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**HOUSE OF
REPRESENTATIVES**

STANDING COMMITTEE ON EMPLOYMENT, EDUCATION AND
WORKPLACE RELATIONS

Reference: Education of boys

TUESDAY, 20 FEBRUARY 2001

EAGLEBY

BY AUTHORITY OF THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

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STANDING COMMITTEE ON EMPLOYMENT, EDUCATION AND WORKPLACE RELATIONS

Tuesday, 20 February 2001

Members: Mr Barresi, Mr Bartlett, Mrs Elson, Mr Emerson, Ms Gambaro, Ms Gillard, Mrs May, Mr Ronaldson, Mr Sawford and Mr Wilkie

Members in attendance: Mr Bartlett, Mrs Elson, Mr Emerson, Ms Gambaro, Ms Gillard, Mrs May 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

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Committee met at 10.34 a.m.

BOFF, Mr Christopher, Teacher, Eagleby State School, Education Queensland

LEATHWAITE, Mr Kevin, Acting Principal, Eagleby State School, Education Queensland

WILSON, Ms Patricia, Acting Deputy Principal, Eagleby State School, Education Queensland

ACTING CHAIR (Mr Sawford)—I declare open this public hearing of the inquiry into the education of boys and thank Mr Kevin Leathwaite for agreeing to host the committee's visit to Eagleby State School today. I also thank everyone involved in this morning's presentation at Eagleby and those who are about to give evidence. I am obliged to remind you that the proceedings today are legal proceedings of the parliament and warrant the same respect as proceedings of the House. The deliberate misleading of the committee may be regarded as contempt of parliament. The committee would prefer all evidence to be given in public, but if at any stage you wish to give any evidence in private, please ask to do so and the committee will consider your request. I invite you to make some introductory remarks about your school and the issues you believe are important to this inquiry before we proceed to questions and discussion.

Mr Leathwaite—Eagleby State School has a fluctuating population of students of between 350 and a maximum of 390 students in years 1 to 7 and a preschool unit with two groups of 25 children on half-time programs. The school is located in a low socioeconomic area. On average, we have a high transient rate in our student population, which would be somewhere around 30 per cent per year.

ACTING CHAIR—Do you want to add anything to that?

Ms Wilson—Generally we find that children who come into our school during preschool age do not have the readiness skills that a lot of other children at other preschools have.

Mr Leathwaite—We assess our students as they enter year 1 level and preschool. We have discovered that, although our students have rich literacy experiences at home, those literacy experiences are not necessarily the ones that are required to ensure school success. There are some specific areas in which our children in general—and boys more so—have difficulties, such as phonemic awareness.

ACTING CHAIR—Chris, do you want to make any introductory statements?

Mr Boff—Not at the moment. I think it has pretty much been covered.

ACTING CHAIR—What improvements have been made in attainments between boys and girls literacy over the last three years?

Mr Leathwaite—Using results from Queensland year 2 diagnostic net data, prior to 1998-97 we identified about 78 per cent of students as requiring support in literacy, specifically reading.

In 1998 that figure was reduced to 56 per cent. In 1999 that figure was reduced to 41.5 per cent and, last year, 2000, the last year for which year 2 diagnostic net data is available, the figure was 27.5 per cent in reading. The writing percentages have also improved dramatically. In 1998 they were 42 per cent; in 1999, 26 per cent; and in the year 2000, 10 per cent. The data for the last two years reflecting boys and girls show that in 1999 we were identifying only 39 per cent of boys as opposed to 44 per cent of girls in reading. They were very similar percentages, although slightly better for boys.

In writing, the figures were 25 per cent for boys and 28 per cent for girls. So, in that instance again, boys were slightly better than girls. In the year 2000, in reading, 26 per cent of boys and only 9 per cent of girls were identified as still requiring support. So again, boys were doing slightly better than girls. In writing, there was another significant improvement with only 13 per cent of boys being identified as requiring support in writing. However, girls improved even more so. Only 6.5 per cent were identified as requiring support. So in that area girls again began outperforming boys.

Mrs ELSON—In this year's results for year 7 boys there was a marked improvement in award certificates compared to other schools in this area. I want to ensure that those figures are correct.

Mr Leathwaite—If you look at the year 7 test results, I do not think you will find that that is the case. In our upper school we have not as yet quite achieved that success due to a variety of reasons, including transient school population, and having some of those students for short periods of time even before the year 7 test. As I said earlier, last year we started the year with 28 year 7 students and we finished the year with 38 year 7 students. So we could not take credit for the education of many of those year 7 students.

Mr EMERSON—You said at the outset that the kids who arrive here have rich literacy skills. Is that in reading?

Mr Leathwaite—No.

Mr EMERSON—So it is more communication skills?

Mr Leathwaite—They have experiences in communicating with others, in families and in other situations. They have experiences in social situations, whether it be at the supermarket or at the TAB. They have had rich experiences, but that has not necessarily given them the literacy skills that they require to ensure their success at school. So we need to look at those students coming in and use what they have. If they have been exposed to junk mail, bills, show bags and other sorts of texts, we need to include them because they may be the only texts that they have seen in the past. So we include those texts within our program to help make that link to book literacy.

Mr EMERSON—When you made that observation about them having rich literacy skills, is that a way of identifying values that are already there, or are you making some sort of comparison between kids who come here and perhaps other kids?

Mr Leathwaite—It is about valuing what is there; not seeing these children as having a deficit. If you look at it as though they have a deficit, you then have expectations about what they are capable of doing.

Ms GAMBARO—I would like to ask you about the value of strong role models, and also about the percentage of male and female teachers. I noticed that you had one male teacher aide. Do you actively encourage more male teacher aides?

Mr Leathwaite—We actively encourage as many males as possible to be involved in our students' education. When we are organising our current staffing at the school we try to spread our male staff—because they still represent a smaller percentage than female staff—throughout the school. They are not concentrated in any one area. We have Chris working in infant school; another male teacher working in the middle school; and, last year, when we had two other full-time male teachers, one was in the middle school and another was in the upper school. So we spread them out as much as we can. I do not specifically go looking to hire male teacher aides. But when one comes along and I am looking at what jobs and activities I can have him doing in the school, I try to involve him in as many literacy roles as I can so that he acts as a role model.

Ms GAMBARO—I refer to the interaction between male and female teachers. Are there certain tasks to which male teachers automatically get delegated, or does everyone pitch in here? Are there gender type issues like football training or something?

Mr Leathwaite—I will let Chris answer that question in part, but I will say that I think we have both. Chris coaches upper school soccer at the school, although he teaches junior school. We also have another teacher, Angela Paterson, who coaches AFL. Sorry, Joanne Rennie coaches AFL. I will let Chris comment further.

Mr Boff—I do not believe there is any definite gender role or stereotyping between male and female staff. We all get in and do what needs doing, regardless of gender or what is involved. I take on the soccer and Angela Paterson takes on the softball. I think she took that on last year. Joanne Rennie takes on AFL, and we all share out the responsibilities equally.

Mr BARTLETT—Kevin, the figures reflecting improvements at your school over the last two or three years are impressive. Has there been a similar improvement in other variables, such as behaviour, levels of truancy and those sorts of things?

Mr Leathwaite—Yes.

Mr BARTLETT—To what do you attribute that? Is that because of the greater attention, or do you think it is because of improved literacy?

Mr Leathwaite—I think it is a combination of the fact that the children have learned skills and strategies for keeping on task. Students are given work that they are able to do and that they feel good about doing. They have pride in the success that they have had. I will give you an example. One student, who began here in year 1, had significant behavioural problems. We could not get him to sit still for more than two minutes in a classroom. He was supported through our behaviour management program, in a responsible thinking classroom. He made it through his first year. He was still having significant problems in literacy, even with the small

group support and instruction. We were lucky though as we also have reading recovery in the school. He was able to go on to the reading recovery program. As he improved in his literacy standards he was able to do more of the work, while constantly being supported with his social skills and behaviour. We have seen him turn around and he is coping quite well now in year 3.

Mr BARTLETT—Has that improvement been more noticeable with boys than girls, or is it pretty even?

Mr Leathwaite—I think both have occurred. Some girls have similar difficulties to the ones I described in relation to boys. It helps them equally. But there are obviously more boys in that category. So I guess, as a numbers game, more boys have been supported.

Ms GILLARD—It is important for the *Hansard* record that we note some of the things we saw today. Could you describe the mixed age class philosophy of the school—the broad approach you take to literacy training, and why you think that might work, especially for boys?

Mr Leathwaite—The three of us would need about 10 minutes to describe that.

Ms GILLARD—I think we should get that onto the record.

Mr Leathwaite—I will speak, first, in general terms. One of the key points about the program is that we are a multi-age school, so we do not have straight year levels in any classes. Our classes are all mixed. With two teachers we would have three year levels. For example, year 1, year 2 and year 3 would be in the same classroom with two teachers. We devote at least half an hour per day for focused instruction in literacy in every classroom in the school, with teacher aides employed to work in small groups and teachers also working in small groups. In those groups the teachers prepare detailed written plans for both themselves and the teacher aides. Chris will speak a little more about that.

Some guidelines within that require teachers to include in their programs community texts and those things that the kids see in their own community—the junk mail, the newspapers, the timetables, or whatever. They also use a fairly structured program of materials that are levelled according to reading recovery levels for that focused reading time. But for a balanced program they do not always use those structured materials. They must use more rich engaging texts as well in other areas of their program. Their program must include the four elements of reading from Luke and Freebody's work, which is decoding practices, text meaning practices, pragmatic practices, and text use.

Kids must know that different texts have different purposes, for example, timetables as opposed to dictionaries, as opposed to stories, as opposed to junk mail. They all have different purposes and uses and kids must understand how they do that. Critical literacy practices involve understanding what a text is trying to do, who it includes and who it excludes, and those sorts of things. Boys really get quite involved in those sorts of discussions. So programs must include those four areas. We have developed a common language to talk about language across the school with teacher aides. Teachers use similar strategies as well. So if one teacher does the planning and a different aide gets the work they still know what it is. They can still understand it even though teachers may plan quite differently.

Teachers are given quite a lot of flexibility in how they implement those programs. I believe that ownership and accountability must lie with the teachers. In that way they have an investment to ensure that their program succeeds rather than having it imposed by us, and being told exactly how it is to be done. I would then be the owner and responsible for the success or failure of the program. However, the successes and failures of each program are owned by teachers. So they take that on to make it work. There are common strategies also for behaviour management to help to assist to keep boys in particular and also girls on track.

So within these small groups there is face-to-face teaching. It is not about giving them a phonic worksheet to do for 20 minutes; it is about activities and strategies that engage them in that constant face-to-face teaching. It is about teachers and their aides swapping groups so that teachers are always aware of what their students are able to do. It is about monitoring those groups so that students are not static in any group and that they can move within groups. It is about having that funded as a number one priority in the school. If someone is away he or she is always replaced within this program, even if it is by me, the deputy principal, or whoever. That person will always be replaced in this program. It is a number one priority.

We put the vast majority of our discretionary funding into having as many staff as possible employed for that short period of time in the morning. So we do not employ a few aides for a lot of time; we employ a lot of aides for short periods of time. We ensure that we have resources to support those four literacy roles that we want to develop in our children. So we look at a lot of Susan Hill's work as she constantly uses those four roles. Teachers are highly supported and trained. There is a lot of professional development and training and professional sharing. That is also supported within the district across a lot of schools where we have been able to organise professional development after school for teachers.

But back here at the school we do a lot of training as well, and we share information about how they implemented what they learned last week. So teachers work in teams to share what they are doing. It also builds in accountability. We have open classrooms that are transparent. Everyone can see what is happening in them. I mentioned that we use community text and other non-narrative text. Boys in particular seem to enjoy getting into non-fiction. You saw in some of the classrooms that the boys really got involved in magazines and material on cars. We look at early assessment—and Trish will talk more about that—specifically to determine what the kids know and what support we need to provide to help them. That is done right throughout the school.

We monitor every child in our preschool to year 3 on a yearly basis to obtain general information. Teachers monitor that constantly and keep running records. Most teachers will take running records on their students' reading, for example, every few weeks and certainly every term, but especially every few weeks for those kids moving through quickly. It is about setting targets and monitoring those targets. It is everyone's responsibility in the school to do that. If anyone, whether it be a teacher aide, a parent, or me as principal, notices that a student is operating with a text that is too difficult or too easy, we tell the teacher that. It is a no-blame zone; it is about the teacher constantly knowing where that child is, and being able to adapt to and support that child. If someone has knowledge that they need, they give it to them. I will hand over to Trish to talk a little more about some of the other components.

Ms Wilson—I will start in the pre school because I believe that that is the area in which there is a lot of work for year 1 teachers. Kevin mentioned that our preschool children who move on to year 1 have many more skills than children coming from other day care centres. We have identified that children come to preschool without the school language that they need. So we look at preschool programs which are fairly structured. We train parent volunteers who come into the school. Once again, we work with preschoolers in small groups. It is done orally. There is no hands-on written material; it is all oral.

The children are introduced to books in a school sense. They are introduced to the language that the teachers use in the classroom because they are not familiar with that sort of language at home. So we go through a lot of that language thing: what is a book and how do we know that it is a book?—those sorts of things that cover basic language. We do a lot of phonemic awareness also, in the sense that the children are not taught phonics and sounds but they are taught to be aware of the fact that words are made of sounds and they are made aware of the types of sounds. We teach them syllables, onset and rime and rhyming words, what is a word, spaces between words—all those basic things that I think a lot of children will have when they come to you. But we have identified that a lot of our children do not have these things. So our preschool program has a heavy emphasis on those early preschool reading skills.

All the children are put through assessments. We look at a lot of Marie Clay's things which she does on readiness and preschool reading skills. We put the children through those sorts of assessments, and they help us identify the sorts of skills that children need. The communication teacher and the preschool teacher put into place a lot of parent training for the parents of our preschool children. A lot of parents came to a session where we talked about the sorts of things that they could do at home with their children and the sorts of things that we do at school. We are trying to make the link between the home and the school in that language sense. There are a lot of parent programs. The parent programs, of course, are ongoing throughout the school. We do reading programs for parents on Tuesday afternoons. I will be running one today on reading, writing and basic numeracy—things that they can do at home with their kids. So we are trying to make that link between home and school.

Mr Boff—I wish to add something in relation to teachers working with teacher aides in the classroom. I have given you a copy of a plan, to which I will not really speak, but which shows the detail that the teachers put in. The idea is that, if we are away or a teacher aide is away, the person who is brought in to replace us can pick it up and run with it. All the materials are set out. A lot of communication goes on between teachers and teacher aides to maximise the time and to maximise learning for the children involved. As Kevin has already said, the teacher aides and the teachers take running records, which forms part of your planning. We are constantly changing our planning. There is no set format at the moment, as long as we keep the components that Kevin has already mentioned. How we actually type out the format and in what order we teach it is up to us. But I cannot state enough that a lot of communication is involved between teachers and teacher aides to maximise the learning time for those children.

ACTING CHAIR—Thank you for those contributions.

Mr Leathwaite—I want to refer to a couple of points. The teacher aides are also highly trained over the years. As Chris said, they do and can take running records. They do not interpret them—the teachers do that—but they can certainly take them. With the parent

programs, we talk to parents about boys too. If they use books that are more hands on, you know, with the flip tags and those sorts of things, that is the way in which a parent can get some of the boys interested. Within our multi-age classrooms one of the things I did not mention earlier that supports the children is that if you have struggling students they are not as easily identified within a multi-age classroom. They are not in a group of two; they are in a multi-age group of other children who are of a similar ability and the age is not of concern. Similarly, skilled children who are talented are placed with others of similar ability.

Mrs MAY—I refer to teachers and their workloads. We are talking about preparation time here, and detailed written plans. When are you fitting this in? Is this an extra workload at the school? Are you preparing these plans during school hours, or are you doing a lot after hours?

Mr Boff—In any teaching position a lot goes on after hours anyway. In relation to the guided reading and writing planning, it is not a great addition to our workload because a block of time has been allocated. We are also fortunate in this school in that we do a lot of sharing amongst teachers, which I know does not happen in a lot of other schools. So we share a lot of our planning ideas. As Kevin said, it works. If it does not work we share ideas and improve upon it. It is not a lot extra, even though it may appear that way.

Mrs MAY—Is it a lot or only a bit more?

Mr Boff—A tiny bit more. It is a fraction more, yes. It is nothing overwhelming, quite honestly. As you can imagine, if you have four pages that you are planning for yourself and one or two aides, a lot of typing and a lot of other work is involved—work which we cannot do during school hours and non-contact time. So there is a bit of work to be done after school. As I have said, we do share, which is something that does not happen in a lot of schools. We have a filing cabinet in our office into which we put our planning documents. I will not take up someone else's plan and just run with that; I will adapt it to meet the needs of my teaching styles, and I will definitely adapt it to meet the needs of the children. So there is a lot of sharing, which helps to lighten the load quite a bit. But it is something that the teachers take on willingly, and it shows great gains for us and for the children. I do not believe it is an overwhelming burden, if that is the way it appears.

Mr Leathwaite—I encourage teachers to prepare plans on computer so that there are similarities, obviously, from book to book. They can just change the focus and do a bit of cutting and pasting to save time. If teachers coming in and new teachers have a busy week with other things they can pull out someone's old plan or a plan that has previously been done. The ones that take more time are obviously community text plans, where no advice is available.

Mrs MAY—Is a block of time allocated each day when every teacher is not face-to-face teaching in the school?

Mr Boff—Not each day, but we do have a lot of non-contact time. Each teacher gets roughly two to two-and-a-half hours per week. I have a one-hour block on Monday afternoon, but other teachers might have half-hour blocks each day on timetabling.

Mrs MAY—And you would use that time for the preparation of plans?

Mr Boff—It is for lesson preparation in addition to our weekly preparation that we have to do in the classroom.

Mr Leathwaite—When we can afford it—and we can usually afford it at some time during the year—we release teachers for some time to share their planning, and especially to help new teachers on our staff to do that. If we can squeeze a few more dollars out of our buckets we also employ teacher aides for a few extra hours a week to support assessment. Now they can do some assessments on children and provide that information to the teacher, or they can supervise a class on an independent activity while the teacher does a one-on-one assessment. We do that a couple of times a year.

Mr Boff—We also get time, usually once a term or at least once a semester, to get together with our teaching partners, as we are a cooperative school, and we plan our term overviews. That gives us more time during the week and during the days to plan these lessons as well.

Mrs MAY—You spoke to us today about running literacy programs in the morning as the children are more attentive and more awake. At some of the disadvantaged schools in my electorate some children are coming to school without having had breakfast. We have started nutrition programs. As this is a low socioeconomic area do you have those problems as well? Do you run any breakfast programs, such as the ones being run in my electorate?

Mr Leathwaite—Yes, we do have those problems. We have our main lunch break at 11 o'clock for that reason, so we know that the kids are at least getting some food at that time. I will hand over to Trish on that one. Although we have not been doing anything, we are about to.

Ms Wilson—I am meeting with Paul Dodd from Gold Coast health. I think Kathy's school may also be starting a breakfast program in the future. It will be funded for three years. So, yes, we will be starting a breakfast program as soon as Paul and I meet and organise the finer details.

Mrs MAY—So you have identified a problem here?

Ms Wilson—We have, yes.

Mr Leathwaite—It has been difficult to deal with. In the past our tuckshop has been providing low-cost milk drinks and toast in the morning. We have done that for a while. But there has been a cost attached, whereas with this program minimal cost will be attached—25c per child.

ACTING CHAIR—Everything we do in this world has pluses and minuses. This obviously highly structured, highly organised program has a defined network of a whole group of people—parents, aides, principal, teachers—who are all implicitly aware of the problems. Are there any negatives? One of the criticisms of some structured programs relates to risk taking. Creativity, an attribute that boys love and enjoy and a whole range of other things are lost in that program. How do you ensure that you do not lose those attributes, which can be lost in a conforming program which, by the way, has a lot of pluses? How do you deal with the negatives?

Mr Leathwaite—As professionals we constantly are confronted with a lot of dangers. There is a danger of getting too focused on structured texts and not providing enough rich experiences of other texts at a level above which the child can read. But if we look at a balanced program and we ensure that we have guided focused teaching of reading and writing and we have activities that are independent, cooperative and modelled by the teacher, that helps to alleviate some of those problems. This very structured program is only a half an hour per day. There are other segments in other parts of the literacy program that will allow more of that creativity. I ask Chris to respond to some of the things that are done there.

Mr Boff—From my experience we have guided reading for half an hour. We also have incorporated in our classrooms what we call our literacy rotation program, which involves six workstations. Children are split into mixed ability groups. So it is not based on need or ability; it is all mixed. You have the higher children with the lower children. They get a lot of their creativity in those sorts of activities. We have technology centres so they can get on the computer and obtain literacy experience on the computer with a different media. We use word formations using a variety of materials such as blocks and books. It is hard to mention stuff off the top of my head.

Mr Leathwaite—They might use plasticine and play dough, and they might make up letters.

ACTING CHAIR—Do you do anything in particular, say, in your expressive arts programs within the school?

Ms Wilson—A curriculum enhancement program.

Mr Leathwaite—We have a strong emphasis on activities for all students. So we provide a lot of opportunities—sporting opportunities and arts and drama activities. As a school, every second year we put on a rock eisteddfod so that students get to do performance arts every class. They put on some sort of performance. We have those opportunities throughout the year in a variety of different ways. We try to involve our students in as many different avenues and experiences to cater for all different learning styles, interests and abilities. Staff focus on multiple intelligences as an idea. Within the literacy centres that they create they provide experiences that will obviously cater to a wide range of abilities—some musical, some kinaesthetic, and so forth. I mentioned earlier off the record that we have a lot of lunchtime activities. Children can choose to be involved in dance clubs, environmental clubs and leadership groups.

ACTING CHAIR—How much time would be spent during a school week doing expressive arts?

Mr Leathwaite—I do not mandate any particular time, but we are a trial school for the new Queensland arts program so a number of our teachers have expertise in that area. They are able to share that expertise with other staff. Because we are a trial school for the New Basics we are looking at trans-disciplinary work. We try to find what we want to do and then what disciplines of knowledge will help to support children develop something in which they will be able to share through some form of exhibition of their knowledge. That is also great for the boys. They know that there is that end point and they know that, in time, they will be able to tell everyone what they know and what they have learned. It is also great for the girls. So it is very

purposeful. I think boys, in general, need those strong purposes and reasons behind what they are doing.

Mr EMERSON—We referred earlier to this issue and I think it would be useful to place it on the *Hansard* record. What is your view of the reading recovery program in Queensland?

Mr Leathwaite—I believe that the reading recovery program is an excellent program when taken within the context of the whole school program. It certainly is not something that just translates straight to a classroom. But we do use some of Marie Clay's assessment devices. We also use others. We use the Sutherland test of phonemic awareness as a significant tool to support our knowledge of children. In the reading recovery program some of the strategies that are used come to the guided reading and writing program. Looking at the four-role model we see that reading recovery strongly supports decoding and, to some extent, text participant components. It does not do very much in other areas.

So the classrooms must take that up to give a balanced program. It has in place someone who is highly trained in the school who can also act as a mentor for strategies and things within the staff. We have new trainees this year, but last year we had an experienced person who trained and worked here. She had been in a multi-age environment for a long time. She also helped support peer reading programs. So she was able to apply her reading recovery knowledge, use what was very useful in it, show how that could be incorporated in other ways within our programs and also show that it was a component of a balanced program.

Mr EMERSON—That is one example of an early intervention program, but are there also parenting programs at home and so on to address the root causes of literacy problems? Is any work going on to marry reading recovery and other programs with early intervention through home visiting, parenting programs and that sort of thing?

Mr Leathwaite—We have parent education programs at the school. With the reading recovery programs, for example, one of the reasons we use peer readers is that we found that a lot of the reading that we wanted to be done by those in the program was not being done at home with their families, for whatever reasons. So to ensure that those students were still getting that extra practice outside the reading recovery time, and extra practice outside their normal classroom program, they were also involved in those peer reading programs, which were monitored and followed up by the reading recovery teacher. So we found other ways around that, although we do still try to encourage parents as much as possible in parenting programs.

Mr EMERSON—Do you have a supporter reader program that supplements your reading recovery teacher?

Mr Leathwaite—In the early days we used supporter reader with our teacher aides. I believe we have moved above and beyond that.

Ms GILLARD—On the question of the lesson plans and your focus on those plans, we have heard from other schools—schools that are in difficult areas—that their preference, really, is to pick up a predetermined literacy curriculum package and roll it out because it takes the burden of lesson planning off teacher aides and teachers in those environments who are already struggling with a lot of issues. Craig Emerson and I, outside the ambit of this inquiry, visited a

school in the west of Sydney where that view was strongly put to us. You seem to be going an entirely different way. I would be interested to hear your views about those matters—whether or not you have been able to achieve what you are achieving partly because of the nature of staffing here; whether there is a role for predetermined curriculum packages; or whether you think it is a flawed methodology to take ownership of lesson plans away from teachers?

Mr Leathwaite—I believe that there is a role, but that is it. It is a role; it is not the whole program. We look at whatever programs are available and, as I said earlier, we purchase resources that will support the development of students in those four literacy roles. I know that planning can be burdensome, so we have the Alphakids reading scheme in junior school. It is not the only material we have; we have a lot of programs. But it is one that Susan Hill put forward which covers the four roles. So at those times when teachers are running short of time and they do not have time, for whatever reason—family circumstances or anything else—they are able to take a core amount of work from that and support their program for a period of time.

With the professional sharing and training that we do, I believe it is more important that teachers are not looking to a package to tell them what to do; rather they should be looking at students needs and developing a program that will support those needs. They must have that high level of knowledge to be able to do that. That is what I believe is part of being a professional. As I said earlier, off the record, I believe that the difference between our teacher aides and our teachers is that our teacher aides are excellent educational technicians. They can implement programs we give them to a very high level. They can do the running records. They can follow the lesson plan the teacher gives them with a small group. But it is the teacher who looks at the needs of those students, plans that appropriate program and writes that program for them to implement.

It is critical to keep that level of knowledge for teachers and to have teachers sharing their expertise with one another. I think our teachers work very well as a team in doing that. But we look at every program to see what components of those programs we might be able to take and incorporate. We certainly do not say: we are this sort of school or that sort of school.

Mr Boff—I want to add something. I have actually seen and used a program that specifically spells out what you do on day one, week one, day two, week one, and those sorts of things. It leaves a big question mark above those children who do not grasp the concepts spelled out on day one, week one. I was told to keep moving on with the program, even though children were not grasping what was said.

Mr Leathwaite—Not here.

Mr Boff—No, this was not here. This was at a different school. So it leaves a big question mark in relation to what happens to those children who are not grasping the concepts. They are still left by the wayside and are picked up later on. Here we get all those children through base one. The needs of the children are not spelled out in a day one, week one sort of program.

Mrs ELSON—I am impressed with your figures for the improvements that are being achieved at the school. Your teacher aides seem to play a big role in that success. You must have a rationale or a reason for your success. What is the rationale for giving your teacher aides two hours work a day? I think you said that they work eight hours a week. Do they come in only

once a day for that two hours in the morning? Do you have another team that comes on in the afternoon for two hours? If you do not, can you tell me why not? You are employing highly skilled people, which costs money, so why could one teacher aide not work two hours in the morning and two hours in the afternoon? You would then require only half the number of teacher aides. Your policy is successful, so something is working. Why do you employ teacher aides for only two hours in the morning? Is that to keep them fresh and interested?

Mr Leathwaite—There are several parts to that question. I do not think I have yet mentioned on the record that we have a backward timetable on all our specialist lessons. So our mornings are as free as possible from interruption in the classroom. We ask our office not to do any callovers, as you heard earlier, until just before lunchtime. We ask parents not to bring lunches during that time. We tell parents to leave the lunches at the office and that we will ensure that the children get them later. Teachers are not interrupted in those first two hours of the day because that is the best learning time for our students. That is the time that they are most focused and most able to pay attention to what we are doing. It is cooler and their attention span is longer.

So our focused teaching and learning are implemented, as much as they can be, in those first two hours. Therefore, we employ as many people as we can. Every child in the school is involved in that literacy and numeracy teaching within those first two hours. They all get that teaching within that time. The second part to your question is that they generally come in from 9.00 until 11.00, although if we do not have enough bodies for, say, numeracy, we might employ them for some time in the middle session, particularly in the upper school. Because a number of them are employed for a short period—9.00 until 11.00, four days a week, and they do only eight hours work—they tend to be locals.

We are also upskilling our local community. We lose teacher aides to other schools who employ them or we lose them to other career opportunities. They build their confidence and their self-esteem rises as members of this community as they work here, do the job, and see the success that they are having with children. Often they go on to other things. So we have to constantly keep renewing that base, which is great for the community. However, the more people we have the larger the pool we have to support one another. That means that we are required to re-train a few people. So it is about supporting the community and upskilling our parents, as most of those aides are parents or past parents. It is about supporting children in the best time of the morning so that they can learn, and it is about providing that opportunity to as many people as possible.

Mr BARTLETT—What about children with special needs such as ADD and ADHD? How well do they respond to this approach? Is their improvement commensurate with, better than or worse than the improvement in your student body generally?

Mr Leathwaite—It depends on the level of the problem that they have. We certainly have kids who have been diagnosed with ADD and ADHD. They progress well on the program. In general, I think that they progress equally well. We try to modify some children's programs. If we know that they are to have their focused half hour with the teacher and our behaviour support people from 10.00 until 10.30, we ensure that they walk up to the behaviour room to get some stamps for their great work in that early morning before they walk back into the room to recommence that focused work. So they have time to get up and move around.

Within the program teachers are constantly changing the activity. It is not one activity for half an hour; four, five, six, or eight activities occur in that half hour. It is very focused and very intense in your face teaching. The children might start on the floor, go to their desk for a bit and then come back to the floor. They might go out on the pavement if they are new students at school and start writing in chalk the letter T as many times as they can in the next minute before they go back inside. So there is a lot of movement for those students.

ACTING CHAIR—I like the term that you used earlier—‘in your face teaching’. I had not heard that before, but it says a lot for the way you are organising this school.

Mrs MAY—I want to touch on the non-structured activities at lunchtime, getting back to boys and their participation in school. Have you been able to evaluate their participation? You were talking about art and drama and those types of activities. Is the participation as high for boys as it is for girls?

Mr Leathwaite—The dance groups are fairly new. They started only this year. What we offer depends on our teachers volunteering and it also depends on their expertise. We have some boys in those groups. The teachers are actually trying to encourage more boys. They would like more boys because they want to enter an eisteddfod later in the year. But certainly in the clubs that have been running longer, for example, the environmental club and those sorts of things, there are fairly equal numbers. We try to keep the leadership activities fairly balanced. Sometimes we have more girls in, say, our school student council than we have boys, but sometimes the opposite is the case.

The whole environment is about children understanding that everyone has different strengths and needs and that they can feel okay about having a go. We are strong about having a go. I would rather have participation in a competition and not get great results and have all the kids proud of the fact that they had a go. We constantly encourage participation. So, no, we have not done any formal studies on it because the activities change fairly regularly too. I can say from personal experience over many years at this school that, eight or nine years ago at our biennial rock eisteddfod, every class had to put on a dance to music at the end of the year. There were certainly quite a lot of boys whose families thought that this was not something in which they should be involved. These days we would not have a single boy in the school who would query it. They all love to get up there and do their bit.

Ms Wilson—Even the year 7 boys participate very strongly.

Mr Leathwaite—There are no problems at all. They are all very happy to get up there and do their bit.

Ms Wilson—To add to that, children take parades too. We see equal participation in boys and girls taking parade as well as presenting on parade, which is demonstrating leadership roles.

Mrs MAY—Just going back to your teachers, is the turnover high, or is there a real stability in the school with your teachers? Do you need a lot of time to upskill new teachers in this program, or are their own professional backgrounds of assistance? Is there a lot of upskilling to be done to bring them up to your standards?

Mr Leathwaite—It varies. We get a lot of graduates here by choice because we are looking at people who are prepared to work as a team—people who are prepared to learn with us. We do not believe that we have the answer at any given point in time. If we are not about changing and improving, I think we have lost the game. So it is about constantly looking for those improvements and seeing how we can do things better. How one teacher is going to do it will always be a little different from the way in which another teacher does it. That is okay. We accept difference. We have some classrooms, as you saw, where there is much noise and movement. But I look at the learning outcomes in that room. If they are equal or the same as the outcomes that are achieved in the quiet classroom where everyone is sitting very still and writing in their books, that is okay. Those teachers' preferred styles are fine.

When we do student placements we take into account their preferred styles as well. The turnover of staff, I believe, is improving. In the past we had very high turnovers of staff. But with the support of our district office in recent years they have given us a greater opportunity to look at staff coming here. We speak to those staff before they come in so that we employ people who want to work in an environment as a member of a team, who share their work and who are happy to have people walking through their classrooms. I let them know up front that we do that all the time. The deputy principal, parents and I walk into classrooms at different times. We do not interrupt and the children do not stop their work and say, 'Good morning, Mr Leathwaite' when I come in. I expect them to keep doing their work.

So there is transparency in the classrooms. Our district office has been good in supporting us getting staff who are happy to do that and who, therefore, are more likely to stay. Having said that, over the last few years we have had quite a big turnover. It is a challenging school. Teachers who work here get a lot of expertise in different areas. Many teachers then go off to other things. They go off to become education advisers; they move into administration; or they go into specialist teaching roles. When new people come in, because we work as a team, the rest of the staff are there to help them. We have examples of these plans, for example, for them to use initially, and then they adapt them and support them in their own way. We start immediately in supporting them with a lot of induction and professional development. We talk to them about the culture and the ethos of the school. I believe it is critical to have that first before we get into other types of things.

Ms GAMBARO—These results are terrific. I just want to talk to you about bullying. Have these results improved from 1998 to 2000? Have you noticed an improvement in antisocial behaviour and bullying

Mr Leathwaite—I believe so, yes.

Ms GAMBARO—You gave us a brief rundown.

Mr Leathwaite—At a time similar to the time that we started implementing these programs we also implemented our responsible thinking classroom, which is always staffed by two people. We try to ensure that we have a teacher working there part time as well who can take on the proactive roles of a supportive school environment. We found that from 1999 to the year 2000 the number of referrals of disruptive behaviour halved but, on the other hand, because we have a transient population, we always have significant issues and things coming up. We do not talk about a specific bullying program.

Ms GAMBARO—Do you have a policy?

Mr Leathwaite—We do have a policy. But we have a whole of school behaviour management policy and program of which bullying is a component. We look at the whole big picture of a supportive school environment—everything from lunchtime activities to the playground. Those are all components that help to create an atmosphere and an environment that is supportive of students. Students learn and work cooperatively together to build self-esteem. All those components come together. I am sorry, this is not a short answer. Once again we do not pull a bullying program off the shelf and implement it.

We do a whole variety of things that support that. But certainly we have seen significant improvements. However, we always have an influx of older new students in term three. There is always a resettling in the school in that period because those students are coming in. Often they have significant social, behavioural and academic issues that need to be resolved. So it takes us a little while. Sometimes we can have 20 new students in a week. That obviously can change the dynamics of the school significantly. In 1999 it probably took us the whole of term three to get back into a nice, even routine. Last year it probably took us only four weeks. So we get better at it as we recognise the sorts of issues that we need to deal with.

Ms GAMBARO—I refer to parental involvement. I know that you have spoken about teacher aides, and you have parents becoming involved. You can only do so much here. What are your significant issues when dealing with parental involvement after school hours, particularly on reader programs? Is that a difficult issue for you in this area?

Ms Wilson—I have been running other parent programs in school hours, which coincide with the drop-off time for children. So we start at 9.00 and run until 11.00 or, in the afternoons, from 1.00 to 3.00 or from 2.00 to 3.00, depending on the program. Parents come here to pick up their children anyway. I will also be looking at evening programs to cater for those parents who cannot come during the day. The involvement so far has not been that high. We are looking at ways of improving that. We will certainly be determining in term 2 how to get more parent involvement in the school.

Ms GAMBARO—From the lower grades to the higher grades?

Ms Wilson—Throughout.

Mr Leathwaite—Right across.

Ms GAMBARO—So you cannot say it is any worse?

Mr Leathwaite—They are involved in other ways. If we have a sports day we have a massive roll up. At our rock eisteddfod, about which I spoke earlier, thousands of people in the community turn up to watch it and to support the kids. So, yes, we may have a bit of trouble getting them to be involved and training them in how to help their children with literacy. That does not mean that they are not interested. Sometimes they do not feel that they have the ability. We have to find better ways. We have not solved that at all. We have to find better ways to get them in and support them.

I believe that an after school homework centre, which we have had over a couple of years without technology, has been helpful, but I hope that we will soon have a technology centre set up with computers and Internet access ability available to the community, students and their parents. That would be a way in which to draw in parents after school. We would also be able to show them the ways in which they would be able to help to support their children, if they are interested. So those are the things we are looking towards. It is a future-type program.

ACTING CHAIR—Kay Elson, your local member, is very complementary of the school. On behalf of all committee members, I thank you for your participation in this public hearing today. We understand that the organisation, the structure and the systems are in place. There are identifiable frameworks and plans to involve a significant number of people in the education of children. You have been highly successful. We wish you further success. Thank you for your frankness, your openness and for your welcome here today. We very much appreciate that.

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

That the committee receive evidence and include as an exhibit for the inquiry into the education of boys the documents received from Eagleby State School—the literacy program for junior school: *Guided reading and writing planning*, and Eagleby State School results for year 2.

Resolved (on motion by **Ms Gambaro**):

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

Committee adjourned at 11.34 a.m.