

**Ms Terry**—No.

**Mr Windeyer**—I think you run into a conflict in terms of time available. There are masses of wildly exciting things you can do. They might be educational excursions or retreats. A head of a department will say, 'But I cannot get through the maths syllabus if you keep moving into that area.' There is that tension which clearly exists because the parental focus, the staff focus and the pupil focus ought to be primarily on the academic program of the school. In terms of the socialisation aspect, that is something that intrudes into that area, but it is very important. We devote a lot of time and resources to it.

The fundamental thing would be that there is a pastoral care system through which a lot of these issues are explored and the contributions made. For that structure to exist in the senior school, there are 10 members of staff whose teaching load is 23 periods per cycle, whereas the normal teaching load is 34 periods per cycle. That is a very considerable investment in things beyond the basic curriculum on the socialisation aspect. We expect every member of staff to be a pastoral, and not academic, tutor to a group of 15 boys. That is an expectation on the staff as well. There are a lot of resources committed to this but this finite resource of time is where the tension develops.

**Mr BARRESI**—We have also had submissions that say—and you have made the same comment—that there are more male underachievers. That has been disputed by a number of witnesses who say there are not more male underachievers but it is just that there are more girls who are achieving. Therefore, their achievement is highlighting the fact that there are males who are underachieving. What are your thoughts there? In other words, is there a discrepancy in the figures because the girls are just catching up?

**Mr Murray**—All the programs for girls have been hugely successful. I think that has been in the spotlight. The worry going into this inquiry, for some sectors of the community, was that it might take the spotlight away from programs that have been successful for girls. Yes, the achievement of girls has significantly improved, especially in areas of maths and science.

**Ms Terry**—In the gifted and talented area I get a lot of boys whose teachers' tacit knowledge tells them that they are really bright but they are not producing, they are not doing it, they are not involved and they are not engaging. I actually think it is the fact that boys do not have the skills to be able to break out of that cycle. I do not think they quite know how to channel the energy that they have got. I think it really takes specific teaching strategies to be able to tap into that, so that they can channel it into something positive rather than into negative behaviours, through boredom and things like that.

**Mr Owner**—In the ACT system, if the tenet that was put to you, by whoever, was true, you would expect to see it in participation rates. When girls and boys start college at year 11, they are obviously about fifty-fifty. The proportions that do the tertiary end of the courses would be, say, fifty-fifty there again. What you tend to find is that the girls tend to maintain their percentage on the way through. In other words, you will tend to find there will be a drop-off in girls, perhaps from 50 per cent down to 47 per cent, 46 per cent or 45 per cent. But you will find with the boys that they will drop out of the tertiary end into the non-tertiary end at a far greater rate than that and then you will also find that they will fall out of the education system at a far greater rate than that. Typically, we used to say that 75 per cent of the kids that would move from one level to the other would be boys, 75 per cent of the under-achievers would be boys and 75 per cent of the dropouts would be boys. I think that if you have a look at the data it might support figures in that order.

**Mr SAWFORD**—I have a couple of questions on your section on literacy needs of boys, on pages 6 and 7. I do not know whether it is a two-bob-each-way statement, Simon, or a mildly provocative one, but in terms of your introductory paragraph on the literacy needs of boys you make the comment:

It is sometimes alleged that current teaching practices in the literacy area appear to favour girls. If the committee of inquiry finds this to be true, there needs to be a powerful program of teacher professional development...

I would not mind an expansion of your own view on that. Following that over, on the bottom of page 7, you offer some reasons. I accept that you are just saying what people are saying; it is not necessarily your own view. If I wanted to structure a curriculum to favour boys, it would not be terribly difficult. I would take Bloom's *Taxonomy of educational objectives* and I would take analysis, insight, comprehension and visual spatial skills and I would structure the program really strongly around those. If I wanted to actually create a curriculum to favour girls, then I would take synthesis, intuition, translation and verbalisation skills. It does not take a bright

person to actually work that out. There have been significant differences in the propaganda in terms of how exams are written now and how they were written 25 years ago. They are quite different. Also, part of the propaganda has changed. For example, 'Boys often find the creative approach to reading and writing difficult because they find it difficult to express their feelings—synthesis.'

But you never seem to see in the propaganda, 'Girls find the analytical approach to maths and science difficult because they don't like it.' You do not see that. Another comment is, 'Male role models in Australia are sportsmen not poets and philosophers.' I have heard that before. It is said quite often. I beg your pardon? Would you say girls' role models are poets and philosophers? I will tell you what girls' role models are—they are also sportswomen. They are models and film stars. There is nothing intrinsically good about any of those, either. They are not poets or philosophers either. In other words, the propaganda is there. Going back to your original statement, which is almost inviting the committee to take a particular view, you are safely keeping out of it, Simon.

**Mr Murray**—I ask Anna to make a comment on the literacy side, in terms of the question.

**Mrs Steele**—The literacy area favouring girls?

**Mr Murray**—Yes.

**Mrs Steele**—I would like to go back to my statements about the kinds of books that are chosen for the teaching of English, the concept of the set text and the way set texts often do not cater for what boys really need. I did not actually write this—do you know who did?

**Mr Murray**—This is coming through from ideas that there is, in the curriculum, prescribed texts.

**CHAIR**—Ken Rowe, for example, said to us—and I think this is mainly in the government sector—that reading lists are more aspirational than reality checked. I thought that was not a bad way to put it. In other words, most of the kids will read the books, but there is a significant minority who will not—who will not find it interesting—and it is inappropriate for them.

**Mrs Steele**—There is a feeling that English curriculums in particular have been feminised. There is a sense that they are female controlled and they bring the best out of female pupils. Certainly, if you wanted to look at the new HSC in a certain way, it would tend to support that, in that students now, when they write exams, have to adopt personas—become the person in the book—and write from that person's perspective, which many people could say that boys find more difficult than girls. Therefore, certain practices that are in place would appear to favour girls. I think one of the best things that has been said in this statement was where we talked about boys' enthusiasm—getting in touch with boys' enthusiasm and actually using that to ensure that they achieve at their best. I believe that we can give boys strategies to adopt a persona from a book and write as effectively as girls—I do believe that. But you have to have a faith that it can happen. One of the things that I think makes a good teacher is when that teacher walks into the classroom and they have absolute faith in what they are going to teach and what the outcomes are going to be. Boys will recognise that and latch on to that.

**Mr Owner**—But it is not saying what was said at a boys conference a couple of years ago—that boys in order to achieve in English have to think like girls.

**Mrs Steele**—No, I am not saying that.

**Mr Owner**—No, it is not. This was said at a fairly senior sort of level. It is a fairly obnoxious position and one that boys will reject.

**Mrs Steele**—But we have the luxury that there are not girls in the classroom and I think this really helps them.

**Mr Murray**—Exactly.

**Mrs Steele**—There are no girls in the classroom, so boys can interact with a poet like Shelley, fall upon the ‘thorns of life’ and sit there thinking ‘I’m allowed to feel like this.’ We do not have anybody making fun of boys who want to see great literature as great literature, and say, ‘Gosh, that means something to me,’ and stay behind and talk to the teacher about it. I think this is one of the great luxuries that we have, and the boys are fortunate to have that. In relation to what we could do in early years, just like when we separated girls to teach them maths and science so they would not have the reaction of boys to them achieving, if we were to consider the concept of young boys being separated from girls for reading lessons, I do not know what would happen but it would be a really interesting thing to try.

**Mr Murray**—Picking up on Anna’s point, I think the statement makes reference to the compromises that need to be made when you are teaching boys and girls together, such as selecting the text to appeal to both boys and girls. It is a more difficult ask in the delivery and in the engagement of the students. We are fortunate to be able to select the text and deliver it in a manner which will engage boys. It is more difficult to do that in a coeducational environment.

**Mr BARTLETT**—What about in the very early stages of literacy—the dichotomy between the whole of language approach and the phonics approach and those sorts of things? We have had a number of submissions that indicate that, for boys, the whole of language approach to early literacy has really created barriers to literacy for them, whereas girls have handled it better. We saw a demonstration lesson at one school, for boys with reading difficulties. That was very structured—the Spalding approach—and seemed to be having some success. What is your view of that? Would you agree that the whole of language approach has been more difficult for boys to cope with than girls and that we ought to be going back to a more structured phonics based approach?

**Ms Terry**—I think there is room for both. I have taught from kindergarten through to year 6. Probably one of the biggest things that I have noticed, particularly in the junior school where I am now, is that boys need a very structured spelling program. They work well if you are dividing words into syllables and making it very analytical and logical for them. In answer to your question, it probably would be useful to implement strategies like that to help them.

**Mr BARTLETT**—The Spalding approach is based on that. You use Reading Recovery I noticed. That is similarly based, isn’t it?

**Ms Terry**—I do not use it myself. I am not involved in that area. That is lower down in the school.

**Mr Owner**—Right down at infants school.

**Mr BARTLETT**—So it is quite different.

**Mrs Steele**—I think the combination of the whole language approach of writing has had a devastating effect. In the senior school, we actually teach grammar separately.

**Mr BARTLETT**—When you say ‘devastating effect’, is that more so on boys than girls?

**Mrs Steele**—I can only comment on boys because I have not taught girls for 25 years. But certainly you can see the skills that they lack when they come into year 7, and we work very hard to introduce the concept of punctuation and what a verb is. We do teach it through years 7 to 10 almost as a separate subject.

**Mr SAWFORD**—Can I go back to the propaganda question. It was the other way around, 25 or 35 years ago. There were basically programs structured throughout education in this country that very much favoured boys. Now we have a situation that some people allege favours girls. What worries me is the propaganda and the games that are played with our kids. I see statements in submissions like this. I know these are not what you believe, but this what people say, isn't it, in the literature? It is not balanced. For example, and I do not want to criticise you for this, in attachment A, on the vulnerability of being male by Jeanette and Mark, there are a lot of feminine skills. There is nothing wrong with those as self-actualisation.

Competition is not mentioned once. It is an evil word. Competition is not necessarily evil. You can make it evil and you can make cooperation evil too. You can do anything evil. What I am saying is that the language that is often presented on this issue is not balanced. Simon, your submission overall was extremely balanced. You are acknowledging that there is a lack of balance in a lot of the comments out there. Why don't people, in the propaganda, say, ‘There are things girls don't do that well’? No-one writes that.

**Mr Murray**—One could say it took a propaganda campaign for the situation to shift for girls. I think the fact that we are seeing statements like this out there in the public arena means is that there is a genuine desire to put a spotlight onto boys. Perhaps it is considered in the public arena as a legitimate means by which to move a spotlight.

**Mr Owner**—I have a little bit of difficulty with exactly what you said. Twenty years ago there was a big movement—the girls in education movement. Within a few years of that movement getting a move on, we began to notice substantial changes in the performance of girls. They were measured at the year 12 level. So we did something and we got a result. It was prefaced on the notion that you can do something in the education system to make changes to kids.

One of the big resistances running up to boys education is that we are really baulking at doing that. We are saying, ‘No, it's testicles; it's testosterone. They develop later; their maturity levels are wrong. There are a thousand biologically determined arguments as to why boys are like they

are.’ But we are not prepared to say, ‘Boys can do it. Boys can do the lot.’ All we have to do is get it out there so that they can do the lot and we will effect changes by changing the way in which we teach boys. I think that we are well on the way to doing it at the grammar school. We have boys who are high achieving boys. They do not belong to the cool to be fool culture; I do not think the cool to be fool culture actually exists at our school. If it does, it certainly does not exist to the point where it is a dominant paradigm.

**Mr Murray**—Sometimes it is there. It is more there in year 10. It is part of a development phase.

**Mr Owner**—It ebbs and flows. You can do things to take it on. You do not have to sit there and accept that it is just the way it is going to be—it is predetermined.

**Mr SAWFORD**—What would you recommend in terms of propaganda for—not disadvantaging girls; I acknowledge the point that Simon made in the last part of his submission; we are not into that—advantaging boys? Is there going to have to be a propaganda campaign? Is that the only way it works?

**Mr Murray**—There needs to be reassurance that there will not be a cost in terms of decline in support for other needy sectors in the educational arena—disadvantaged students, special education and so forth. The main concerns will come from those who feel that girls may now be disadvantaged as a result.

**CHAIR**—There is absolutely nothing that will be recommended by us that will disadvantage girls. In fact, there are a couple of areas I have identified already in the course of this where I think girls outcomes could be improved. Career advice in education seems to be one.

**Mr Murray**—I would like to emphasise that a reassurance is needed that these are good things to do for boys and that it is not at the cost of someone else suffering.

**Mr SAWFORD**—These are terrible questions.

**Mr Owner**—We would do well to have a look at the propaganda campaign that accompanied the girls in education movement and learn from those significant mistakes. One of the significant mistakes could be exemplified by a poster that I recall being prominently displayed in every government school—and probably every school—called the ‘girls can do anything’ poster. It had girls in uniforms, girls with plumbers spanners and girl racing car drivers and the like. Nobody had any problems with that. What we did not ask was: what message did that poster give to boys? As you say, there was nothing to balance it. The message we decided the boys were getting—they were reading the subtext, which was not quite written—was: and boys can do nothing.

**Mr SAWFORD**—Or boys can do feminine jobs. That was another subtext that boys dragged out of that, which quite surprised me.

**Mr Owner**—Yes. I think you would find a great deal of resistance from teachers—male and female—if that particular style of program were to get a move on for boys education.



**Mr SAWFORD**—Here are a couple of terrible questions, but I am going to ask them nevertheless. You mentioned teacher training inadequacies at one stage—at the bottom of page 6. In New South Wales, 19 per cent of the teaching force in primary schools are men. That has gone down dramatically over the last 25 years. Does the way in which people have been taught—or not taught—to teach in the last 20 years have any impact, and do some women have more trouble with teaching boys?

**Mr Windeyer**—In answer to your second question, it is not a question of women having trouble teaching boys. There are some boys who have trouble being taught by women.

**Mr SAWFORD**—I always say that when a school makes an excuse about a deficit—I go along with Mike—it is an excuse. Any school can teach kids who want to learn. A good teacher is the one who can motivate and challenge the one who does not want to learn. That is a good teacher in my view. Anybody can teach kids who want to learn.

**Mrs Steele**—To support what Jim is saying, we have boys from cultural backgrounds who do not accept that women have anything of importance to say. Because the home background supports that and because they may only be here, say, on a diplomatic posting, those boys will not be taught by women. We actually have boys in the school who will not look at an unclothed face of a woman because in their culture that is unacceptable. What Jim is saying is absolutely true. We face that constantly.

**Mr Windeyer**—That is the point I was making. I am sorry, that was just the second part of your question.

**Mr SAWFORD**—The first part was about teacher training inadequacies.

**Mr Owner**—I came from a college system where some boys did go on to teacher training. A lot of them would drop out and we would run into them selling suits in David Jones, and bits and pieces around the town. We would ask them why they had dropped out and they would say that they had just got sick and tired of feeling as though they and their gender were being held responsible for what had gone wrong in the education system. They would give examples of how that was being handled. So there was a strong position being taken, at least in some places, that, even when we got a few males into teacher training, we did not value them or make them feel inclusive.

I went to an in-service maybe two years that was given by somebody from the Sydney University. The presenter was a feminist and she was talking about trying to get the boys who were being trained as PE teachers involved in some of the more salient issues. As a feminist, she was talking about feminist psych concepts. What she said was a lovely by-line. She obviously had a period before lunch and a period after lunch. They got stuck into things before lunch but the boys did not come back after lunch. And that is what happens, I think. The boys will not do anything about it; they just will not come back after lunch. As soon as they feel that they are being unfairly treated or are being singled out, they just will not come back after lunch. And that means they either will not come back to that unit or they will not enrol in it. So you lose them out of teaching if they do not feel they can be included.

**CHAIR**—I would like to finish with a couple of things. At Canberra Grammar, if a boy says in year 9, ‘This university kind of stuff is not for me; I want to train to be a technician’—or some vocational education and training sort of concept—I gather from what you say that there are alternatives for those kids. You are not preparing everybody for university, and woebetide them if they do not want to get there?

**Mr Murray**—We do not have a strong emphasis on vocational education at the school—we cannot be all things to all people—and so the program that is offered at years 11 and 12 is one from which the vast majority of boys will move on to university.

**CHAIR**—My experience is that it is often the unfulfilled ambition of the parents that drives the kid, and some schools compound that of course. So the kids think ‘Well, if I don’t go to university, I am a failure’, and all that sort of stuff. What do you do with the kids who inevitably will not be cut out to be lawyers, engineers, doctors, teachers or whatever else?

**Mr Murray**—We would hope that, during the preceding years, before we come to that point where the decision is made, we will have been able to develop a confident young man who can understand that not moving on to university is not failure, that there are many other highly worthwhile careers to be aiming for. So some of our boys will leave us in a very positive manner and go on to a college where they may be better suited to the teaching and the learning that is going to go on in that environment. We are simply not saying that, if you are not suited for university, you have got to be pushed through our system. We are on about boys being supported and being advised as to where they might best learn.

**Mr SAWFORD**—I have a very important question. I happen to agree that the idea of a single comprehensive high school, which we introduced into this country in the middle 1970s, was the greatest disaster that ever happened. I know you have to have two separate sorts of schools. Why did you not take the vocational track or try to include it as a lot of schools have unsatisfactorily done?

**CHAIR**—This actually seems to be creating a lot of the problems that boys have got. When we were growing up, we believed that, if we studied and worked hard, we would do better than our parents—drive a better car, have a higher standard of living, earn more money and all that kind of thing. The kids today are still basically tethered to those values, driven often by society and parents. Obviously, in your school you try to do the very best you can for these boys, but there is a significant proportion who want to do these sorts of things, whose natural instincts and hearts would be in those vocational education areas. It just seems, at least from what you are saying, that it must be tough to be a boy at Canberra Grammar if your instincts are in those areas, rather than necessarily academic pursuits. That is probably an unfair thing to say.

**Mr Windeyer**—I think there are some boys to whom, by the end of year 10, or when the crucial decisions are being made in relation to choice of subjects and so on, you could say, ‘I think you will find the academic demands of our curriculum in the next two years will probably be beyond you. You should select your subjects very carefully.’ Obviously, for some boys some subjects are easier than others and there is a range of subjects. There are a lot who say, ‘I accept that’, and their parents say, ‘We accept that. But still what the school has to offer in the way that this boy will develop within the total experience of Canberra Grammar School is something we want him to have and he wants to have’. So he stays, and yes, the English assignment is terribly

frustrating because he does not understand it, but he enjoys drama and design and the responsibility he gets as a senior boy in the school looking after junior boys and helping coach a team. He enjoys the sport he is playing.

I think those people are seeing more of the total picture of what Canberra Grammar School offers, than perhaps some of the very focused scholars who simply say, 'In these last two years, the thing which will determine whether or not it has been a success for me is the score I get at the end.' If they are prepared to see it as a total package, then I do not think it is a problem. If they see it as simply, 'What I will get in an academic result at the end, I am not going to get a very good one,' then yes, there is, if you like, some frustration.

**Mr Murray**—Mr Chair, why did Canberra Grammar School decide to go down this path? It is simple to say that I was not there 40 or 50 years ago when that happened.

**CHAIR**—You are not alone in this regard either.

**Mr Murray**—But we have touched on it from time to time to revisit as to whether the current program continues to be relevant and one which we wish to support or one which we might wish to change. We did that most recently 12 to 18 months ago and, very clearly, it was coming through from sectors of our community that this is the school that we believe we wish it to be, based on the premise that you support, Mr Sawford, that we cannot be all things to all people. Let us do what we do well, rather than dilute the resources across a broader section of curriculum.

**Mr SAWFORD**—We need to go back both in government and non-government schools, but not to create a technical school of the 1950s and 1960s, which is a world that does not exist any more. But Alan Walker, who I think was the most progressive director-general in Australia we have ever had, had a duration of 18 months in South Australia and led to people like Steinle, Jones and Dodd and the names go on, who basically influenced everything in Australia. He was of the view that you had to have both, the very opposite of what Karmel came out with in 1973 or 1974 when he recommended the single comprehensive high school.

When you look back, 20 years ago the differential between boys and girls in this country was less than one percentage point. It is now up to 20 per cent. Something has gone wrong somewhere. It seems that when we talk to people, in public education mainly, there is almost a sense of denial first. Then they go back to what Mike was saying this morning in terms of deficit models which I do not think help anybody and then they deal with the periphery. We have dealt with gender construction, gender equity, homophobia and goodness knows what else. I did not think it had a great deal to do with it. I am serious. You ought to read the stuff we have got. There are a whole lot of agendas out there. Basically, I am just asking: do you think we need to revisit, because there are boys who do not fit into your school? Where do they go?

**Mr Owner**—There are. Our task is made easier by where we are, I think, in that there is a very solid, viable set of alternatives that exists just down the road in the college system. The college system is madly developing vocational strands in their educational process. The kids pick up the handbooks and say, 'I want to do electronics or computing engineering or drama and music. I cannot do those, or I cannot do those and take them as separate subjects at this school, so I will trundle off down the road.' We have a significant proportion of the kids who leave year

10 making their decisions on those bases. In other words, they say, 'This is what I want to do. I cannot do it here but I can do it down there.' We are advantaged in that way. I do not think you are in other state systems in New South Wales where you do not have that sort of choice where there are different sorts of schools offering different sorts of curricula.

**Mrs Steele**—Have you talked to the selective government schools in Sydney?

**CHAIR**—Not yet. We are getting there.

**Mrs Steele**—You might find some of the answers you are looking for there.

**Mr SAWFORD**—That was also widespread right across Australia. New South Wales is probably the only place left that has selective high schools, isn't it Kerry?

**Mr BARTLETT**—I do not know about the other states.

**CHAIR**—We need to finish at that point. Thank you so much. It was an excellent submission and we really have enjoyed talking to you. We normally try to close it earlier than this. If there is anything else as we go through the inquiry that you want to comment upon or any supplementary suggestions or anything like that, please pass them on to us.

**Mr Murray**—I have just one final invitation. If you would like to come to talk to some of our boys of all age groups, we would certainly welcome that. If you feel that first-hand information would be useful for your decisions, come and visit us.

**CHAIR**—Thank you very much. We may take you up on that. The other point I ought to make is that whilst I am sure Mr Selth was a great loss to Canberra Grammar he has been a great asset to us over here. Your taxes in that regard have been very well spent. Thank you once again.

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

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

**Committee adjourned at 10.38 a.m.**