COMMONWEALTH OF AUSTRALIA

Official Committee Hansard

HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

STANDING COMMITTEE ON EMPLOYMENT, EDUCATION AND WORKPLACE RELATIONS

Reference: Education of boys

THURSDAY, 22 FEBRUARY 2001

ROSEVILLE, NSW

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HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

STANDING COMMITTEE ON EMPLOYMENT, EDUCATION AND WORKPLACE RELATIONS

Thursday, 22 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: Ms Gambaro, Ms Gillard, Mr Sawford and Mr Wilkie

Terms of reference for the inquiry:

To inquire into and report on:

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

WITNESSES

Committee met at 9.28 a.m.

LETNIC, Mrs Ann, School Counsellor, Roseville Public School

PARSONS, Mrs Gay, Reading Support Teacher, Roseville Public School

RICHMOND, Mrs Carol, Principal, Roseville Public School

WILLIAMS, Mrs Catherine, Deputy Principal, Roseville Public School

ACTING CHAIR (Mr Sawford)—I declare open this public hearing of the inquiry into the education of boys. I particularly thank Carol Richmond for agreeing to host the committee's visit to Roseville Public School today. I also thank everyone else involved in this morning's visit to Roseville and those who are about to give evidence. While we are your guests, I am obliged to remind you that the proceedings here today are legal proceedings of the parliament and warrant the same respect as proceedings in the House. The deliberate misleading of the committee may be regarded as a contempt of parliament. The committee prefers that all evidence be given in public but if at any stage you should wish to give evidence in private, please ask to do so and the committee will consider your request. Do not be intimidated by those comments. I invite you to make some introductory comments about your school and the issues you think are important to this inquiry before we proceed to questions and discussion.

Mrs Richmond—I am going to start the information sharing discussion today by saying a little about the culture and the background of our school. Then Catherine is going to talk to you about the way we have identified the needs of the various students in the school, the programs that have been put into place and then the very important thing: how we have tracked and monitored how those programs have gone.

Our school has a population of between 530 and 560 students annually. Generally there is a balance of gender. This year there are 260 boys and 269 girls. We are fairly careful, when we are placing the children in the class, to try to get a balance of gender in the classes, where possible. There are 35 staff members at the school, with three males on staff—one being the general assistant. All the executives in the school are female. They are all strong personalities and, I would think, probably strong female role models in the school.

Our school has promoted an open door philosophy. The community are very comfortable with coming into the school. They know when they come into the school that they will be listened to and we will take appropriate action, if need be, about their concerns. I think all of the community would say to you that they feel very comfortable in coming into the school.

Many of our children come from homes where either one or both of the parents are professional people. So the parent community actually value education very highly, and that rubs off onto the children. The children are task orientated and they, too, value their education. They start thinking about what high school they want to go to in about year 1, and they start thinking about HSC in about year 6, which we do not particularly like. That is the sort of community that we are dealing with.

Our parent community is very supportive of the school and its educational programs. The P&C puts as much money into this school as the government, and that allows us to provide the quality programs that we are able to. It is probably atypical of most schools, so I think you need to keep that in mind.

The funding that we get from P&C allows us to run a fantastic literacy support program, excellent sporting programs, computers and music. There are five bands in our school, and two-thirds of the children in the primary part of the school are in one of the bands. So you can see the sort of funding and the support that you need from the community to run those sorts of programs. This year, the P&C have put aside $10,000 to support school initiatives and the learning support team is probably going to use most of that funding in actually looking for ways of developing the students that have particular gifts and talents in our school. In the past few years, we have spent most of our resourcing on the other end of the learning spectrum, but we are moving towards supporting the children with gifts and talents. We have a lot of children in that range as well, so their needs need to be addressed.

How did that all come about? Probably about four or five years ago through the P&C. The P&C decided that they wanted to have a look at the whole issue of self-esteem in the school and we met with parents and teachers over a 12-month period, exploring that concept of self-esteem. At the end of that time, one of the recommendations that we made was that in our school we had identified 57 students that we felt had low self-esteem in one or two of the domains that we were actually assessing. At that time, 57 of our students represented 10 per cent of the students in the school. That was a figure that we thought we could not ignore.

The recommendation that that committee made to the P&C was that we really needed support in reading. The P&C then decided that they would fund—and they have funded for the last four years—a teacher that works at our school, almost full time now, in literacy support. It was the sort of resource that we could not get from the government because our basic skills results would be too high to get that sort of support. But there are still students that need that support within our community. They might not be two or three years behind, as they might be in other schools, but in this community they feel quite threatened because basically the students are pretty able. That is what we were looking at. We also identified children that were not coping well with peer relations in the playground or in the classroom or even out of school. We implemented a social skills program, and Ann is going to talk to you about those in a moment.

As I indicated to you, the band program is really strong with the boys and the girls vying for lead positions in the band. Every instrument section in the band has leaders and co-leaders, and that is regarded as a highly sought after position by the children. They are very eager at the beginning of the year to see who the leaders are.

Sport is very well supported in the school, and that probably comes from my background. My background is sport, so I am keen on sport and I think that filters down through the rest of the school. I am a strong rugby supporter, and so are the rest of the school now. When the boys play rugby, all the fathers come to the games. No matter what time of the day we play, they all leave their work in their high-powered professions and they come and watch the rugby game. That is one of the reasons that I keep going. Another reason is that I have 20 boys in year 6 that I have a very good hold on. If you have a good hold on year 6, then you have a good hold on the rest of the school. So rugby is important.

Mr WILKIE—Do you have to employ bouncers to control the parents?

Mrs Richmond—No, but it is interesting that the parents line up to coach those teams. I would have letters down there now saying, 'Can I coach the rugby team this year?' It really brings the dads into the school. At the moment we also have a number of boys who have decided that they want to play in the girls teams, so this year for the first time we have boys playing softball, T-ball and netball. We have a couple of boys in each of those teams because we have to be careful that we do not stack the teams so they are too strong against the other teams. We have got girls that are wanting to play, and are playing, soccer. We had a girl in the junior rugby team last year and she was the strongest player in the side.

There is also quite a lot of dance in the school, and boys are involved in dance. There is no stigma attached and I do not think any of the boys in the dance group get a hard time. They want to be in the dance group; and that is certainly a popular program. We have developed a zero tolerance policy to bullying and I have given you a copy of that. The policy is widely publicised in the school. In fact, next week we have got a performance group coming in doing a performance on bullying and we will follow that up with a review of our policy. That happens annually. That policy goes home to the parents. The parents are aware of it. We have made some pretty strong statements in that policy so we have to live by those if there is a problem.

Dads are encouraged to serve in the canteen and we have a dozen fathers on the roster for this term. They have fathers day in the canteen where just dads are manning the canteen, but there are other days when the dads are working with the mums. Those same dads shift their time in their professions to allocate time to the canteen. I think the students really appreciate that and I know the dads get a lot out of it too. Dads attend school functions and both parents are often in attendance at parent-teacher interviews and at parent information nights. Traditionally the dads, but certainly not exclusively, have taken key roles in the P & C and the school council.

That probably gives you a little bit of a snapshot of the school. Catherine is now going to talk to you about the way we have, over the years, found out what the needs are in the school, identified them, put programs into practice and then monitored them. I will now hand over to Catherine.

Mrs Williams—Probably central to improving the learning outcomes, as Carol said, is the identification of student needs, looking at designing the programs and implementing the programs that specifically meet those identified needs, then monitoring that student performance and evaluating those programs so that they are still relevant. All of the strategies we use are always based on sound and current research and best practice at the time. That is probably a very essential part. The other thing is that all learning is coordinated by one central team—the learning support team. It is responsible for students with gifts and talents as well as for students with learning, behavioural, social and emotional difficulties and any kind of additional needs. It is coordinated by that one team.

That one team consists of 10 members of the teaching staff right through from kindergarten to year 6, as well as our school counsellor, support teacher learning difficulties and reading teacher. If that is what we want to achieve then what we have done over the years is put systems in place that all interrelate to each other. The first system that we put in place was to develop a teachers' guide to or a whole school overview of the type of assessment that is done and when it

is done. For example, in term 1 teachers use a range of assessments that are what we call standardised diagnostic tests that they would give to their whole class. The purpose of that is to screen the children. Every child is screened and then we are able to target children that might be at possible risk. We target those children for closer individual assessment to see if they are at risk. If they are, we act then to put something in place. If not, we tag them to monitor them later on and we come back and check on them.

That also allows the teacher to then have an idea of grouping children of similar ability and learning needs so they can match the instructional program with those children. Also, from a school point of view, we are able to look at each grade and watch as it goes through and see whether we are actually improving the learning outcomes for students based on these standardised tests. That is just one thing we do in term 1. To build up a very comprehensive picture of student achievement, in each term the teachers will use a different range of assessment strategies, from using what is called running records where they are checking on children's reading, through to collecting work samples so they build up a complete picture of the children.

The learning support team has a role there too because it reviews and analyses all the results that we get. We dedicate that time and it is within the plan. In term 1 we will get in all of the results from the teachers on what the teachers have done and then we will look at and analyse those results and make recommendations. In term 2 and term 4, the children who are in the literacy or reading support program are assessed and then we analyse those results as well. We see who needs to come in or go out of the program and on to maintenance support. When they come out of the intensive reading program they go on to a maintenance program.

In term 3 we get basic skills test results and University of New South Wales competition results. So the learning support team also analyses those results as well, looking at individual students and comparing these results with the results and information we already have on those students and, again, looking at any school wide issues that might need addressing. We will then make recommendations for either training or development of staff or for implementation of other programs.

Because our assessment has become very refined over the past few years, we have been able to identify trends. For example, one trend that we picked up was that our students were very good in terms of their accuracy in reading—they were very good at being able to read the word and break it down—but their comprehension was not as good. We therefore had to look at training and development of staff and at explicitly teaching those comprehension skills. We saw an improvement there as well. That has taken a number of years to get to. We have also been able to pick up that in year 1 where the students' comprehension, even verbally, was poor. We put in a preventative program in kindergarten. We always look at what resources we can get for nothing, so we always look at what the district has to offer. We will bring in the district team as well as the school team and parents, and we will put in preventative programs too.

That is where we have come this year. We really need to address explicitly the needs of children with gifts and talents. We have spent a long time on the other end and people, both parents and teachers, are now at a stage where they feel quite confident that those students' needs are being met. Now we are moving to these children and people do not seem to have a problem—whereas, in the past, they were a bit reluctant and saw it as elitist.

We have got those results and we have analysed them. We also have another system to track student performance. We have put a system in place using tracking sheets so that every child has a tracking sheet, which is just a summary of the main results from standardised result tests. That gets passed on to the next teacher, who puts on more information and passes it on. So when you get your class at the very beginning of the year you do not have to wait six weeks to find out where they are at. You literally look at their tracking sheet and you get a picture of the child as a learner—you can see where they have come from. For us that means we can also pick it up and, if there is a discrepancy, then we look and see why that is the case.

Another system that we have in place is for when teachers are concerned about a child and their progress. We have a procedure for referring those students that they are worried about to the learning support team. Teachers fill in a form—they have to put it in writing—and it comes to the learning support team. We meet every week during lunchtimes. We look at the students that have been referred and develop a plan of action for that student. That could involve parents, outside agencies or people within the school. As soon as we do that, a file is established on that child. That goes in the learning support team file, which is kept in my office. Privacy and confidentiality are very important—those files never leave my office. The only people allowed to access them are those who have some reason to—the student's current class teacher or our specialist teachers. Those files are not allowed to leave my room. That provides more detailed information, and then the tracking sheet is just an overview. Children who have been a concern or worry have a specific file set up for them that gets added to as the years go on.

As soon as a child is referred, their name goes on the computer database. Every year, we print out a current list of the children who have, at any time in their schooling career, been referred to the learning support team because of a concern. Teachers get a list of the children so that they know that there is a file available that has more detailed information than is available on the tracking sheet. Again, it means that they can develop an instructional program that is going to meet those needs and be tailored to those needs. We actually have current files on 172 students—that is, we have had plans of action to support a third of our school. Thirty seven per cent of those are girls and 63 per cent are boys.

The next system that we put goes to accessing special programs and funding for those programs. We will access from the district. We will apply for support from intensive reading classes, from the itinerant teacher of behaviour—who is in the school this week, helping to develop a behaviour plan for a student that is challenged—and also from the district support teacher for language. We also access money through state funding, through Funding 2001, for students with disabilities, and we spend a lot of time trying to get as much money as we can to develop programs for those students. Then we have our school based programs, such as our social skills program or our self-esteem program from a number of years ago. That was funded by our P&C and we also used our district resources, the school counsellor and the district teacher for behaviour. We also have the oral language and listening program for kindergarten—that is a preventative program—and our literacy support program that is funded by the P&C.

ACTING CHAIR—I am conscious that the more time you talk, the less time we have for questions and answers, so is it possible for you to keep it to a couple of minutes each?

Mrs Parsons—Happily! I will just run through quickly what happened with my program. I started in semester 2 in 1997, paid for by the P&C. At that time, I was only working four days

and until 12.30 every day. We had 15 girls and 22 boys in that first one. The children were referred by the class teachers. They were assessed using a Neale analysis and there was a Miscue analysis for the infants. We ran small groups—four children in the infants and six in primary—and we saw them three times a week. I did modified reading recovery with the infants and reciprocal teaching of reading for the primary students. Stop me if I am using strange words. Year 6 was in-class support at that time, with another teacher, and we also started individual programs. If a child does not fit into a group—if it is a spelling, handwriting or sequencing program or anything that I can help with—Ann, the STLD or I will see the class teacher, and the child will start some sort of program within the classroom that is checked through the person who puts it in place. The parents often run those as well at home, so I might send home a whole lot of sequencing stuff if the child has a sequencing problem. There were then nine girls and 12 boys on individual programs.

In 1998, we went from years 1 to 6 on withdrawal, and we had 16 girls and 17 boys. The testing became more extensive; we went twice yearly. We did the Neale and the Educheck on the primaries and we did a Burt and Educheck and a running record on the infants. We had 24 boys and 11 girls on individual programs. In 1999, we went to 26 girls and 23 boys, so it is starting to change, and we went to 21 girls and 25 boys on individual programs. In 2000, the P&C increased funds and I saw more children. I saw 30 girls and 30 boys—we got even—and I had only two girls and eight boys on IEPs, because I was seeing so many more children then. That was the first year we also trialled visualising and verbalising. Visualising and verbalising is a comprehension program usually done by speech pathologists.

We were aware we were getting these kids with incredibly high accuracy and low comprehension. I think that started to come in because the accuracy was getting better and better because that was an area that reciprocal reading and reading recovery were targeting. I think we were picking up more. We were seeing kids that the teacher would once never have thought had a problem: 'He reads really well.' But when we said, 'What do you see? Do you understand that? What can you infer from this?' There was nothing. So I got the book on visualising and verbalising written by Nanci Bell—it is an American program—and adapted it for use in a group. We had eight boys and five girls. We trialed that. The year 6 group was all boys and we were a little bit worried about withdrawal—some of them were the rugby boys—but they were great. They loved coming and used to run in. We had a ball. Speech pathologists always say it is a very boring program but we had a lot of fun with it. It starts with pictures and then goes to words. You get the child to rewire their brains to use both hemispheres—the right is for making pictures and the left is for words—and, over a period of time, they rewired their brains. When we assessed that we had some amazing results. The average gain of these students was 1.8 years over six months. The biggest gain was three years and 11 months—that was in six months. We checked them again six months later. A lot of them had maintained the gain but some had not, so some of those came back in again. I think it is to do with IQ a little bit; the kids who were very bright seemed to take it and hold it but with the kids who were a bit more average it did not seem to stay, for some reason. Maybe there is a better way of doing it. I will keep looking. We tried it on year 2 children, too, and younger children, but that did not work either, for some reason. I will try to work out why that happened.

This year we are running one year 3 group once a week on visualising and verbalising. You do not need to do visualising and verbalising three times a week, unlike the accuracy which I always have to do three times a week. I am seeing year 3 once a week, year 4 once a week, year

5 twice a week and year 6 twice a week. They are all withdrawals. There are five boys and one girl in the year 6 group, so it tends to be, once again, an area that leans towards the boys. This year before doing it we notified the parents; I sent an information sheet home about it. I also went into the classroom and gave the kids my little Einstein talk about how Einstein had reading problems—so did Churchill—and that it was a wiring problem and had nothing to do with IQ. The kids were really interested in why some people were right brained, some people were left brained and some people were in the middle. We had quite a good talk and they were fine about it. There have been no problems with withdrawal at all with those kids. The boys are coming in and we are still having a lot of fun.

This year we have 33 girls and 34 boys in support. The balance has changed radically since 1997. We have got nine girls on individual programs and 29 boys. Basically we treat all children as individuals. We target the problems early. We continually monitor our progress and respond to the needs as they arise. We have a very good learning support team. I am aware that you have to establish a good rapport with a boy before he can learn. I have always done that. But it was Carol who pointed out to me that research showed that that is something that you need. It was very clear with one little boy: it took me six weeks to get eye contact and have a good rapport with him. And then there was his behaviour. He was always in Catherine's office for doing something dreadful, but he turned around as soon as we developed a strong rapport. I think that is incredibly important.

Mrs Richmond—I think the research on that shows that girls will respond to content but that the boys respond to the person, so it is really important that that person is very strong. I want to interrupt there because I know time is the thing. When Jim approached us we had not put a submission in. That is probably important for all of you to realise. When Jim approached me on the phone I said, 'We are not doing anything special for boys that we are aware of. What we are trying to is to put good programs in schools for students.' I had a look at Gay's figures last night. Since she started—if you take it up to date—128 boys have had places in the program and 128 girls. It is amazing that when it works out it is actually worked out like that. Some of them are the same people accessing it again, but the places in the program are exactly equal. You can come back with specific questions to Gay because Gay is the specialist in that area.

Mrs Letnic—I am the school counsellor and my role is to assess students, to advise students, parents and staff, to refer students to appropriate resources and also to counsel students. As with the learning support team overall, my focus is on the individual needs of students but it is also to look at common trends and ways of grouping students so we can address their issues in an overall systems approach. My role usually involves IQ assessment, then probably some academic assessment and sometimes social and emotional assessment. I would then give individual feedback to the parents, and it is usually both parents who turn up here to get that feedback about the student. I would also then give feedback to the class teacher.

Some examples of what I might do on an individual basis might be: if a child had a problem wearing his glasses, because he felt inhibited about wearing glasses, I might actually advise the class teacher that he has to wear them each day and encourage that sort of approach to reward him in that way. It might also be back at a school level on an individual basis advising the class teacher that this child has a poor auditory memory and to make sure they check that he knows what to do with the task by asking him to check with them as well in that way or to use visuals more often to get the content over to this child.

On an individual basis, if I am looking at a child's needs I might be counselling him about bullying and it may be that he is a bit different from the other guys in this school. I might sit down and say, 'What sorts of kids do you relate better with? How can you change your behaviour?' I would be looking at strategies of empowering them to cope with what they see as a problem. It could be anxiety, because a lot of children come to school being anxious about school or anxious about other problems. We look at empowerment strategies to cope with that anxiety. I might also refer beyond the school and use the resources beyond the school. As Catherine said, we might use the district resources of the behaviour teacher who might come in and advise the class teacher on what they might do with the child. They might run a social skills program within the school—and I will go to those in a moment.

Individual referral could also mean that I might refer out to a health professional, be it a speech pathologist or the local health centre. They might go to an occupational therapist if they have problems with their fine motor skills or their visual processing, or they might even go to a paediatrician if we are thinking about attention problems. All these recommendations I see as individual. We then try to move on to look at a systems approach. For example, if a child in a classroom had poor social skills, we might then talk to the teacher and say, 'Are other children in the class like that?' We might then look at classroom skills like poor listening skills, poor asking of questions skills and those sorts of things. We then might talk to the teacher and say, 'Could you run a program for a term or a couple of weeks with that sort of focus?' In that way we target a number of children and we look at that systems approach as opposed to just an individual approach.

Another example of that is that sometimes it could be a whole grade that might have a social skills problem and so we have addressed it in that way, looking at a whole grade approach. Gay has talked to you about how we have moved into visualising and verbalising. I have been here for five years and over those five years I was just running through some of those activities that have become a grade or even a school approach. They included a social skills program run by me and the behaviour teacher a few years ago with some difficult year 5 boys. You put in children who are good role models as well as the more difficult role models. We ran it for about a term, focusing on being responsible members of a classroom, coping with change and those sorts of focuses. We have also run a social skills development day for grades K to 6, looking at planning for a whole term where we have looked at doing a social skills program for a whole term. That has run over the years.

We have had self-esteem groups run by me for middle primary students. That was for a term. That was probably one of our earliest stages of focusing on self-esteem where these kids just were not coping as well as we would have hoped. As Catherine mentioned, we even ran a self-esteem group that was run by a private psychologist who was brought in for a term, supported by the P&C. That picked up children who we identified as having long term self-esteem problems.

We have also moved into a pastoral care program run by one of the scripture teachers who came here who also had qualifications as a youth counsellor. She ran a program on an individual basis picking up children we saw as in need of emotional support, I suppose, in that way. That ran for about 18 months. Mostly it was focusing on debriefing, sharing time with them and just establishing rapport. Recently we have begun a form of teacher mentoring. We have actually lost our pastoral care person so we have moved into teacher mentoring, picking up those same

students with teachers who are volunteers working on that. They touch base with me as school counsellor or with Carol as principal in management of that. We have also withdrawn children with significant learning difficulties, in a group of two at this stage, and I have run strategies for them to cope in the classroom with their difficulties.

Another example is basic skills. We have children who have visual processing problems and we see that as the reason they have not done so well in the basic skills test, so we have had some practice groups in things like test technique. It has targeted a small group of those children. Over the years, they are just examples of the grouping that we have done to address issues of need.

ACTING CHAIR—Thank you. When we first began this inquiry, the Commonwealth department of education gave us some statistics that reflected New South Wales and Victoria, in particular, but it was an Australia wide trend. Twenty years ago, the differentials between attainments of boys and girls was less than one per cent which is what you would expect because, intrinsically, the intellectual abilities of boys and girls should be the same. Recent information says that those differentials vary up to 20 per cent. Something has happened in the last 20 years for that to occur. It is interesting that, when you first started this program here at Roseville, two-thirds of your 57 diagnosed group were boys, and yet now you are telling us that the people who have gone through the program are 128 boys and 128 girls—and I would have thought that was a realistic view. That is what should happen.

Is it the involvement of parents or is it because you have a structured program? This committee has received a lot of evidence, and we have actually seen evidence in schools, of where there are structured programs. For example, Catherine, you had a plan—identification, planning, monitoring and evaluation—such that the differentials between boys and girls were minimal or did not exist. Obviously, you are giving us very strong evidence that boys and girls can achieve to the same level. We want to know why and we want to ask you, 'What are the strongest factors that you believe have created that?'

We have listened to bureaucrats of state education departments and independent schools and, in fact, teacher unions, both independent and state, who have rejected out of hand what you have said—the left, right, and the balance and whatever. I would have thought a balanced approach to education would have been far more sensible and I very much appreciate that when you use terms like 'expression', you use terms like 'understanding', which is the balance. Girls are traditionally better at expressing themselves. Boys, if I can make a generic statement, are sometimes better at the understanding part, but you need both skills. Boys and girls need both. All of you have identified balanced skills. What is that factor in terms of the rationale, the involvement of parents, and what do you think are the main factors that have contributed to your success?

Mrs Richmond—I think it is all of those things. It comes back to resourcing and having good systems in place. Basically, what the learning support team have done over the last four years is to put a really systematic approach into the school, but that comes about by resourcing. If we did not have the help of the P&C, which is giving nearly $40,000 a year for this person to come into our school, if we did not have this specialist, we would be really struggling. The other thing is parent support. This is a high socioeconomic school. A lot of the mums are professional people but working part time, so they can then dedicate the other part of the time

that they are not working to coming in and helping with the school. We have a lot of parents that will come in and learn Pause, Prompt and Praise or learn some of the programs that Gay is doing. Or, if we give home programs, we know that they are going to be followed up. So, basically, we have got that audience that wants to do something. But I was reading some research on homework the other day and it was saying that even in very disadvantaged environments the parents want to be able to help—they just may not have the skills. So it has to go back to the school.

Mrs Parsons—I run a lecture on how to teach children to read. We get 30 parents and about a third of those are men. Some of them will stay on and help within the school, and I give them children that need a little bit of extra help. Others will just use it with their kids at home. They are very keen and they are already saying, 'When are you doing it?' because kindergarten parents want to come.

ACTING CHAIR—Is this a staffing formula problem as well? It is no good spending a lot of money and then not having a plan. You have got a plan. But if schools have a literacy and numeracy plan, as evidenced here at Roseville, is it also a problem that needs to be recognised Australia wide that in primary schools, in particular, there is something wrong with the staffing formula in terms of the ability of all schools not only to have the program but to actually implement it, monitor it and evaluate it?

Mrs Richmond—Without a doubt.

Mrs Williams—Yes. We used to have our district support teacher learning difficulties come three days a fortnight. Now we have that person come for just one week a term. We had to adjust our programs because we lost district resourcing, because our basic skills results were much better—

Mrs Richmond—The district lost the resourcing too, because the results in the district were better than, say, the results in the met. west. So the district lost that resource.

Mrs Letnic—There is an effect even with staffing for school counsellors. I am only here 1½ to two days a week. The issue is that if you change the day the learning support team is on, then you might not have the school counsellor as part of that team. That is an example. I have just changed schools elsewhere, and that is a problem they have got to turn to, to work out the solutions. So yes, staffing is a huge issue.

Mrs Richmond—I think it is even broader than the reading and the learning support; it is all the programs. That is why I mentioned that it is the band, the public speaking, the debating, the sport. There is somewhere in this school where a kid is going to fit and achieve. Once they start to achieve, it doesn't matter what area, then it really turns them around.

ACTING CHAIR—I am conscious of the time and I want to allow some of my colleagues the opportunity to ask questions. Perhaps if you could make your comment, Ann, and then I will hand over to my colleagues.

Mrs Letnic—We spend a lot of the time with parents trying to raise their awareness, even, of self-esteem. Catherine organised some specialist consultants to come in and talk about it. So

that is another example: we are talking about educating the parents in how to read, but it was also raising awareness as far as the self-esteem is concerned.

Mrs Richmond—That is not only done through parents. We will have parent forums, and they are very well attended. We will get expert people in, but every week in the bulletin that goes home—I could show you some samples of bulletins—there is a lot of education going on of the parent community. So they are very well informed educationally.

ACTING CHAIR—To go back to the beginning, just quickly: the 57 reflects the more general view of what is happening out there in Australian schools. Why was that the case? It wasn't the case 20 years ago. Why are two-thirds of our boys in a group who are struggling at school? It doesn't make sense, does it?

Mrs Parsons—Maybe it was. Maybe the testing has changed.

ACTING CHAIR—Have you got any theory as to why that was the case?

Mrs Williams—I can only think of what was different.

ACTING CHAIR—Was learning too unstructured before?

Mrs Williams—I can only look at what is different now from, say, four or five years ago when we had that number. I know that if we look at it now, there is a whole school approach to what goes on and it is very focused on learning and improving learning. We adjust our programs to fit the need. I am a non-teaching person and not many schools have a person that is non-teaching. I only look at curriculum and learning. That is quite a luxury in a school too. Therefore, I can afford the time to focus on that, to organise the structures and to bring in and make sure that we have current research and current data and we put the systems in place—that is my job.

What might happen in schools is that they might have programs in place, but the programs might not necessarily be addressing specific needs. I think it is about identifying the needs. You keep evaluating that program to see if it does keep fitting—that is really important—and, of course, the training and development of staff because things change. Teachers have to keep the big picture in mind, too. It all interrelates.

Mrs Richmond—If you think about 20 years ago—and I do not want you to misconstrue this—there were probably a lot more men in the teaching profession as well. There was a different style of teaching in a lot of classrooms as well. I am not saying it was better at all, but I think we are probably suffering as a profession too because we have more women. Even in our school we have a lot of women.

ACTING CHAIR—It has fallen from 37 per cent to 17 per cent in teacher training at the moment. That is an incredible drop.

Ms GILLARD—Rod has referred to the data that motivated, in part, this inquiry. One set of that data was about literacy achievement, with the emphasis on testing early literacy. There are substantial differences between boys and girls in their achievement in attaining literacy at age

seven and that kind of thing. We have had a lot of evidence before this inquiry that that in and of itself should not necessarily be of concern, because boys develop literacy skills more slowly than girls do but they will get there in the end. So the level of attainment will be equalised. In your experience, is that right or wrong?

Mrs Richmond—It is fraught with danger, isn't it? It is what happens in that intervening time. Yes, they might get there in the end, but what happens to them in year 9? They will fall by the wayside because, if they do not have it and they cannot compete with the others, they are going to develop a whole lot of social and behavioural problems. They have to get it early. When they leave this school, they have to have it because we know when they go into high school that it is too big a system. They have to have it now.

Mrs Parsons—We cannot just sit there and say, 'Oh, they are going to get better later.' What if it is a specific learning difficulty and you are thinking that it will be fixed later on? You have to find out exactly why that child is not reading and fix that child. I treat every single one as an individual. I do not assume it is going to get better.

Ms GILLARD—No, I am not saying we should just assume it is going to get better.

Mrs Parsons—I know.

Ms GILLARD—The conundrum for us, as public policy people, is that you do not want to just assume things are going to get better, but you do not want to jump in fright at a set of statistics when there might be some real explanations. If you test boys and girls at seven, eight, nine and 10 and by 10 the level of attainment has been equalised but it just took the boys longer to get there, then there is no need to get completely hysterical about differences at age seven. What I am trying to get a feel of is whether, in your experience, boys do attain literacy more slowly than girls so that we have to bear that in mind in terms of looking at data from the early age range. Some people have said that that is the case.

Mrs Richmond—Some girls are not ready either at the age that you think that most kids are ready.

ACTING CHAIR—They are all different.

Mrs Parsons—Yes. They are all different. You just treat every single one at whatever stage they are at. You take it on, and you see exactly what the problem is.

Mrs Richmond—I am not sure but maybe that data, where they say they will catch up, is gathered in, say, years 11 and 12. But there might be a lot of kids that have actually fallen away from school, so we are not gathering the data on those early leavers.

Ms GAMBARO—Thank you for your submission. I enjoyed reading it. We have taken advice from a number of professionals, as the acting chair has said, and there is a school of thought out there that boys mature at a much slower rate and that perhaps—and I think the teachers union in Queensland spoke about this yesterday—we should bring in a longer period before they go to school—for example, another prep year. Then I speak to other principals who

say, 'You should start boys one year later than girls.' I wonder what your thoughts are on those particular suggestions.

Mrs Richmond—It is interesting that you have said that, because we have found that that has happened in the last couple of years. If parents have boys who are a little bit younger and they are able to afford to keep their kids back, they are tending to keep them back and start them a year later. That actually became a concern to us because there were so many parents who were doing that. That became the popular trend in the last couple of years—that they would not send their boys when some of the boys were ready but they were keeping them back. They can afford to do this in this climate, but others cannot because preschool fees are much higher than school fees.

Ms GAMBARO—So on an individual basis it basically depends on the boy's level of maturity.

Mrs Williams—That is exactly right. If you were to speak generally—and it comes back to the point that you were making too—there would be a number of boys whose readiness to learn comes a little later than girls, but I think it is really important to keep in mind that each child is an individual and you have to look at each child as that individual. Even though they might chronologically be five years old, they might be more than ready to learn and to move on, regardless of whether they are a boy or a girl, and some other five-year-olds might not be. It is really important to believe that all students can learn and will learn, but it is their rate and how they learn that will vary, and so you have to modify the program for that.

Ms GAMBARO—At preschool—we call it first grade in Queensland—what testing methods are used to determine if people are ready to go into primary school? Do you think more could be done there or are you pretty much getting those kids who are ready for school—or can that be addressed more through testing techniques?

Mrs Williams—It is interesting that you say it, because I think that our preschools tend to use an intuitive feeling for whether a child is ready or not for school.

Ms GAMBARO—Yes. That is my observation personally, too.

Mrs Williams—Yes. It is interesting because last year we had two boys who, the moment they walked in the door, we knew were not ready for the formalised setting that school brings, but their parents could not afford to have them at preschool any longer. Then we have had to repeat them in kindergarten, which is not a good thing to do—it is not a good way to start your school life. They just happened to be boys, but you knew that they just were not ready. It is the formalised structure and setting. They just wanted to play.

Ms GAMBARO—They just were not ready for it. I was really interested when you were speaking about the number of fathers you have in the tuckshop and, again, we are looking at this from a holistic approach in terms of strong male role models and we have spoken about the lack of male teachers. When was that turning point where the dads put up their hands for tuckshop? Was it a gradual thing? I can imagine those fathers early on would have had to lead the way for the rest.

Mrs Richmond—They did lead the way. Actually, the first person to lead the way was a parent of a boy called Sam who had a very severe visual problem. He is almost blind so he is coming in on our integration program, and dad had taken a lot of time off work over the years to look after Sam. He started it and then he would ring around to other dads in that year and say, 'I'm going on canteen duty; how about you tell work that you are not going to be there for a couple of hours and have a monthly roster.' Then it started and it has just mushroomed, but it is all part of that feeling that has grown in the school. Everyone is aware that our staff is mainly female so we have to provide other role models as well—hence the rugby, hence the canteen. There are two fathers day breakfasts every year. They are booked out. There is not a father that does not come, and they could put on a lot more.

Ms GAMBARO—That is terrific and I have to commend you on that. Thank you.

Mr WILKIE—I was curious when you were talking about some students being ready for school and some not. Have you had a look at any of the backgrounds that they might have had? Have they come from preschools where there has been a semi-structured environment or have they not been to preschool? Has that been a factor?

Mrs Williams—Not that we would be able to statistically say, 'That is so.' It comes back sometimes to the amount of time that parents have for those children, because their language development might be so restricted that they cannot even really communicate. That was the case with one of our students. There is nothing that you could say is set in concrete or would be consistent.

Mrs Richmond—Except, Catherine, there are a couple who have not been to preschool and we can certainly notice that when they come in.

Mrs Williams—Yes, but sometimes they do not take a while to settle; it is just that they have to make bigger adjustments more quickly.

Mr WILKIE—The reason I asked that is that we have had suggestions that obviously the children need to stay at home with their parents and that helps them when they come to school. They have obviously got the opposite train of thought that those young people that have had an environment of coming up through preschool tend to cope with primary school a lot better.

Mrs Williams—Again, it would vary and it would depend on the kind of environment they are in before they come. Even I can think of some of our students who have not been to preschool, but they have fitted in very well because they have had a parent who is very involved with them.

Mrs Richmond—And they could stay home with a parent and not get the benefits. There are a lot of parents who just could not afford to do that.

ACTING CHAIR—Can I ask some deployment of staff questions? I will go back to you, Catherine. Not many deputies around Australia would have non-teaching commitments. Some of them have up to 90 per cent, and an average would have at least 50 per cent.

Mrs Williams—That is right.

ACTING CHAIR—Could you do what you do, in coordinating this program—initiating structures, monitoring the unit, making sure that it all runs well and also the assessment and evaluation for continuous review—if you had a 90 per cent teaching component?

Mrs Williams—In my previous school I was a teaching deputy, so I taught for half of a week and I was non-teaching for half of a week. We were a very big school; we had 800 students. We had two deputies and we were both half teaching and half non-teaching. Because there were the two of us, it would have been the same. One was responsible for kindergarten, year 1 and year 2 and I was responsible for years 3 to 6. You had a smaller number of students, only 400, to deal with, but it was more difficult because my thinking now is only on systems issues, big picture. When you spend half your time preparing your lessons for your class and focusing on your class, it is a switch in thinking and really you do not have the same time. You know what it is like: you are thinking so much about your class and you are really worried about those students.

ACTING CHAIR—So you couldn't do it?

Mrs Williams—You could not do it, not to the degree that you do it. That is one of the reasons that I actually chose to come to a non-teaching position because, to do it well and to keep the big picture, and that is a really important thing to do, you have got to not get lost in the day-to-day things.

Mrs Richmond—The bus passes.

Mrs Williams—Yes.

ACTING CHAIR—I will come back to the big picture in a moment. Are the teachers on the staff committed to face-to-face teaching from the time they arrive to the time they leave? Is there any flexibility in the way that they are deployed? Do they have 20 per cent no contact time? Do they have any no contact time?

Mrs Richmond—Yes. They have two hours a week released from face-to-face teaching.

ACTING CHAIR—What sorts of activities do they do in that time? Do they catch their breath?

Mrs Williams—Yes, they catch their breath, have a cup of tea and go to the toilet.

Mrs Letnic—They might need to talk about a student.

Mrs Richmond—There is a statement of what has to happen during that time.

Mrs Williams—Yes. They are engaged in activities with the teaching.

ACTING CHAIR—The other thing which you keep saying, Catherine—which is also in stark contrast to what we get from the bureaucrats—is that you keep using the words 'whole to part', 'analysis to synthesis'. This is exactly the opposite from what we are being fed from departments. Do you get that information as well? Does that trickle down to the schools or do

you just do what you like? The propaganda that is around is saying the opposite to what you are saying.

Mrs Richmond—Our department in New South Wales gives the government priorities for the year, and we have to make sure that our programs address those government priorities for the particular year. For the last few years, the government priority has been literacy. Therefore, we were in line very much with what was happening state wide. Sometimes the government priorities are so huge that you physically have not got time to address all of their priorities. There is a system in place that we have to follow, and there is a plan.

ACTING CHAIR—A couple of the principals we spoke to in Queensland worked in schools that were fairly socio-depressed. They did not mention government but they said basically that they had no problem with what comes out of the Director-General's office. They did not have any problem with the so-called director who relates to the school. But they did have huge problems in having their understanding of what education should do and happen in that middle bureaucracy. Is that similar here in New South Wales, or is that putting you on the spot?

Mrs Richmond—That is putting us on the spot. I do not think we are dictated to as to what happens. Every school has their own style of doing it, but teachers are probably crying out for it to be more prescriptive, don't you think?

ACTING CHAIR—If I were a principal in an area that did not have the ability to run $40,000 of fundraising, how the devil, as a principal, deputy, school counsellor—if I have got one—literacy teacher—well, I have not got a literacy teacher—

Mrs Williams—No, you have not got that.

ACTING CHAIR—How do they do it?

Mrs Richmond—Depending on where they are situated, they probably have to do a lot through the training of their staff. Our P&C gives us $9,000 a year to assist with the training of our staff.

Mrs Williams—Yes, whereas the government allocation is about $1,000.

Mrs Richmond—It is about $25 per head.

ACTING CHAIR—So you have got a fairly significant professional development program paid for by the parents?

Mrs Richmond—Yes, but $9,000 is probably not significant over 35 people. But it is much better than most schools would have.

Ms GILLARD—What is the total amount of P&C fundraising that is made available to the school?

Mrs Richmond—$100,000.

Ms GILLARD—Each year?

Mrs Richmond—Yes. And our global budget from the department is $106,000. That is depending on student numbers.

ACTING CHAIR—Some schools in Australia with similar numbers would struggle in their communities to raise a thousand dollars, and the effort to raise that thousand dollars is just huge.

Mrs Williams—Yes.

Mrs Richmond—There is a true partnership here between the school and the community, and the community are just amazing in terms not only of their fundraising but also of the other sorts of support that they give. A family will be in difficulty—someone has gone into hospital or dad has lost his job or whatever. Okay, there is a program in place in this school that nobody knows about but suddenly meals will arrive at that house. That happens all the time.

ACTING CHAIR—Do you have lots of visitors at the school, having a look at what you are doing?

Mrs Richmond—No. We do not encourage them because we want to get on and do what we are doing. That is true. We were amazed when Jim rang us up because of this little article. No, we do not encourage it.

ACTING CHAIR—Can I simply say that you should, because I think you have a professional responsibility to share your success in your profession with other schools that maybe do not have the parent participation or the ability to raise the funds. I think, in terms of what you have told us today and in terms of what we learned the day before yesterday in very successful public schools based in Brisbane, primary and secondary, that you do have something to offer. It comes back to a far more realistic assessment of where boys and girls ought to be in Australia. A lot of this debate is highly non-constructive. On one hand, you have got a group of people out there using feminist conspiracy theories over the last 20 years. They tend to get a lot of publicity but it does not tend to produce anything. On the other hand, you have got people who are denying that that problem that you identified in 1997 exists at all. Somewhere in between, there are people like you who are actually doing the work and getting the results. I think that does need some exposure. Do you have any contact with your neighbouring schools, for example?

Mrs Parsons—North Sydney Dem came in to see my V/V (visualising/verbalising).

Mrs Richmond—People approach us and they are very welcome to come in. Catherine has had people that have come in and shadowed her, and she has helped people in other schools. People can come in and sit in on the learning support. But we are really flat chat doing what we are doing.

ACTING CHAIR—I understand that, but what you are doing is incredibly important.

Mrs Letnic—Local schools in the Ryde district are aware of Catherine's learning support team.

Mrs Parsons—I think you transfer it, too, don't you?

Mrs Letnic—Yes. I work in other schools so I pass that on.

Mrs Parsons—That is why North Sydney Dem supports coming to see what I am doing.

Mrs Letnic—The ones who work in the district cross schools: the behaviour teacher might say, 'Oh, look what Roseville is doing here', so there is that connection.

Mrs Richmond—Catherine and I are going on Monday to talk to all of the consultants of the district about the planning processes in the school and how they work, so we are sharing that information. Last year, when we were looking at Aboriginal reconciliation, we raised the money to take the 75 year 6 students out into western New South Wales for a week. We went to Bourke and to Brewarrina, and we camped and we stayed in shearing sheds. The kids had the most amazing literature that they read. And it was just a mind-blowing experience. Again we did not tell anyone about it; we were just doing it. But people heard, and when we came back the kids were asked to go and speak at all the different schools and things. So it gradually filters out, but there is only so much time.

ACTING CHAIR—Is there any bullying or violence in this school, harassment?

Mrs Richmond—Yes, but it is minimal.

ACTING CHAIR—Are there any changes over the last three years since you introduced these programs?

Mrs Richmond—There is a change in the awareness of the children and what constitutes bullying. There is a change, too, in what we say to the staff—that it is not just dobbing. If somebody comes up to you in the playground and says something, there must be action. You cannot just ignore it. Kindergarten will come and tell you a million things but you still have to listen to them and see what is happening.

ACTING CHAIR—Sometimes young boys and girls who are being hurt cannot get that information out. Have you any programs or ways in which you deal with that?

Mrs Parsons—I always know if there is someone having a problem; because you have a rapport with the child you know that something is wrong.

Mrs Richmond—The kids come and tell us, don't they? Our doors are open. They would not harbour it. They would either tell their parents or tell us and we would respond.

Mrs Williams—Or some other children who have seen it will be concerned for those children and will come and say something.

Mrs Letnic—And teachers are very aware. The children would have a depressed state, and teachers are aware of picking up that something is happening for this kid. Further investigation results in, 'Okay. Yes, that kid's been picking on me for a while,' and we act on it. Just as we do in their learning, we act also on their behaviour and we follow through.

Mrs Richmond—That would come up in their social skills lessons and in their child protection lessons. That would be revisited several times a year. Next week we are having a drama group come in—we are doing a drama group on bullying. The teachers will go back and talk about that and, because the kids have seen this in the drama, there will be a lot more discussion. We would make sure, then, that we talk about that in the bulletin that goes home to the parents and say, 'Discuss this at night.' There is all this going on all the time.

Mrs Parsons—It is out there because you know they are not performing.

Mrs Letnic—I deal individually with children with bullying. It is not a huge issue but it is still part of their ongoing life that they have to cope with. Carol is wonderful. She will call in their buddies to support them more or have a talk to the bully. She is a very hands-on principal in that way.

Mrs Richmond—Two years ago a certain boy was having a problem in year 6. We just downed tools. We didn't just deal with that boy; we did a whole program with that class.

ACTING CHAIR—What are your views about competition?

Mrs Williams—They are opposites.

Mrs Parsons—I hate it; Carol loves it.

Mrs Richmond—I thrive on it. We have different views—but so have the community. We are in a very competitive community, too. Even with the excellent programs that we have in place we still struggle against the independent schools. We are surrounded by independent schools. Our parents have the wherewithal to make choice and last year we lost 13 children out of year 4. They are really good kids that we want to keep.

ACTING CHAIR—Catherine, you obviously have a different view. Do you see any positive aspects of competition?

Mrs Williams—Competition has its place but it needs to be kept as part of. You have to have cooperation—that is really important in competition.

ACTING CHAIR—That is the next thing I want to ask: are there any negative aspects to cooperation and collaboration?

Mrs Parsons—Not in my groups, no. My kids are really supportive. We have a no put-down policy. No-one is ever allowed to put anyone down in my groups. They are gorgeous. If a kid has been struggling with a word or something and he gets it, the others go, 'Oh, yes!' So I cannot see—

ACTING CHAIR—I noticed that in your submission you included dealing with losing or understanding the dynamics of losing, which is a very strong social skill.

Mrs Richmond—Yes, and it is a really big thing in our community, because our parents have been winners and they want their kids to be winners. When I first came to Roseville, even if they lost a band competition there would be kids in tears. I could not believe it. We are dealing with how to win and lose graciously.

Mrs Letnic—Winning is also based on the individual focus that we have to find some areas of winning for kids. For each child you can usually find something that they are winning at and are great at.

ACTING CHAIR—Much of the current propaganda almost dismisses competition as an evil and promotes collaboration as the beauty of the world.

Mrs Richmond—You can have both, can't you?

ACTING CHAIR—I would have thought you could have both. No-one seems to talk about the negative parts of collaboration. You can actually reduce everything to the lowest common denominator—mediocrity and uniformity. Do you agree with that?

Mrs Richmond—Yes.

ACTING CHAIR—You have a balanced view.

Mrs Richmond—What we thought we might do, if it suits you guys, is take you to some classes and then have a break. Is that what you want to do?

ACTING CHAIR—Yes.

Mr WILKIE—I want to slip another question in. I was really encouraged by your comments about relationships. Obviously if the boy is in a positive relationship in the classroom it works a lot better in their learning environment. How did the peer support program work in encouraging relationships across the school?

Mrs Richmond—Do you mean the social skills program?

Mr WILKIE—Yes, going right through from kindergarten to year 6. I saw that in the article you had a program to encourage them to interact.

Mrs Richmond—It is a really strong program and it tends to last longer than that initial kindergarten experience. They will have this relationship for a long time, even with siblings of the year 6s that might have moved on. It is a strong program.

Mr WILKIE—So it has a role in encouraging that across the school?

Mrs Richmond—Yes. We have not had the peer support programs that a lot of other schools have because we have not had the need.

Ms GAMBARO—You have covered a little bit on self-esteem issues. Again we were talking about the individual, but we were at a school the other day when students said that boys needed to be praised more than girls. Do you find that, or is that a generalist statement?

Mrs Williams—It is really interesting that when we were doing that whole issue on self-esteem we really had to look at what was self-esteem and self-concept. We had to do this with the community—

Mrs Richmond—It took a long time.

Mrs Williams—and it came back to an understanding, a feeling of being competent. Even if you did praise somebody, unless it was genuine praise and they themselves felt competent, then they would know it was not genuine. So praise had nothing, really, to do with it. What was important was the recognition of competency, and developing people so that they were competent in social interactions and competent in what they did so that the praise, when it was given, could be actually taken on. Otherwise, with praise or any kind of recognition—we went through that feely thing that even if kids smiled you would say, 'That was really good'—the child would know intrinsically if it was not good and the praise was false.

Mrs Richmond— Before you go away I will give you an article that I was reading just last night. It is about winning and losing, and talked a lot about how we have gone overboard in our community to always say, 'Gee, you are doing a good job, Johnny. You might have come last in the swimming race but it was fantastic.' We are always praising kids, so often kids have not got a realistic idea of where they are really at. It is a really nice article to read. I am actually going to share it with the parents.

ACTING CHAIR—Before we formally close this public hearing, could I just get on the record a recommendation, I am sure from all of us here, to start showing off and stop being modest. I think that, basically, you are doing in this school what a lot of schools ought to be doing—and what many are doing, and perhaps not getting recognised for it. It is a very commonsense and balanced approach, in which you are inclusive in terms of all the research that is available and not just being selective, which is what we are all being presented with. I congratulate you all, and I am sure my colleagues agree. Show off.

Mrs Richmond—Whilst we appreciate the comments, I also keep coming back to this: if you cannot do it in a school like this, then you have got to be shot. It is a really good environment to work in.

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

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 10.37 a.m.