
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

KOGARAH, 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 2.04 p.m.**

**BILLINGTON, Mr Stephen, Principal, James Cook Boys Technology High School**

**ACTING CHAIR (Mr Sawford)**—Welcome. Would you like to make a few introductory remarks?

**Mr Billington**—I am the principal of James Cook and I have been here for five years. I would like to give you a very quick idea of some of the things that we have tried to do in the last five years. For the year 2000, this school was awarded the Director-General's award for excellence in school achievement through the project called Machismo. Machismo came out of the idea that all boys at some stage in their schooling need to be recognised for their excellence or achievement. This school has a very strong sporting tradition. A number of celebrities and outstanding sportsmen have come through this school. The school has always been recognised as a champion in athletics, swimming, rugby league, soccer and so on.

It also has a reasonable academic background from the principal who was here in 1968 through to boys who have scored 99.9 in their TER and 99.8 in the last three years. So there has been academic excellence as well. But we feel that a lot of boys have slipped through the net. They needed to be affirmed in what they were doing at school. It was a focus to start with on the creative arts, drama, music and dance to try to say, 'You can be a boy and you can achieve at those things and still be valued.' When I got to the school the stereotype was the achievements of the outstanding sportsmen were to be idolised and, when you were a great sportsman, that was the end of it.

So in the last four or five years we have tried to redress the imbalance and say, 'Here are some things that boys can achieve at.' Recently we had a number of boys recognised in Art Express, which is where the top 1,000 Australian year 12 major works are displayed at the art gallery. We have boys in that. Boys who finished their HSC last year are performing at the Opera House as the elite performances from the HSC. In drama, they had a conference in which Robert McClelland was involved in called Growing in Harmony. There has been a whole lot of conflict between the Vietnamese and the Lebanese, which, as you know, has perhaps risen its head again more recently. We had a number of Lebanese and Vietnamese boys in a presentation called Growing in Harmony. There were 1,000 at the conference and 1,000 people gave it a standing ovation. It was the most moving thing. We have had many letters from politicians and parents who were there to say that they had not seen anything that moving done by boys, yet this is a school that was once a sports school.

Obviously, we are a technology high school. We have had to achieve that through a review which takes place every three years. Every boy in year 7 and year 8 undergoes some type of technology through our technology rooms. It was interesting to hear Rod talk about literacy and numeracy. We have spent a lot of time and money in the last few years trying to develop our literacy and numeracy skills because 56 languages are spoken at home by those at this school; 75 per cent are from NES background. It is important that we focus on literacy and numeracy. Not many boys are that literate in their own language; they can speak it but they find it very difficult to write. So to actually get them to write and read another language is even more difficult. So we have focused on that.

Last year we were also part of a best practice program sponsored by the government called Innovative Practice. We were one of five schools in New South Wales that were part of the program. We looked at what we did in year 7, because we believed that from year 6 there is a huge gap to year 7. We felt it was important to try to link year 6 and year 7, so we spent a lot of time linking year 6 and year 7.

We run an IM program here, which is for boys below 75. One of the things we try to get them to do is run their own commercial coffee shop. Every three weeks—for people from the street or wherever they might be—they cook and plan the menu. It is part of their hospitality program. A real feature of this place has been that these boys are achieving success in an area which they normally would not have thought of. We run a gifted and talented program and a gifted athlete program. We have excellent staff and a very supportive community.

The last thing to mention is that, as you saw in our class, in year 11 we are now joining in cooperative links with the girls school. I believe that, certainly in years 7 to 10, there is a place for stand-alone boys education. But I would like to see, in years 11 and 12, the opportunities for boys to mix with girls and vice versa. It has also allowed us to extend the curriculum to such a point that they have a choice here of every available subject that is offered in the New South Wales curriculum. That has not been possible as a stand alone boys school or a stand alone girls school, but together we could provide everything. The other thing is that, being next door to TAFE, you have the added advantage of work studies—which is a program where boys are out in the work force—and VET courses being readily accessible. So there is a very quick thumbnail sketch of what we have tried to do in the last five years.

**ACTING CHAIR**—Colleagues, I know that we have plenty of questions that we can ask Steve, but I suggest that we leave those questions to when we talk with the principal and staff later in the afternoon.

**Discussion with years 9 and 10.**

**BAYLEY, Kevin**

**BECKETT, Chris**

**BYE, Andrew**

**CAI, Sam**

**HAMILTON, Cameron**

**HONG, Craig**

**KACEVSKI, George**

**KACVESKI, Nick**

**McLACHLAN, Wess**

**PAREKH, Amit**

**TAWALO, Jerry**

**WEBB, Aaron**

**ACTING CHAIR**—Welcome, boys from years 9 and 10. Thank you very much for being prepared to talk to us this afternoon. I would like to ask an opening question: name me something that is very good about this school, or something about this school that you would like to see improved.

**Craig Hong**—What I like about this school is that the teachers are really good. One thing that I want to see improved is that it should be a co-ed school.

**ACTING CHAIR**—I might come back and ask you why later.

**Amit Parekh**—One thing I really appreciate about this school is that a lot of teachers take care of the students, to the extent that they do go out of their way to make sure that everything is catered for you and there are a lot of subjects available for us to excel in. One thing I would like to see improved in the school is the communication between some of the other teachers and the communication between our effective SRC and the student body.

**Chris Beckett**—I like the school's computer lab. It is well equipped. I would like to see a few more teachers because there are only a few teachers that teach computers in this school.

**Nick Kacevski**—What I really love about this school is the music and the technology they have in the music department. I think it is probably one of the top in the district. What I would like to improve in this school is the communication between teachers and the parents so they know what is happening in the school and what is happening with the students.

**George Kacevski**—I am also impressed with the technology of this school, but I still think that it should be a co-ed school.

**Sam Cai**—I think that the music department here is very good and also the computer rooms. What I would like improved for the school is the tennis courts, the toilets, the facilities.

**Aaron Webb**—I think the music and sports facilities are good and I would like to see more teachers come here to teach—that might be a bit better.

**Jerry Tawalo**—I really like the computer facilities here. There are lots of computers for lots of students to use for assignments and most of them are linked up to the Internet. I am impressed about that.

**Wess McLachlan**—I think the music room and the computer rooms are really good, but the thing that needs to be improved is the toilet facilities and most of the playgrounds.

**Cameron Hamilton**—I really like the sports facilities. I think the toilet department should be upgraded.

**Andrew Bye**—I like the sporting facilities. More teachers should be coaches for the sports.

**Kevin Bayley**—I like the computer rooms. The things that need improving are the toilets, because lots of students smoke in there.

**ACTING CHAIR**—A couple of common elements that are coming out of what all of you are saying are that you like active learning, in terms of sport, music, technology—that lots of things are going on all the time. Also, a number of you have made comments that suggest to me, listening to you, that there need to be more teachers in this school. Why do you need more teachers? Could anyone tell us that?

**Sam Cai**—Sometimes if a teacher is absent, mainly we have the same teachers to take us—for example, a PE teacher has got to teach us computer studies. So it is not really in their specialised field. I think we need more teachers to specialise in their kind of field to teach us.

**ACTING CHAIR**—Do you like specialist teachers?

**Sam Cai**—They can teach us more things instead of just teaching us the basic things, like learning off the book.

**ACTING CHAIR**—Would anyone else like to make a comment?

**Amit Parekh**—Yes. Sam does have a good point in regard to teachers not being available when they are needed. For example, in computing studies we have a teacher who is from the PE

field. We really have to give him his due, though, because he does really does try to make the effort and teach us what he knows. He finds it very difficult himself to gain that knowledge in regards to computing studies, so we do give him his due for that, but Sam does have a good point in regard to teachers having a specialised field coming into the school and teaching their specialised field of subject.

**ACTING CHAIR**—Just one last question from me and then I will hand over to my colleagues to ask their questions. Could you quickly tell me what book you are reading, or what you like reading?

**Craig Hong**—I like reading novels that have to do with subjects that I like—action novels and books about real life stories.

**ACTING CHAIR**—Non-fiction?

**Craig Hong**—Yes.

**Amit Parekh**—At the moment I am reading a fairly different novel by a Gothic horror artist by the name of Clive Barker. I felt that I would have to go out of the school—for example, to some of the state libraries—in order to find some of those books. A lot of people have condemned his writing as being extreme and as Gothic as it is, but because it is not catered for in our library, I feel that I need to go somewhere else and find his books. That is the book I am reading at the moment.

**Chris Beckett—**I like reading adventure books in which people go out and find things, meet new people and become friends.

**Nick Kacevski**—The book I am reading at the moment is *The Alchemist.* The books that I like to read are books that require thinking to understand the story and what is happening. Our library does cater for those types of books but not a very wide range of them. I got this book from a library in Hurstville.

**George Kacevski**—I am mostly into science fiction. I also think that our library does not really have the books that I am interested in.

**ACTING CHAIR**—Where do you get the books from?

**George Kacevski**—Mainly Kogarah and Hurstville.

**ACTING CHAIR**—Kogarah library?

**George Kacevski**—Yes.

**Sam Cai**—I like to read adventure books—books set in medieval times, such as *Lord of the Rings,* and that kind of story.

**Aaron Webb**—I like to read books that have a good ending, that are action packed all the way through and that keep you wanting to read it.

**ACTING CHAIR**—Are you able to source those books in the school library or do you go outside the school?

**Aaron Webb**—Usually, I get them from school, but sometimes I go out to Hurstville library.

**Jerry Tawalo**—I like reading action and mystery books. They are really exciting to me.

**Wess McLachlan**—I am reading the *Shadow Child* at the moment. I like non-fiction stories and mysteries.

**Cameron Hamilton**—I like adventure books because you can think about what they are doing.

**ACTING CHAIR**—Kevin, there is a common theme coming through here.

**Kevin Bayley**—Yes.

**ACTING CHAIR**—What do you like?

**Kevin Bayley**—I like pretty much fiction and non-fiction. I like horror books. Most of the time you have to go outside the school library to get a good range of books.

**Andrew Bye**—I like the scary books like *Goosebumps*. Sometimes you have to go out of school and get the different series.

**ACTING CHAIR**—The boys we have talked to at your level all seem to be fascinated by horror books. Can someone give me a brief answer as to why that is so?

**Amit Parekh**—I think it is human nature. The genre of horror seems to be widespread at the moment. The thing about the horror genre is that it feeds upon all sorts of genres and it collaborates them into one story. For example, it feeds upon adventure—the fact that the character has to go through so many experiences to come to terms with the type of psychological pain and pressure that they are going through throughout the story, such as confronting personal demons. In some of the *Goosebumps* books, there are demons that are supposed to be haunting the child. I think it is the fact that a lot of the horror novels at the moment feed upon other genres and supply their own thing. They provide a sense of excitement and take you to another world, in a sense.

**ACTING CHAIR**—I can see a professor of English coming up here somewhere.

**Ms GAMBARO**—I was very interested to hear that some of you thought that the school should be co-educational. What do you think girls can teach you?

**Craig Hong**—I can’t say.

**Ms GAMBARO**—I know you have got some mixed classes. Are any of you in mixed classes?

**Craig Hong**—It is just year 11.

**Ms GAMBARO**—Okay, sorry about that. We will go back to the coeducational comment.

**Craig Hong**—We have a girls school next door and I just thought the boys would study to impress girls and do like that.

**Ms GAMBARO**—Do you think boys do that? Do boys study harder in the classroom to impress girls?

**Craig Hong**—Some boys.

**Aaron Webb**—They try to impress them and show off, but that could push your marks up. And it would be more fun having them around. Hanging out with guys all the time gets boring.

**Ms GAMBARO**—Do you think it would get more competitive with girls?

**Aaron Webb**—Yes.

**Ms GAMBARO**—Do you all believe that, or is it just a few who believe that? You definitely think that if you had girls in a classroom it would make you, because of the competition, strive harder?

**Amit Parekh**—At the moment, from what is in the media, it just seems that girls have been getting a lot of the attention in regard to education. They seem to be getting all the attention by the media saying that girls have been getting higher marks and getting better marks in education. Perhaps if there was a coeducational school we would be able to put that into practice and see how well we do with the girls involved. I suppose what it comes down to is the fact that when you have girls involved, it opens up a different type of viewpoint upon things. When you are hanging around with guys in a lot of your classes, you have some sort of a narrow-minded view upon things, but when you get the opposite sex involved, it seems that they have a completely different view upon things. It is good to be exposed to their viewpoints on things.

**Ms GAMBARO**—Could I just ask all of you around the table: what do you think girls are better at than you are? Are there some subjects that you think you would give girls a good competitive run on, subjects that you would be able to beat them at? I might just start with Craig.

**Craig Hong**—Girls have a different knowledge than ours. They have a different way of thinking.

**Ms GAMBARO**—In what way?

**Craig Hong**—People say that girls are smarter. In some subjects like sport you can get two views: what we think and what the girls think. It is better to have a mixed school that way, so we get to know about what is out there and what is around us.

**Ms GAMBARO**—So you need to understand the competition better. Amit.

**Amit Parekh**—I just felt that—especially getting back to the media—the media has said that girls are definitely better in English, and I think that is definitely not true. Our school has got some people who really excel in English. It is a proven fact because we have a very efficient debating team at our school. I will definitely advertise them, because we are fairly good and we do meet fairly regularly, and we actually do have competitions against Moorefield next door. Whether it be we win or lose, it is a fact that we actually get to see what they are doing as well, and we are not given the impression that girls are better at English than us. We are at the same level. It is not a matter of winning in that case, it is a matter of learning what they are learning and a matter of them learning what we are. I suppose it nurtures our English program as well.

**Ms GAMBARO**—Thank you. Chris.

**Chris Beckett**—I agree with Amit and Craig. It gets us ready for later life after school, seeing how different sexes work—how girls work and boys work. It just gets us ready for the outside world.

**Nick Kacevski**—In my opinion, I think that girls maybe might have a better concentration span than males, but it might not be the fact. If we did have a co-ed school—I am not saying we should—we could see how girls react to what we think and how we react to what girls think. It might be a fact that, as I have heard, they can concentrate on more than one thing at the same time. I am not really sure on that, but if we did have girls maybe we could actually prove what has is happening.

**Ms GAMBARO**—Fair comment. George.

**George Kacevski**—For me I think it is mostly specialising, preparing you for, like Chris said, the outside world. If you have not had much experience with not just females but any different kind of people, you go out there and you do not know how to act towards different people. Just to know how people react to certain situations is a good thing to prepare you for future life.

**Sam Cai**—I agree with him. If it were co-ed, it would be easier to socialise with girls out of school or your friends who are girls. A co-ed school is better because at least we have competition. In maths—I am not very sure—

**Ms GAMBARO**—You think you might have the edge in maths or do you think the girls are equal? You are not sure?

**Sam Cai**—Yes.

**Aaron Webb**—Today, everyone says girls are smarter in the room and boys dominate outside in the sports area, but I do not think that is true. You need a co-ed school and then you would have that competitive edge against them in the room. That could show you what it is all about.

How can you say they are smarter than us? We have got to get against them to find out. I reckon they probably are a bit smarter in the room.

**Ms GAMBARO**—Do you think they concentrate more?

**Aaron Webb**—Yes.

**Ms GAMBARO**—Why do you think boys do not concentrate as much as girls?

**Aaron Webb**—I do not know. Guys probably think more about sport and stuff like that. They want to get outside, which is probably why they are associated with being better at sport.

**Jerry Tawalo**—I am sure that, if more schools became co-ed, the boys at that school could learn off the girls and could learn how to act around them when they are older. Boys' marks might get higher in the educational system.

**Wess McLachlan**—I agree with him, and also there is the socialising with the girls, so that when you get into the real world you know how to act around them.

**Ms GAMBARO**—So you think that a very big part of education is being able to socialise? Everyone has said that.

**Cameron Hamilton**—If we had a co-ed school, boys would impress girls and get higher marks in their school work.

**Ms GAMBARO**—They would give you a bit more competition?

**Cameron Hamilton**—Yes.

**Kevin Bayley**—I think it would give us much more competition so we can try to beat the girls. Because we would all be in the same school, we would try to go against each other.

**Andrew Bye**—I think the girls would be better. You would get more competition and then you would upgrade your marks and get better grades in different subjects.

**Ms GAMBARO**—I will hand back to the chair, but it seems as though competition and socialisation are really important to all of you. You have all said that.

**ACTING CHAIR**—Before I hand on to Julia Gillard, it is interesting to note that, when we spoke to some of your Queensland peers in a co-ed school two days ago, they said some very different things to you. They said that in a co-ed school the boys waste too much time competing against each other and their own work deteriorated. They were arguing for separation. It is interesting that you are in a boys school and you are arguing the other way.

**Ms GILLARD**—I would be interested in your view about what makes a good teacher. Do you prefer male teachers, female teachers, younger teachers, older teachers, teachers who crack jokes with you or teachers who are stricter? What sorts of teachers do you like?

**Cameron Hamilton**—I like teachers who teach us a lot and have a good sense of humour and do not get us into trouble.

**Ms GILLARD**—Does it matter if they are men or women? Do you prefer male teachers?

**Cameron Hamilton**—No, it doesn't matter.

**Wess McLachlan**—I like younger teachers because it was not that long ago when they were in school and they know how hard it is for us working.

**Jerry Tawalo**—I like the teachers who are firm but who crack a joke now and again, because it is really easy to get along with them and make friends with them.

**Aaron Webb**—I like teachers who can see the funny side of things and who are not strict all the time, because otherwise people get sick and tired of going to their classes and that is when people just do not listen. If they make learning fun, then everyone listens and they all learn better. I do not mind if they are male or female, just as long as they can see the funny side.

**Sam Cai**—I like teachers who have a little humour so that it makes education fun. I do not really care about male or female teachers. If they make school fun, it is better.

**George Kacevski**—I think experience is what a teacher should have. Humour is important, but if the teacher is experienced you trust them. It is also easier to communicate with the teacher if they crack a joke every now and then. But if they are strict, you are not as close as you could be with the teacher. To be able to teach comes with experience.

**Nick Kacevski**—I prefer that the teacher is professional; that they are good at what they do and you know that what they say is how it is. A teacher should be good with the students and have a personality which makes the students talk to them. They should be strict in a way. Strict is also good because you can work.

**ACTING CHAIR**—Do you mean strict or organised?

**Nick Kacevski**—Organised is probably a better word. They should be speaking to the students more personally to understand what each person is good or bad at and then they would know what could be improved on.

**Chris Beckett**—I prefer younger teachers to older ones because they have just come out of high school. They know what school is like because they have been there previously—and not too long ago. I prefer teachers who can joke with the students and who are not too strict.

**Amit Parekh**—Probably the main thing I would look for in a teacher is somebody who is open-minded to the beliefs and thoughts of other students. There are two who come to mind immediately at the school, one in art and one in English. They are tremendously skilled teachers who have gained through experience a sense of open-mindedness towards the work of other students. They have never put down a student's work for not being up to an expectation of being too good, too dark or too happy. They are teachers who are very supportive and are constantly

able to be there for you whenever you do need them. They continually put effort into their jobs. There are many teachers in this school—again, two come to mind—who are always available if we do need to come after school or during lunchtime, if we do need to consult them on anything. They are always available for us to speak to them. With regard to being young or old, it does not really matter. As long as the teacher is open-minded to the thoughts and beliefs of others, I am sure they are going to go far.

**Craig Hong**—I agree with everything that has been said. I like teachers to be able to communicate and to make teaching fun for the students.

**ACTING CHAIR**—How they connect with you?

**Chris Beckett**—Yes.

**Kevin Bayley**—I like younger teachers because they have just been students at high school. It does not matter if they are a boy or girl because they are pretty much the same. I like a teacher who is strict but who does not mind having a joke.

**Andrew Bye**—I like strict teachers, male or female. I like them to have a little joke and to keep their classes under control.

**Mr WILKIE**—Do you find you actually perform better in a class where you get on well with the teacher, where you have got a good relationship with the teacher? I can see that you all nodded yes; I imagine most people would say that. You get in trouble when you have done the wrong thing. There is a bit of discipline around. Do you find you get enough encouragement when you are doing the right thing, when you are excelling in different areas? Would you like to comment on that?

**Amit Parekh**—It depends on what subject it is. A lot of students do complain in some subjects that they work very hard and put a lot into it, but when it comes to teachers looking at their work and evaluating it, they do not get praise. Even if it is just something small like 'That is a good job, John' or 'That is a good job, Joe.' It is a sense of encouragement. It may seem small and petty in the eyes of a teacher, but in the eyes of a student, it is really something that they take to heart and they can use and implement and put towards their work. Later on, when they might be writing another short story or doing a piece of maths homework, they might think, 'My teacher had told me earlier that I was doing a really good job. So maybe if I continue she will give me an even better comment', or something along the lines of that.

**Chris Beckett**—It is very important for teachers to give good comments to students because it makes them try harder and think, 'If I'm doing good work and try even harder, I'll do even better work and the teacher will give me more praise.'

**ACTING CHAIR**—Does anyone else want to make a comment on that?

**George Kacevski**—I think communication is most important. When a teacher communicates with the students, they feel as though they are part of the group, and are actually doing something to help not just the group but also themselves. They know the teachers are backing

them up or he or she is saying what a good job. It is about communication and feeling you are noticed in the group in the class itself.

**Ms GILLARD**—We have been told at other schools that, when you get to the stage where you can pick your subjects, if a boy picks a subject that is viewed as girlie, like early childhood development or even art or dance, the other boys get into him a bit and tease him about it? Do you think that happens? Have you got in your minds subjects that you think you would not do because they are girlie subjects or that maybe other boys might think it a bit odd for you to do?

**George Kacevski**—I do not think it is a big problem in this school. Maybe there is a bit of humour involved. Students normally tend to do what they choose to do and, if someone makes fun of them, the majority back them up and help them by saying, 'That is good.' I do not think there is a lot of making fun of the student about the subject that he or she chooses.

**Ms GILLARD**—What do you think, Aaron?

**Aaron Webb**—No, I do not think so. Mainly everyone does all the subjects here. It is split up well, and some classes have had too many students because they have been overliked. In year 11 and 12 you get to go over to Moorefield and do stuff like home economics. No-one sees that as girlish or anything like that. Everyone just looks at it as being normal.

**Kevin Bayley**—With cooking, some boys like cooking, and some might want to become a chef. Even if you do get teased, you will not care, because you still like the subject.

**Ms GILLARD**—Do you reckon that you would get teased though if you picked cooking?

**Kevin Bayley**—Maybe for a little while, but that is it.

**Ms GILLARD**—Not seriously?

**Kevin Bayley**—No, just one or two jokes.

**ACTING CHAIR**—What about bullying?

**Craig Hong**—I think if a student picked a subject that they like and do well in, they would not get teased. The people would see them as doing well in the subject and encourage them.

**ACTING CHAIR**—You are probably aware that in the media in recent weeks there have been stories about bullying going on in various schools. Have any of you got any comments to make about that at this school?

**Amit Parekh**—In regards to bullying, I was just speaking to our deputy principal, Mr Quinn. We have implemented a new program that is going to be up and running fairly soon in conjunction with Kogarah High and Moorefield next door. It is going to be helping students in our school with the problems that they do have with bullying. The program is fairly extensive; it does reach out to parents, teachers and students alike. The questions within the questionnaire that are going to be given out fairly soon are very easy to understand and very comprehensive.

A lot of the statistics that will be picked up from the survey will be implemented into our school program and then presented at an up-and-coming national conference. There is a very small problem with bullying at our school. It does get brushed under the carpet fairly often, but with this new program that is going to be conjunction with our SRC , hopefully that is going to be stopping and the problem of bullying will decrease.

**ACTING CHAIR**—Has the student body been involved in the organisation of that survey?

**Amit Parekh**—At the moment the survey is just a draft. Mr Quinn and I have been going through it this afternoon, but it is definitely going to be implemented. There were not any students involved in the survey, but the doctor that we received it from did evaluate the situation within Australia of bullying, and the questions are very valid towards every school. When the statistics do come in from both Kogarah High and Moorefield, we will be comparing them with both our school and next door and see what we can pick up and evaluate from that.

**ACTING CHAIR**—Who initiated the work on that? Was it students or—

**Amit Parekh**—What has happened in the bullying program in our school is that, as was said in the media, we have seen that there is a problem that needs to be addressed in regards to bullying. We felt this was a great opportunity for us to use these surveys and understand more of what we can do in our school to help out. This was a perfect opportunity for our school SRC to get involved. We felt that we wanted to brush off the idea that the SRC was just basically there for school fundraising and creating cup cake sales. We wanted to brush off that type of image. We do have active students involved in this upcoming survey. Both the SRC and teachers will be evaluating the results.

**ACTING CHAIR**—Would anyone else like to make a comment on that topic?

**George Kacevski**—Bullying in our school is mainly in the younger years. Maturity has a lot to do with it. When you come from primary it is a problem. In years 10, 11 and 12, I do not think it is a major problem. There might be a little now and then but people get used to working and doing well at school and pay attention to what people think of them or what they think of others.

**ACTING CHAIR**—We have got the year 11 and 12s waiting outside. Can I say on behalf of all the committee how highly impressed we all are with your contributions this afternoon? They are riddled with commonsense and sound practice. We are very pleased to hear the obvious interest in reading which gets a bit of a mixed result around this country. Before we ask the year 11 and 12s to come in, are there any questions you would like to ask us?

**Amit Parekh**—What are the results that you have gathered today going to be used for?

**ACTING CHAIR**—This inquiry started a couple of months ago. We have been down to Melbourne and had public hearings where people like teachers' unions, the education departments, independent schools, Catholic education, individuals, psychologists, doctors and people involved in learning difficulties have come to hearings like this and given the committee information. We also have gone out and visited schools like yours and talked to students, principals and staff about the issues affecting boys' education.

Basically I believe, and I think our entire panel does, that boys and girls have similar abilities. If there is something happening in Australia where one group is succeeding over another, that is because something has gone wrong somewhere. We are trying to find out what is going wrong, if it is. In some schools that we have been to, the attainments of boys and girls have been very much the same. But there have been strong points to the way in which their educational program has been organised. There are some commonalities with what you have expressed to us today.

This will go on for several months more. We will go around to every state in Australia and regional Australia. We will then come back to Canberra, put all the information together as a committee and agree on what should go in the report. The report is then tabled in parliament and given to the Minister for Education, Training and Youth Affairs. He or she has 90 days to give a response to the parliament. Hopefully the recommendations that are made will be followed up by the government of the day. Copies of that report, as soon as they are tabled in parliament, will be sent to your school through your principal so you are quite welcome to read through those recommendations. I think your parents, your teachers and your principal in particular ought to be very proud of you. You have made our afternoon most enjoyable and made a very successful contribution to us. Thank you indeed.

**[2.53 p.m.]**

**Discussion with years 11 and 12**
**BRDAROSKI, Jovan**

**CARCASONA, Jason**

**DINOV, Sasho**

**GHAZI, Mouhammed**

**HAQUE, Erfan**

**KAYE, John**

**KUMAR, Salesh**

**NANKANY, Akash**

**PANG, Peter**

**RATU, Sikeli**

**SHAD, Gustavo**

**SKLIAS, Stan**

**SPANKIE, Robert**

**ACTING CHAIR**—Welcome, everybody. Thank you very much for giving up your time this afternoon to talk to this inquiry, which is looking at the attainment levels of boys and girls amongst a range of other matters. We are basically concerned to find out whether some claims that have been made about boys and girls attainment are true and if they are true, what people are doing about them. They are these. Twenty years ago when people were examining boys and girls attainment in Australia, the differential between the ability of girls and boys was less than one per cent, which is what you would expect because boys and girls are probably as equally talented. In terms of what is happening now, there are some reports that up to 20 per cent differential levels exist between the attainment levels of boys and girls. We are trying to find out whether that is true first of all and whether in those places where it is not true what they are doing that is so special that makes it work. That is a very brief overview. We would like you to quickly say something you like about this school and something you would improve about this school. If you would like to say something about the education of boys and girls straight off, you can do that too. We have a Young Citizen of the Year, Sikeli. We will start with you.

**Sikeli Ratu**—James Cook Boys High has a good student representative council program and leadership programs. That is a good thing about this school. In some classes in this school discipline is a problem. I think that is an area which could change.

**ACTING CHAIR**—We might come back to that, Sikeli.

**Jovan Brdaroski**—There are lots of things that I like about this school. I am a member of the SRC, so that is one of them. The teachers give you an opportunity to excel in the things that you are talented in. We have lots of different gifted and talented programs. They give you an opportunity to do what you really are good at. A thing that could be improved is discipline in some classes.

**Erfan Haque**—I agree with them. The best thing about this school is the teachers and the way they teach. As they said, we need to improve discipline in some of the classes.

**ACTING CHAIR**—Is it discipline at year 11 and 12, Erfan, or is it discipline at other year levels?

**Erfan Haque**—It is the whole school.

**ACTING CHAIR**—All through.

**Robert Spankie**—I like the school because it has so many courses and it supplies all different things. You have got VET courses and things like that. There could be changes to the way teachers construct the classes and are able to control kids, That could be done a bit better. There could be different ways of teaching.

**Stan Sklias**—The really good thing about this school is the teachers, not only because they teach really well but because they are willing to help you at any time of the day. Most of them, once you get to know them well, are not like teachers; they are like friends because you can talk to them about anything and they will help you through anything if you have any problems. I guess discipline is a thing that could be improved as well.

**Gustavo Shad**—I just came to this school three weeks ago. I am really liking this school. It is a very good school.

**ACTING CHAIR**—Don’t tell us where you came from, but are there any differences between this school and your previous school?

**Gustavo Shad**—Yes, the only difference was the other school was combined with girls and this school is just boys. It is still good because the teachers give you support and stuff like that.

**ACTING CHAIR**—So you think there is value in having a boys school?

**Gustavo Shad**—Yes.

**Sasho Dinov**—What I like about this school is that there are lots of programs. Machismo is one of them. That provides lots of activities that students do. I do one of the activities—the breakfast club. The thing that I do not like about this school is discipline, as Sikeli, Jovan and the other students have said. I do not know how to fix it, but that is the big problem in this school.

**John Kaye**—I agree with Stan. The teachers put a lot of hard work into the students. They help them reach their full capability and they do real well to put up with some of the students with discipline factors, as everybody else has said so far. I am in the breakfast club with Sasho as well. It is a program that just helps people to have breakfast in the morning so they can achieve their full capability learningwise; people can have a decent, healthy breakfast.

**Salesh Kumar**—I agree with Sasho that we have got a lot of programs like the breakfast club, which I am in. I like both the programs and the subjects.

**Akash Nankany**—I believe the really good thing about this school is the student involvement in things like the Machismo Project and sports. I will have to agree with everybody else that one of the major problems with this school is teacher discipline in class and how to control the class.

**Jason Carcasona**—I have been at the school for almost five years. I am in my final year. I have to agree with everyone here about what they said about the discipline. That is what is lacking. Overall the school and teachers have done a very good job.

**ACTING CHAIR**—What would you do to make it better?

**Jason Carcasona**—Just discipline the ones who are less advantaged.

**Peter Pang**—I like this school because of the teachers. They really take the time to help you in what you are studying, sometimes even after school and out of class times. The equipment like computers and the Internet, which I use a lot, is very good. The bad things are discipline and also the attitude of the students. They place a lot of importance on sport over academic achievements, which sometimes makes people not achieve as well in their classes, because they worry about their sport commitments.

**Mouhammed Ghazi**—I would have to agree with Robert and Stan. The teachers do try to help the students as much as they can. As Robert said, there is lots of choice with subjects and that is really good.

**ACTING CHAIR**—Sasha and Akash, you mentioned the Machismo Project. Could you both give us a brief definition of what that means as far as you are concerned?

**Akash Nankany**—I believe the Machismo Project is a better way for student involvement in different things and in them finding out themselves what they are good at and what they can maybe improve on. For example, last year we had exercises with standing on bicycles and all going around. For people who can do that it gives them self-confidence. As for the breakfast club, which I am in, it makes us feel better that we can give at least that much to people who do not have the time in the morning to have breakfast which will help them in their education.

**Sasho Dinov**—Basically Machismo activities are teamwork. If you do not work in a team, you will not be successful like helping each other with the cereal and stuff like that.

**ACTING CHAIR**—So there is a focus on cooperation?

**Sasho Dinov**—Yes, that is it.

**ACTING CHAIR**—How many boys here have been in the Machismo Project? I see it has been quite a number. The other issue that people raised—and I think Sikeli, Jovan, Sasho and almost all of you made comments about it—was discipline. What would you be suggesting to school administrators, principals and teachers? How would you improve the discipline in the school?

**Sasho Dinov**—Through more counselling for the students.

**ACTING CHAIR**—Do you have school counsellors at the school?

**Sasho Dinov**—Yes, we do.

**ACTING CHAIR**—How many?

**Sasho Dinov**—One, I think.

**ACTING CHAIR**—One for 700 children?

**Sasho Dinov**—Yes.

**ACTING CHAIR**—How many do you think you need?

**Sasho Dinov**—I do not know. I think 10 maybe.

**ACTING CHAIR**—You have put in an ambit claim. That is certainly much more than what you have got now.

**Sikeli Ratu**—I think teachers are afraid to be harsh on their students. You often find that, at the start of the year when students go to a class and have a strict teacher, that strict teacher is often called things behind their back. I think teachers like to be popular like everyone else. Some people are afraid that, if they are strict on students, that will backfire on them because the students will not like them, will truant their classes or will not take them seriously.

**ACTING CHAIR**—Is the word just ‘strict’ or does it mean more than that? Is it really basically teachers who are consistent so that you know exactly where you stand with them? What do you mean by ‘strict’?

**Sikeli Ratu**—More that they follow practices like checking homework or having strict deadlines for assignments and are thorough.

**ACTING CHAIR**—Organised?

**Sikeli Ratu**—Organised to an extent, but more that they impose more limitations on their students and expect their students to do more things and to operate within a more confined environment.

**ACTING CHAIR**—They are structured.

**Jovan Brdaroski**—I would like to make it clear that the discipline problem is not in all of the classes. In the senior school especially this year, I have not seen any big problems at all in all of my classes. It is just in a select few. I think the teachers that have problems in their classes need to be made aware that there are problems going on. Maybe they just do not realise that the problem is so large for some of the students in the class that they cannot learn.

**ACTING CHAIR**—Thank you for saying that, because it is important that we do not get this out of balance. This is an issue that you see in parts of the school that you would like to see improved. We are already very impressed, Jovan, by the way people speak and the way in which they are involved in educational programs. We appreciate you putting forward that balanced view.

**Mr WILKIE**—Can those boys who are involved in the Machismo program tell us a bit more about why it has been good for your guys? Why have you liked it? Why is it so wonderful?

**Jovan Brdaroski**—The Machismo Project was pretty good because we got people who were celebrities who were good at this. They came to the school and gave their skill to the kids who really wanted to pursue their talents or their dreams—say, aerial stunts, acrobatics and such. We got people to go and show them how do it properly and the equipment. It was really pretty good for the kids; everybody liked it.

**Mr WILKIE**—Who else was involved?

**Robert Spankie**—I thought Machismo was pretty good because I never liked doing drama and stuff like that, but I liked doing stunts and taking a bit of a risk, so I thought I might as well give it a try. I did the performance part of the stunts, and I thought it was pretty good. People respect you more. It is not an image thing, but it shows that you can actually achieve something and it is inside yourself. You boost your self-confidence, and you really need that self-confidence to be at a school. You need to have a supposed image. I do not know how to explain it but you just need to have that thing to be able to do it. You have to actually be in it.

**ACTING CHAIR**—The widening of experiences?

**Robert Spankie**—Yes, the wide range. The people you meet and you make connections with and stuff like that.

**Mr WILKIE**—Does anyone have a different view?

**Erfan Haque**—It is basically expressing your inner feelings about things, like helping the skilled students feels really good inside. It does not matter what other people think. I feel good to do something for this school. It gives a really good feeling that you are helping the students to do something good.

**Mr WILKIE**—So you all enjoyed it and found it was beneficial?

**John Kaye**—I also felt good about Machismo because it was actually like a gateway. The Machismo opened up other projects like the breakfast club, which was the project to help kids have breakfast when they did not have the chance. Many more projects from this Machismo project were running. It was helping the students to get more involved in other school activities.

**Mr WILKIE**—Thank you.

**Sikeli Ratu**—I was not involved in the Machismo program, but I did notice that, after some of the boys had been in the Machismo program and come back to class, they were more disciplined and willing to work. I think it did change the way they viewed what they could do.

**ACTING CHAIR**—So it had real results?

**Ms GAMBARO**—Do you think the things you are learning at school are preparing you for life afterwards, or what do you think the school curriculum should have that will prepare you for life outside school?

**Robert Spankie**—I am actually doing work studies at the moment; I am at the physio. The things that I am doing relate to the things I am doing at school, but you get more experience being out there and learning the actual trade. It is so different. You learn certain things but then some of those things just do not coincide. There was a guy at the physio. who had just got out of university and he was saying, 'If you do this technique, is it the same as doing that technique? That is what it said in the book.' The guy at the physio was not too sure, but it could have been the same. If you have used it in practice, then you would actually know.

**Ms GAMBARO**—So what you get out of a book and what actually happens in practice sometimes are very different things, and you are learning that by having that extension of school to pathways to trades or some of these courses.

**Robert Spankie**—Yes.

**Ms GAMBARO**—Does anyone else have any thoughts on how relevant school is?

**Erfan Haque**—We do more practical work, so it prepares us for the world of work. When we are doing business studies, they send us to work experience and things like that, so it prepares us and gives us a choice in deciding what we are going to do in future. It is really good. It combines education, like books and also practical work. That gives you an idea when you choose in future what you want to be.

**Ms GAMBARO**—Do you think you have that combination just about right here? Your school has been recommended to us because of that. Some schools do not do any of the programs that you have here. Do you think the school has the combination pretty right?

**Erfan Haque**—Yes, it has. Mostly it is really good because it always offers us work studies, business studies and subjects like that. We go on work experience and things like that, and that helps us to choose a path. The school really plays a great role in this. It really helps us to do things.

**Ms GAMBARO**—You run a coffee shop. What do you think that is teaching you in the broader sense?

**John Kaye**—It is actually teaching us, firstly, to help our fellow class students and pupils. It is also teaching them to be more social, as in meeting people. We did not know that many people from year 7, but they used to come to the breakfast club the most and we became really good friends with the little guys because of that.

**Ms GAMBARO**—So you were a mentor to the younger grades—would it be fair to say that?

**Sasho Dinov**—You can put it like that if you want to. The best thing about that is that we had a closing ceremony for the breakfast club and, because the year 7s were so good with us, they actually helped us in doing performances—dances and music—which was excellent. The people from the Red Cross came and gave us certificates saying thank you for doing this breakfast club. Now we are thinking of doing it this year as well.

**Ms GAMBARO**—Can I ask one last question on the breakfast and coffee shop club. Do you just run it? Do you have actually have to work out how much it costs to run it and what food to order, or do you have no involvement there? How far does it go?

**John Kaye**—We had a few months warning of this. People from the Red Cross came and told us and we had a few months to prepare. We went to Franklins and they sponsored us by giving us lots of food. We also went to Kelloggs and they gave us lots of cereal. Machismo once again came in and they gave us a certain amount of money to keep the breakfast club running.

**Ms GAMBARO**—So you had a combination of donated resources and managing your funds?

**John Kaye**—Yes.

**Ms GAMBARO**—Do you think that has taught you about business?

**Erfan Haque**—I am also a member of the breakfast club. What it taught me was that everything is not give and take; you just give things to people just to feel good. You do not get something in return; you just get the appreciation, and that is enough for a person. You do not always get money or something. It is an inner feeling that you really feel good to help people. The breakfast club taught us how to trust each other and how to be really friendly. We have learned how to keep confidential information between us and to trust each other. That is the

main thing I loved about it: that we now have the trust. I can say we are one of the best groups in this school who trust each other the most.

**Ms GAMBARO**—That is fantastic.

**Jovan Brdaroski**—All the projects such as Machismo, the Breakfast Club, the coffee shop and also the combined subjects with Moorefield senior school give the students a much broader choice in being able to pursue what they are interested in. When we combine our subjects with Moorefield we get a much broader subject choice and we can pursue what we really want to do. That is what is so good about all of these projects. They let you identify what you want to do and then they give you the means to do it. You can join all these programs or whatever interests you, and they really help you in your life and in figuring out what you want to do once you leave school.

**Ms GAMBARO**—Thank you very much.

**Ms GILLARD**—I know that you get to have some of your classes mixed in with girls and that that has broadened the subject choice. Would any of you prefer that the school was fully coeducational? No? Can you tell me why you are shaking your head?

**Sikeli Ratu**—There are some benefits in having an environment where you are just with boys. With the Machismo program, or with any program, sometimes you feel more inhibited when there are girls in the classroom. When you are in a room of just boys you can say things that you would not say in a class full of girls—not rude things, but you can express opinions that otherwise you might feel, 'I should not say this because it might offend some of the girls.' Even though it might not offend them and that is only what you are thinking, sometimes when there are classes with more boys you do feel a little bit more comfortable. But there are benefits in having classes with girls.

**Ms GILLARD**—Robert, you shook your head too about going fully co-ed.

**Robert Spankie**—Maybe in the senior school but not the whole school, because people would be obsessed about it and when a girl walks past would think, 'Oh, that girl's nice,' and stuff like that. They will just be obsessed with that, not with their schooling. But it has its upsides, like girls can make us compete against each other and build up our marks. That is a good side of having a co-ed school. I would only recommend it to senior schools, where it is so much better because you have competed with boys for the past four years or whatever and then you are against another group of people and they make you think a bit more.

**Peter Pang**—I disagree with what they say. If we start with co-ed right from year 7 we get used to being in a co-ed environment. Many of the things they are saying are happening now because, even when we are separated, many of the girls come over and the boys whistle and say they like that girl. But if they start as co-ed from year 7 they will get used to it and will not think it is such a big deal being with girls. As to what Sikeli said, I think the same thing would happen in an all-boys class. In many situations, such as when you are answering questions about religion or race, you would not say something that you think would offend other people. I do not think being with girls in a co-ed school would change that much.

**Ms GILLARD**—There were a couple of different views there. I know you are at the stage where you have to pick different subjects so you have subject choice, and this school has a lot of choices. When we were talking to some boys in Brisbane they told us that if they pick a subject that people generally thought of as being a bit of a girlie subject—maybe like early childhood development or even dance or something like that—then some of the boys might get into them and tease them about doing something that is a bit girlie, or soft, or whatever terminology you want to use. What is your view about that? Does that happen? Does that affect how you think about subjects?

**Jovan Brdaroski**—I guess one of the subjects where that would be a concern is food technology. I am doing that at Moorefield. I am actually the only boy from this school doing food technology in Moorefield and there are about 10 girls in the class. But there has not been anything like that in this school; none of my friends have said anything about that. I have explained to them that nutrition is interesting and that is what I might want to do when I leave school. I have not heard any negative comments or anything like that—they have just let me do what I want to do. It is quite a mature approach to see a subject not as a boys' subject or a girls' subject but just a subject.

**Robert Spankie**—I do hospitality at the moment and I enjoy that course. I have chosen it to give me broader outreaches and I say I am doing it. No-one actually complains. They accept it. There is nothing against it. People are not like that at our school. They do not tease you or bag you out. They accept you for what you are.

**Erfan Haque**—As Peter said about that co-ed school, if we should start that, we should start from year 7 because now what is happening is very unusual at school. When teachers come into our class there are two separate groups: girls on one side and boys on the other side. The main thing happening is that boys are more quiet than girls. That is an unusual thing in our school—boys are never quiet. But when girls are in there all the boy's mouths are shut and the girls keep talking. When the teachers come into the class they think it is amazing that the boys are quiet and the girls are talking. If we started from year 7 this should not happen. Everyone will talk and be really friendly. Therefore, I do not agree with them that you should have it in senior years. You cannot be friends with them if you just meet them for two years. It takes at least two years to have a good friend.

**Ms GILLARD**—Jovan, I noticed when we were in your class before that the boys and the girls did sit at separate tables. Are you allowed to sit together?

**Jovan Brdaroski**—Yes, of course.

**Ms GILLARD**—But you do not choose to?

**Jovan Brdaroski**—It is just the way that they sit down. Maybe the girls have a set of friends that they want to sit with and there are not enough desks or something like that. It does not even really matter because when we have discussions everyone just talks anyway so it does not matter a lot where you are sitting.

**Ms GILLARD**—We have talked to boys and to girls about what sort of teachers they like, whether they like older teachers, younger teachers, funny teachers, strict teachers, male

teachers, female teachers. Can you say what you think makes a good teacher and particularly whether it matters to you that it is a male teacher or a female teacher?

**Gustavo Shad**—For me it does not matter if it is a female or a male teacher. The important thing is that they teach us well and we can understand everything they are saying. Then that is all right.

**Stan Sklias**—I have the same opinion. I do not really mind if they are male or female. The thing I like and think makes a good teacher is one who is not there just to teach the children but who takes the time after classes to talk to them and not only listen to their problems about school work but takes a few minutes for other problems they have within the school or in other subjects. I do not like very strict teachers who just focus on school work. I think teachers that take the time out to talk to the students have more humour and can deal with more different types of students. That is what makes a good teacher.

**Ms GILLARD**—Individual attention.

**Robert Spankie**—There is a teacher at our school at the moment called Mr Quinn. He used to be the best teacher and now he is deputy so he has to be a bit more serious. He always made the class crack up and he kept the class quiet—not in a strict way—as long as he kept them happy. He is a good teacher.

**Ms GILLARD**—Focused.

**Erfan Haque**—I agree with Stan and other people that it does not matter if the teacher is male or female. If the teacher is good that is it. If the teacher is too strict you do not become friendly with the teacher; you are just afraid of him or her and just do the work. The breakfast club has faced a lot of problems and we have got help from a lot of teachers to help us solve the problems. If the teachers were strict and saying, 'Take your pencil out and just copy from the board', then we would not reach out to those teachers and ask for help. The dispute would have been up till now. If the teachers were friendly, we got help from them, and they really helped us to solve problems.

**Jovan Brdaroski**—It absolutely does not matter whether the teacher is male or female. We do not need teachers that are strict but we do need teachers that will keep order in the classroom and that you can be friendly with as well. We need teachers that do not make many assumptions of what level the class is at, so that they do not assume that the class already knows mathematics, for example.

**ACTING CHAIR**—Who finds out the levels of the kids.

**Jovan Brdaroski**—Yes, so they do not make assumptions so they do not go onto harder stuff before we know the basics or whatever. Good teachers should not make many assumptions about the class without investigating the class first.

**Sikeli Ratu**—I do not think the sex of a teacher comes into it. But I do think that for some reason, and I do not know why, male teachers in this school tend to be a little bit more playful, joking, than most of the female teachers. Maybe it is because the female teachers are more

mature and serious in the way they do a class. That is fine because a lot of them are fun as well but not in the open, joking sort of way.

A teacher who can control the class is very important, not to everyone, because there are people who can do the work and perform well without being hounded about doing the work all the time. But there are a lot of boys who simply will not work unless teachers are doing that. If there is a little bit of leeway then the boys will do whatever they want, especially in the lower grade classes. You go into those classes and it is just like going into a zoo. You see them climbing up on tables and shouting. Teachers who cannot keep control of their class or are afraid of keeping control of their class find boys in their classroom lighting fires on the carpet, being rude to them, throwing papers at them and drawing on their back. It is not nice for the teacher, because the teacher has lost his or her self-respect. The boys who are trying to do well in the class do not think very much of the teacher. The other boys in the school do not think much of that teacher, because they have heard what goes on in the class. The boys are not learning. Maybe they do not deserve to learn, because they do not apply themselves, but I think teachers should not be afraid to be strict.

**Ms GILLARD**—Do both male and female teachers have those discipline problems?

**Sikeli Ratu**—Yes.

**Akash Nankany**—I agree with everybody else: sex does not matter, male or female. The most important thing in a class is that the teacher should have control and should be able to discipline all students in the class. If you cannot control the class, there is no point in going to the class—people are going to jig. If they do not want to learn anything, why go to class? Why not just sit outside in a park and do whatever they want?

**Salesh Kumar**—I agree with Stan: any teacher will do for me.

**John Kaye**—I give teachers a lot of credit for putting up with some of the students. There is a lot of bad things going on in some of the classes, not so much in the senior but more in the younger years. It is all very immature in those years. The teachers try their best to control the classes but some of the students just do not care. The teachers deserve credit for putting up with it.

**Sasho Dinov**—I like teachers who keep the students motivated and treat every student equally. It does not matter what sex they are, female or male; I just want them to be straightforward in teaching us and in having a good time. That is why I am here at school. I am not here to laze about, jig and do things like that.

**Jason Carcasona**—I like any type of teacher, male or female, of any race and any age. I also like teachers who have patience and are able to control the class. I do not blame the teachers here at all. I think they are trying their best to keep the class in control. The problem is that some of the students are less disciplined.

**Peter Pang**—Sex does not matter. It is very important that the teacher has to know what they are talking about. They have to have knowledge of the subject, so that you not only respect them but what they are saying to you. You want someone who will be friendly, not a superior

person, so they teach you and you learn. You want a friendly person that you can chat to. Sometimes we chat to the teachers about current affairs and what is going on in different parts of the world. That is very important.

**Mouhammed Ghazi**—I would have to agree a lot with Akash: it is just as long as the teacher can control the class; that is all that really matters.

**ACTING CHAIR**—We are running out of time and we understand that some of you fellows have probably got jobs to go to. I will ask one last question. What was the motivation for choosing the subjects that you chose? Would you answer that in almost a word or a quick brief sentence, please.

**Peter Pang**—Future careers.

**Jovan Brdaroski**—I just chose all the subjects that I saw as fun and exciting. I did not really care about what courses they would get me into at all, just what was fun and things like that.

**ACTING CHAIR**—You said earlier that you wanted to be a nutritionist.

**Jovan Brdaroski**—I am interested in that and I think it would be fun. It is interesting to learn about nutrition and stuff like that, but I guess it is a bonus that it fits in with the courses.

**ACTING CHAIR**—It is a very important principle to be happy with what you do.

**Jason Carcasona**—I chose the subjects because I was not sure what I am going to be the future—I am still undecided—but I am going to give them a try and see where I can go from there.

**ACTING CHAIR**—Would anyone else like to make a comment?

**Sikeli Ratu**—I chose subjects which I thought I would be good at and I steered away from subjects that I knew I would not have any chance of doing well.

**ACTING CHAIR**—How many people would agree with Sikeli? Quite a number. How many people basically made their choice because of what they considered might be their future career? Quite a number chose that option as well. Was there any other option?

**Sasho Dinov**—I found the subjects that I chose interesting because they involve practical work, a bit of theory and lots of excursions. Later this year we are going to the zoo, to court and to Long Bay jail. It is very exciting.

**ACTING CHAIR**—Education for itself?

**Sasho Dinov**—Yes.

**Jovan Brdaroski**—I want to add a bit more to what I said. I also chose subjects that I was good at. The reason I said they were fun and interesting is because I am good at them and then I

find them more fun and interesting. I can extend from what the syllabus requires and extend my learning in that way.

**Sikeli Ratu**—I think that some boys in the school are in subjects which perhaps they do not enjoy and perhaps they should not be in. Some of them are doing subjects which really are too hard for them. Some boys got 50 per cent in maths last year and are doing three-unit mathematics because that is what they think they have to do to get into their course. Also, some boys last year were strongly persuaded to take up some courses which they might not have really wanted to take up but did so because some people thought they might be good for the boys.

**ACTING CHAIR**—Has anyone here chosen a subject they regretted?

**Akash Nankany**—I chose physics. I have done a half a term's work and it has gone over my head—I have no idea what it has been about. The only reason I chose it is because I looked in books where universities ask for these subjects. All I want to do is IT. For that I need 90-something per cent in my UAI. I do not understand why physics has anything to do with computers. I could get 100 per cent, but I could also do things like drama, food tech and stuff like that which will not help me in IT. But there is no point doing subjects you know you will not do well at and that have no relation to what you want to do.

**ACTING CHAIR**—How difficult was it for you to change?

**Akash Nankany**—Change what?

**ACTING CHAIR**—Change subjects?

**Akash Nankany**—I have not changed. I still have to do it.

**ACTING CHAIR**—You are still going?

**Akash Nankany**—Yes.

**Erfan Haque**—I am not going to mention what the subject is that I find the worst. But at the beginning of this year I thought it was really hard and now, as I am proceeding through the subject, the teacher is making it easy and I am confident that I can do really well in that subject. So I think it is not only the subject you choose; it is the teachers, the environment and the way they teach that really matter.

**ACTING CHAIR**—So you have to give it a fair go before you make a final decision?

**Erfan Haque**—Yes.

**ACTING CHAIR**—We could go on a lot further here today but we are running out of time. Thank you very much for your contributions. Are there any things you would like to ask any of us on the panel? As we have said to your colleagues in year 9 and 10, perhaps some time later in the year, depending on the election, but possibly in November, we will report on this particular

inquiry and we will send a copy of that report—hopefully two or three—to your school. I am sure there will be some references to James Cook School. Thank you very much indeed.

**Jovan Brdaroski**—I am not sure if they are the media or not, but why are they here?

**ACTING CHAIR**—It is very interesting. When it comes to an educational issue, everybody in this country—and I mean everybody—has an opinion. Some are good; some are bad; most of them are constructive. This issue, the education of boys, has created a great deal of interest. Some of that interest is loopy, on both ends of the political spectrum, but most of it is sensible and there are different points of view. It is the role of this committee to try to find out from people like you what are the best ways for schools and teachers to be organised that allows not only boys but also girls to succeed to their potential. We are not in a game of girls against boys. That is silly. We believe that the abilities of boys and girls are much the same. At the end of a particular school program, like at the end of year 12, we would like to think that, around Australia, we are working towards girls' and boys' achievements being pretty similar. If that was happening, we would be on the right track. Thanks once again for your contribution today and all the very best for your future careers, whatever they may be.

**Proceedings suspended from 3.36 p.m. to 3.48 p.m.**

**BILLINGTON, Mr Stephen, Principal, James Cook Boys Technology High School**

**COLLIER, Ms Jill Elizabeth, Deputy Principal, James Cook Boys Technology High School**

**DIWAKAR, Mrs Krishna, Assistant (Teacher), James Cook Boys Technology High School**

**FORRESTER, Mr Howard Joseph, Teacher, James Cook Boys Technology High School**

**KYPRIOTIS, Ms Nicole, Temporary Teacher, James Cook Boys Technology High School**

**LATTY, Mr Gary Colin, Head Teacher, Social Sciences, James Cook Boys Technology High School**

**MASON, Ms Lindsay Judith, English Teacher, James Cook Boys Technology High School**

**QUINN, Mr Stephen Barton, Deputy Principal (Rel.), James Cook Boys Technology High School**

**REES, Ms Deborah Leonie, Classroom Teacher, James Cook Boys Technology High School**

**RIX, Ms Maree Ann, Head Teacher, English, James Cook Boys Technology High School**

**BRABANT, Mr Matthew, Coordinator, Resources and Education on Alcohol and Drugs for Youth (Ready Project)**

**MAAKRUN, Ms Marie-Anne, Private Consultant**

**ACTING CHAIR**—Steve Billington, thank you very much both for your hospitality and for your willingness to participate in this hearing this afternoon. Steve told me, staff, that I should use the intimidatory approach of reading the intimidatory paragraph which says that if you give us any trouble we will put you in contempt of parliament and put you in the dungeons, but I will leave that until later. Steve, do you want to make any more introductory comments other than the ones you made on the record before?

**Mr Billington**—No, I am happy with that.

**ACTING CHAIR**—Perhaps for the benefit of the staff I should explain the purpose of this inquiry. Minister Kemp gave the committee this particular brief because there has been plenty of literature around, some of it very controversial, on the education of boys. When we began this inquiry only a couple of months ago, the Commonwealth department of education gave us information that basically said that, with respect to the attainment level of boys and girls 20 years ago, the differential was less than one percentage point in literacy and numeracy. Today, they report to us that there are differentials existing throughout Australia, including New South

Wales and Victoria, of up to 20 per cent. We want to find out whether that is accurate and, if it is accurate, why it has been happening. We had evidence this morning at one of your state primary schools where, three years ago, two-thirds of children identified as having a problem were boys and only a third girls, whereas today it is even-stevens. So they have initiated a program over the last three years, identified the needs, implemented a program, monitored it, assessed it, evaluated it and reviewed it continuously and, as you would expect, boys and girls intrinsically must have the same latent abilities. I do not believe it has got anything to do with gender. If they are performing at disparate levels, there have to be reasons for it. That is basically the purpose of the inquiry.

Everyone has an opinion on this issue. We have had the loopy feminist conspirators on one side and on the other side we have had the people who are in absolute denial, who say there is no problem at all with the education of boys. In the middle, thank goodness, we have people with constructive views—sometimes disagreeing but necessarily constructive—on the ways in which boys seem to be succeeding.

By way of an opening question, what are you finding successful with boys with respect to the curriculum, the educational program, teaching pedagogies or whatever? What happens in this school that works? We spoke earlier to the year 9 and 10 group and the year 11 and 12 group. We understand that they are probably the cream of the crop, but they were a very impressive cream of the crop. We would like to know why.

**Mr Billington**—I would like to say immediately that they were not the cream of the crop. There were some lovely boys there but there were also boys who have been in a bit of trouble. The whole idea was to get a spread of boys. As I was saying earlier, I really think they are reflective of the students here—they have a great capacity to, if you like, leave outside who their family is and what their culture is and come here in an environment where they are affirmed, and what you have seen today is an example of that. They were not all fabulous kids.

**ACTING CHAIR**—They were fabulous kids.

**Mr Billington**—You know what I mean. I mention two things that I see as important. Firstly, for boys to achieve, as with anyone, but particularly with boys, self-esteem is an issue. I heard some of the boys saying that they need to be affirmed in what they are doing, to be encouraged in what they are doing, to actually get some type of constructive, positive feedback. Secondly, we have tried to focus this year on what is happening in the classroom. Lessons have to be different. I think even as you walked around today, you saw two or three different styles of teaching happening, and that is wonderful. The old idea of the 'book open' learning has gone, well and truly. It appeals to some people, but I think there needs to be variety in the way people are teaching. As you talk to these people, you will find that is important.

**ACTING CHAIR**—What is important for us to know about the way boys learn successfully?

**Mr Latty**—It starts off with a genuine concern for the kids that you teach in terms of student welfare. I think that is where our school has done a lot in the last couple of years, in terms of the Machismo Project, SWAP, et cetera. We have basically looked after the kids. When the kids are looked after, they respond. If you do not look after them, they will not respond at all.

**ACTING CHAIR**—Would anyone else like to comment?

**Ms Rix**—I think with boys you need a lot of structure in the way you organise your programs. A lot of the work we have done in English has been in supporting the boys in structured literacy programs, 7 to 12, and making sure that a lot of the lessons are appropriate to the boys that we are teaching. It is interpreting the new syllabuses especially which has taken a lot of our time, and adapting them to the boys we have in this school to make them appropriate.

**ACTING CHAIR**—Have you had experience with girls at secondary level?

**Ms Rix**—Yes.

**ACTING CHAIR**—Do they learn differently from the boys?

**Ms Rix**—I do not think they learn a lot differently. The idea of a structure for boys is more important. In some ways girls will go off and perhaps, in some cases, take a little more initiative themselves. It is really important that you give boys the steps along the way to achieve success. I suppose that is one of the main differences. The other thing is that their interests are different. Lots of boys are very interested in computers and cars. There are lots of interest groups for boys that are quite different from what the girls are interested in. That is an issue for us as well in selecting resources and deciding what topics to teach. They bring a different sort of background knowledge.

**ACTING CHAIR**—Some people have suggested to us that girls are quite happy in unstructured educational programs—to work on modules, to work on continuous assessment—but that boys are not. When we left the primary school at Roseville after an excellent morning, it was interesting to watch the children in the playground. All the girls were in groups, talking very calmly to each other, and all the boys were actively doing things with a ball or a piece of equipment. Again, a number of people appearing before this inquiry who have had successful programs have agreed with you that boys need highly structured programs.

Deborah, when we were in the classroom, you were teaching literal and implied. It is interesting that that is really the whole focus of understanding literacy. In some of the unstructured programs in literacy, the literal interpretation is diminished at the expense of implied. Do you find that, in those sorts of lessons, you need to start off with literal interpretations first in order to be able to get to the next stage; or can you do it the other way around?

**Ms Rees**—The boys at this school—and that is the context I have to deal with—often come from non-English speaking backgrounds. What happens is that most of their daily life is spent being quite literal: 'I'm going to get this. I'm going to do that.' They have not read a lot of books in English in their earlier years. I think they sit down in the afternoon and watch TV rather than look at books, so their literacy levels are limited in comparison with some children who are exposed to coloured picture books. From the very word go, those children can see that this storyline matches with this type of visual imagery.

What I have noticed here is that the boys have a lot of trouble trying to bring life into their reading. I think that is because they are not running the movie in their head. They can do the

literal work very easily; they can identify that as being quite straightforward. What they do not seem to grasp—and that is right up to year 12—is the inferential work. They literally will be given five or six facts, and they cannot then say, 'From all of this information, this is what I see.' They do not pick up the nuance of the language, the colour of it and its various emotive qualities. It probably has a lot to do with their earlier upbringing and possibly even how difficult it is for them, say, in primary and infants education, to be given the emotive side as well as literally learning the language fresh. They have a double job to do in compressed time. Some other students do not have to tackle as much.

**ACTING CHAIR**—Are there any fundamentals that would be of interest to this committee in the way you organise your work with those children?

**Ms Rees**—In what respect?

**ACTING CHAIR**—How you structure it; what you have in your head when you are planning?

**Ms Rees**—What I have in my mind is literally what I have just said. I do not think they run the movie, they do not visualise. The whole aim of everything we do—role plays, other small drama pieces, empathy exercises, even visuals such as drawings on the board—is to let them see that this phrase represents this set of emotions. I really think they do not grasp that quickly. If we do not show them, they will not see it. You literally have to stand up there and perform for them so that they can pick up that type of thing. That is a huge gap in their experience of literacy.

We have been trying to address that in the English faculty by working on skills in year 7 and building it up like a cumulative process until they get to year 12 and have mastered a broad range of skills. But it is a massive job when you are dealing with students who have an incredibly poor vocabulary and no visual sense in their reading and writing.

**ACTING CHAIR**—Is there any organised, structured school monitoring, assessment and evaluation system that has been in existence for the last two or three years like we have seen in some of these other schools? Is there a system where you can track what has been happening over the last two or three years?

**Mr Billington**—Yes, there is.

**ACTING CHAIR**—Would you perhaps briefly explain what goes on there?

**Mr Billington**—We have our normal reporting system, whereby students are assessed on an ongoing basis through terms from semester 1 and then that is reported to parents, and then the same thing happens through semester 2. We also have individual reporting procedures, whereby students are involved as well in the process of their assessment. In some of the different faculties they actually sit down and talk about the work that is being done, critically evaluate it and then they plot—through a journal or whatever means—their progress in that particular subject. So we have got the formalised ones, where the school has to report, but they also have individual ones, which vary, depending on the faculties and how they report back.

**Ms GAMBARO**—Because you have been a pilot of the Machismo Project, has it seriously affected the teaching and learning methods used at school? Was it a difficult thing to adapt with the rest of the teaching staff? How did you find it?

**Ms Maakrun**—Basically, I started the program because, as a teacher who has been working here for 10 years, I was very burnt out and frustrated with the lack of support I was getting in the classroom. I did not have discipline problems. I had very good relationships with the boys but the boys, I found, lacked motivation, and that was my biggest concern. It would take so much of my energy in a classroom to get in there and just get them motivated to want to learn.

The reason why I started Machismo was because I knew teachers could not do it; they had too much on their plate. The demands are incredible on a teacher in the day to day activities that they undertake. That serious concern was never addressed by the department or by the authorities above. I was concerned that people—and there are amazing teachers sitting beside me that I have worked with for the last 10 years—would start to question their own role as a teacher. I was concerned they would start to question why they were in the classroom, what direction they were going in; and whether it was the right career for them. And when you have quality teachers stopping and saying, 'I am actually thinking of another career,' that is a serious concern because it made you wonder just how many people out there were exactly the same. I was one of them, so I knew exactly what they were going through.

I started the project because I knew schools needed help, and communities were the only ones that could provide that help—the resources and people. They needed to get into schools. Schools needed to drop that barrier of, 'We do not need help. We are doing okay,' which I think they put up very well sometimes—they do not even admit that there is a problem. They needed to allow people—parents and others—to come in and assist them and not to see the parents as a liability or someone to fear, particularly if they were from non-English speaking backgrounds. Those non-English speaking students are not slow learners. They are incredibly bright and talented. The education system does not have the mechanism to tap into that sort of talent.

Those were my particular concerns. That is why I created it. I guess it has now been taken out of my hands and it is now being implemented by New South Wales education and New South Wales health, but the concern still is that I do not know what they are going to implement because they have not consulted me on that process, but it still needs to happen at the grassroots. These people need help in the classroom. They need practical solutions, they need to have them happening now and they need to see the results.

It was really warming to hear the boys say things like: 'Oh, I noticed somebody who took part in the program actually was more disciplined when he came back in and actually was a little bit more mature', or 'It gave me self-esteem', because that is exactly what the program is about—empowering them to believe in their self. If they are not academic or if they are not sporting, the program teaches them, 'Do not worry about it. You know you are in a safe environment and an environment that cares about you, and you can achieve your best regardless of your background or how much money your parents have.'

That is the sort of research there is. I am always impressed by the research from Michael Resnick that came out of the United States in 1997. The US Congress gave him $42 million to go out and research what could protect adolescents from risk and harm. His basic conclusion,

after interviewing 90,000 students, was 'Just give them a caring environment. Connect them to their school and connect them to their home.' We do not have much influence over what happens in the home, but we have a lot of influence over what happens in the classroom. I am concerned because the colleagues that I work with here cannot do any more. They are already stretched to their capacity, but it is not enough. So that is why I started the Machismo Project and why I am continuing to work on it independently, because I do not think I have finished that. There is still a lot more work to be done.

**Ms GAMBARO**—I was going to ask you how long it will continue, and you have partially answered that. Did the state education system see the pilot program here and did it decide to adopt it for the district or for the whole of the state?

**Ms Maakrun**—I was told that it would be adopted as a state initiative. I was not told what part of the project they will take on, because it was a community project. Health and education have taken it up, and I was told that it would be broken down into the current structure that supports education and health from that bureaucratic level—that is, student services and equity. I was concerned with that because they gave me no support and could not offer me any advice when I was creating this project. They are already overworked themselves. So getting another workload put on top of them just means that people sitting beside me are not going to get that hands-on support. Things like the breakfast club are made possible because of people like Matt. Matt came in as an outside person and got that up and running with me. There was no-one else at this school who had the time nor the energy. They would have liked to have done it, but it would not have been possible with their current workload. That is my concern.

**Ms GAMBARO**—You just do not know what those factors are.

**Ms Maakrun**—That is right.

**Ms GAMBARO**—You were in the room when the boys were saying that they want a structured program. I was quite surprised. It has not just been your school; it has been the case with a number of schools we have spoken to. They like organisation and discipline. When we first started doing this inquiry, Rod touched on the feminisation issues. The boys said that they did not mind whether they have male or female role models as long as they were good role models.

One of the schools that we went to the other day has had great involvement from the community. A policeman who is on the beat in the area goes away with them on school camps. The boys see him as a mentor figure, and he has broken down a number of barriers. There is an amount of teacher and parental involvement, but do you see other role models in the community being able to come into a school system? I have given the example of the police officer, but do you have other similar models? Do you have similar people come into your school system or do you see a greater need for more involvement?

**Mr Billington**—We do have people coming to us every lunchtime, and there is one of them.

**Mr Brabant**—This is what worries me—what Marie Anne said about health and the schools taking it over. I am lucky; I am separate from the health system that funds me. You cannot get anyone from health to do anything because they are all overworked. We were lucky. We had two

health workers, a police officer, a sexual health worker and me come into the school for a whole term, everyday except sports day, which was Wednesday.

We were here every lunchtime: I was here with one other worker for the whole school term. It was amazing what we were able to achieve—the amount of information, in respect of relationships and breaking down the barriers. It was phenomenal. We had kids coming up and talking to the police officer. Normally, if we have beat police around here, there is not a very good relationship. They were talking to me about various issues. They were talking to the sexual health workers about simple stuff—tattoos, body piercing. Their health stuff is important to them. We were able to break down a lot of the myths and misconceptions. In reality, there is a PD health-PE curriculum, and all this stuff, but it does not address a lot of the needs that are there. If they cannot talk to people who are not teachers but who are still professionals, how can we do it? With health and school ed taking things over, this is the first time we have been able to get into a school.

**Ms GAMBARO**—How many hours a week was that team of people at the school?

**Mr Brabant**—I was here every lunchtime.

**Ms GAMBARO**—That would be for an hour and a half or two hours?

**Mr Brabant**—We were here for about three-quarters of an hour.

**Mr Billington**—It would be about an hour all up.

**Mr Brabant**—I was here for the four days and then the other workers were here for one hour for a whole term.

**Ms GAMBARO**—Are you saying to me that is all it took—an hour from four different people over a day to engender that sort of mentoring, trusting relationship?

**Mr Brabant**—But it was not done in a classroom; it was out playing handball, kicking a football, sitting around on the grass talking—being normal. We are normal police officers sitting down; police officers playing handball; Matt, the health worker, with Susie, the sexual health worker playing handball or sitting under a tree talking. We are people, and that is important. We are no better than what they are; we are on the same level, and the respect that we got was phenomenal.

**Ms GAMBARO**—One of my colleagues tells me that whenever she goes to a function she goes into the kitchen and starts washing the cups after the morning or afternoon tea. I am just relating that to what you have said: that people open up in those sorts of settings, whereas they tend to stereotype us and perhaps you get stereotyped if you are not in that setting. I think you have achieved a tremendous amount.

**Mr Brabant**—Part of my role is going into schools, so I do go into schools and I do the drug and alcohol and safe sex talks. To me that sort of stuff is a complete and utter waste of time nine times out of 10.

**Ms GAMBARO**—What—standing up in front of a room?

**Mr Brabant**—Yes, standing up in front of a class for the hour that you do your safe sex and drug and alcohol talks. It is more valuable where we have the honesty and the ability to walk around, sit down in comfortable environments and for one person to come up and ask a question that they might not be able to ask anywhere else. That is the respect the kids get here; they do not get it at other places.

**Ms GAMBARO**—Thank you very much for that.

**Ms GILLARD**—I have a question on a slightly different point. It is a question I have been asking wherever we go, so my apologies to my colleagues for asking it again. As Rod described, a motivation for this inquiry was tracking over 20 years the differences in educational attainment between boys and girls. There is a whole statistical argument to be had about whether we are comparing apples with apples or apples with oranges when we look back over 20 years of data. But putting that argument to one side, I have been trying to get people to focus on what could have changed in that 20-year period to explain that differential. People come along and tell us a lot of things about boys' education. They tell us, for example, that boys like active learning styles and they need to move around. But that just makes me think if that is true today that was probably true 20 years ago. They say boys develop literacy slightly more slowly than girls or they might present at school with not so good fine-motor skills. I think if that is true today that would have been true 20 years ago. So we are not really looking for the things that are the same but for the things that are different. I would be interested in your analysis about what is different that could explain that change in educational attainment.

**Mr Forrester**—Just on one area: we had a very strong manual arts section at this school 14 or 15 years ago. Now it has diminished quite a lot. It is a practical area of the school that has gone downhill. I think that is probably similar in a lot of areas.

**Ms GILLARD**—So you think curriculum in that 20-year window has been changed in a way, with it being moved from practical to theory?

**Mr Forrester**—Yes, boys used to learn hands-on skills through training, things that they could use in the work force. Now a lot of that has been taken away from them in practical terms. It has been replaced by design and technology, so you have kids who can do macrame, rather than joints for wood. It is a very simple thing.

**Mr Billington**—There has been a lot of research into the post-industrial age that we are now in. Twenty years ago, the majority of boys would leave at a particular age because there was manual, industrial age type of technology that they could be involved in. There is another factor. Now you have the post-industrial age, so you do not have those manual jobs, not that I want them to go into those; I am just saying that is what they did. The other thing you have is very much a multicultural society which was not there 20 years ago, and a lot of the parents do not understand the system that they have brought their children to. They want to see their boy get a bit of paper, and that bit of paper has to be a Higher School Certificate. It does not matter that they are not able to do the things.

I was interested to hear—some of the others did not have the advantage—Sikeli and some of the others saying that boys pick the wrong subjects. They may get 50 on their school certificate but they still want to do three unit maths—no matter how we advise them. We spend hours advising boys, 'This is not appropriate,' but it makes no difference. Their parents believe that, if they get a bit of paper, that is it, whereas I think 20 years ago there was a greater understanding of the system that the parents had gone through. Unfortunately, it was the same system I had gone and my parents had gone through and there had not been the change. These parents have not been through our system, and it is very new to them. They do not understand it, and we do not help. We try to communicate, but it is difficult.

If you read some of the annual reports and the jargon we use, you would know that it is not user friendly, but that becomes a real issue. So there is this differential you are talking about because the boys we are seeing in year 12 now we would not have seen in year 12 twenty years ago. What is more, they would not have aspired to go to year 12. I am really happy they are here, and I want them to stay until year 12, but I am not sure I want the curriculum that we are trying to put into them in year 12 to be a higher school certificate. There has to be some other valued piece of paper that these boys can achieve too. I think that is the big difference.

**Mr Forrester**—If they are locked into something that they do not achieve, that then causes the other problems that we talked about—self-esteem and all the rest of it plummets. Their families want them in this to get the HSC, to get that paper, and they will then reward them with a new Commodore or something. But they are not happy here and they cannot cope. They are literally fish out of water. They find it very difficult to cope with it, and then you have the problems that result from that, like truancy. They basically find it very difficult.

**Ms GILLARD**—I would have to say that no-one has put it as well as that, that there is this external pressure towards inappropriate course selection and curriculum selection. So that is a good point.

**Mr Forrester**—Because the parents do not understand the system, they are very often not involved with us. So if you go to another school where everyone speaks English and has grown up in the system, the parents are more involved, as opposed to a school which is virtually full of orphans.

**Ms Collier**—On that note, here at this school—and I think it is possibly a trend in other schools as well—we have more opportunities for students to be involved in VET courses than we did have maybe even five years ago. In fact, of the seven industry areas for VET, I think we offer five of those courses. In the longer term there is some change in the pattern of the sorts of subjects that our students are choosing, but I think it is not going to be quite so apparent in the short term. They are not those trade type areas; they are retail, they are IT, they are hospitality, and they are those sorts of things. That is quite a different type of employment than what boys traditionally have done.

**Ms Rees**—I have been associated with the school on and off for over 20 years, and in that time I have noticed the changes in the school population. I think there have been probably three different cultural groups that have come through, and it is pretty much dependent upon the demographics of the area and the changes and people growing up. We were talking about it in the staff room today, that at the moment there is a cultural group that is becoming dominant, and

we are noticing that the literacy problems are far greater. It is difficult for us to try to analyse why we might have this group in the 1980s that has X problems, and then suddenly we have another group in the 21st century that has Y problems. It is difficult for us to determine whether it is a social problem, in the sense that the families do not know how to provide support, or whether it is a language problem, in the sense that they do not know how to interact on that level.

We are not sure exactly where it comes from and we do not have the resources to try to work it out. It is an absolutely massive problem to try to get them into the classroom and bring them up to a competent level. Maybe there also needs to be some kind of examination of cultural links beyond the school so that we get that knowledge coming back into the school. We can then try to work with it more effectively, particularly the parents and the community. Quite often they do not want to come to the school, as anyone would not if they did not feel confident in the English language, if they—as Stephen was saying—are not sure of what the HSC is actually going to give their son. So they do not want to come up and talk about it, because it is nerve-racking.

**Ms GILLARD**—A factor that has been put to us as a possible explanation for this change is that assessment methods have changed. The problem you get into here is the hideous generalisations we should all avoid when talking about something as complex as gender. But at the risk of hideously generalising, we have been told that as a general rule boys prefer short, sharp assessment methods such as examinations with pointed questions, multiple choice, or 'list this, analyse that' kinds of questions. We are now moving towards a more continuous assessment in the curriculum and that assessment is more literacy based so, rather than asking, 'List the 10 factors that cause X,' it will be a more verbally based task and people say that that is inadvertently disadvantaging boys, who prefer the other style. Have any of you as educators got a comment as to whether that is right, wrong or just complete bloody nonsense? It could be any of the above.

**Mr Forrester**—I would say the last one was pretty well true—it would be nonsense. We have boys who would not do anything, whether it be continuous assessment or a short, sharp exam. They just will not. That is the fact of the matter. That would be the same in any other school, not just here.

**Ms Collier**—In most subject areas a variety of assessment tools are used and there is multiple choice. While there is, particularly in the senior school, assessment that is ongoing throughout the whole year, students have to do a number of specific tasks. Most subjects have a variety and they are meant to have a variety of different sorts of things. In fact, the board of studies documents require that there be a variety of those tasks. I would think that that is probably not necessarily so.

**Mr Forrester**—We have got so many various assessment methods that it is fair on everyone. They really try to cater for the whole range of students.

**Ms Mason**—I would have to say that our boys love talking, they love to discuss issues, but they are very reticent to put it on paper. That is where they have problems and that is what we are trying to address—the written side of literacy. But they love to discuss things and they love to explore issues in the classroom.

**ACTING CHAIR**—They suggest that in a co-ed situation they might not be as willing to talk as openly as they are among boys.

**Ms Rees**—I think one of the great joys of working here is the fact that the boys are very open and willing to participate very actively in lessons. With assessment, as long as you are teaching what you are assessing, they learn those skills. You are not assessing in a process that they have never been through before. I find that the boys here adapt very well to assessment procedures which are part of your teaching program. The variety of assessment procedures that you use I think gives everyone a chance and is really fair.

**Mr WILKIE**—This morning we were at a school where they told us that they earn more money from the P&C than they get from the education department, which was quite amazing. What sort of support would you have here from the parents? Have you got ways of involving them more?

**Mr Billington**—I support the parents here with free barbeques. I support their eating habits. Whether it is cultural or whether it is just time factors, it is very difficult to get an active P&C and I accept that. We put on a free barbecue and they come along and chat. We would have 10 or 15 people and for this area, and maybe for lots of schools, that is a very big P&C. But to raise funds and to provide the type of money that we would need, firstly, I do not think it is their place to be honest—that is a personal view—and, secondly, I would never ask them to do it; it is beyond them.

**Mr WILKIE**—I suppose it was more the involvement of the parents in the school itself. They would come in for breakfast and eat with the students, be involved in class activities and do a whole raft of interactive things.

**Mr Billington**—We have had offers from parents to come in. Jerry's mother is a design and build architect and she is happy to come in for half a day a week to talk about the built environment to our year 9 and 10 students. Another gentleman who lives behind the school is a landscaper, and he would like to come in and talk to the boys. We have another one who is a tax consultant who has time to do that. We have those one-offs, if you like, who are willing to come in and talk. Howard has friends, and others have friends, who will come into the school but—as I think was mentioned here—to a lot of the parents the school is daunting. They are happy to come to parent-teacher night, they are happy to chat and we get a great turn-up at the parent-teacher night, but their own lack of confidence in themselves and their understanding of the system would prevent that.

**Ms Collier**—I think it is fairly typical that the P&C associations in high schools are much smaller than in primary schools. I have taught in a number of high schools—a lot with a high NESB population—and parents are not involved. There are a whole lot of factors. I think that in some ways part of the factor is the age of the students. There is a time in young people's lives when they do not really want their parents around. That sort of thing is going on, whereas in primary school it is a bit different. There is one teacher that the parents have to get to know each year, and it is that person they can go to see, whereas in high school it is not quite the same. I think it is a fairly perennial thing, not just at our school. I think there are a whole lot of factors that make it so.

**ACTING CHAIR**—Do you think sometimes secondary schools are not as welcoming as perhaps they could be?

**Ms Mason**—I think they have done a lot. Jill Collier started an open day program where we, I suppose, showcased—really encouraged parents just to come and see what we do at the school. We have drama performances, scientific, history and social science displays—all the different faculties—but the turn-up over several years is poor and disappointing considering the amount of time and effort the boys and the teachers put into it. We really have worked hard to try to encourage parents. I do not know what else we can do.

**ACTING CHAIR**—Usually when kids are performing parents flock.

**Ms Mason**—You would think so.

**ACTING CHAIR**—It does not happen here?

**Ms Mason**—No.

**Mr Forrester**—Ten years ago we won the university shield at Parramatta—

**ACTING CHAIR**—What is the university shield?

**Mr Forrester**—Rugby league—a statewide competition. There were more teachers and spouses there than there were parents of our team members. If a parent cannot go and watch their kid play in a prestigious event like that, I think there is something that we cannot really understand. I also think that parents see this as very cheap childminding. They do not pay fees and that is where it ends. That is my view. The principal, the leading teacher, the deputy and everyone else have made numerous efforts to try to improve—encourage, cajole, whatever—and make the place more welcome to parents, yet we still find it very difficult to attract a crowd.

**Mr Billington**—They very much have an idea that we are professional at our jobs. They appreciate that and they have great trust in us—they trust that when their sons walk through that door we will look after them, care for them and give them the best possible education we can. They do not want anything to do with it. That is our job. Their culture is, 'That's your job; you do it. We do not want to have anything to do with it.' When Steve, Jill, all of us, try to get parents to come to the school—sometimes we are at the point of suspending a boy—their parents still will not come up to school, because dad is working or mum is working. On the odd occasion it is a ruse, but with the majority it is true—dad and mum are working and they just do not want to come. It is not their position to be here. Steve would have found that a lot.

**Mr Quinn**—One of the things I have noticed that has changed greatly in the years that I have been teaching—I have been at this school for 17 years; before that I was at Punchbowl Boys High School for four years, so for 21 of my 26 years of teaching I have taught in boys' schools—and the thing that keeps coming back to me, one of the greatest banes that I have, is our continual attempts to get the parents involved in our schools. I always come back to one word and it is called responsibility. One of the things we try to engender into the boys is a sense of responsibility. I have to say that I think that their sense of responsibility has changed a lot because of the speed of education. I, personally, work through the SRC—the student

representative council—and have a particular interest in student welfare. I have been involved in a number of extremely successful Australia wide programs where other schools have taken models from what we are doing. A new program we are doing now is, I think, going to be a bit of a flagship. It is about bullying and the treatment of it in boys schools, specifically here but generally, and in coeducational schools. I am hopeful that that will be up and running by the middle of the year. It is again coming back to this idea of responsibility. I find that the more responsibility I give boys, the better they respond. But I have to be very careful that I do not give them too much, otherwise they back right away. With the breakdown of the family unit—and, with divorce rates being what they are, there is no argument about that; you only have to look at our 600-odd students to see how many of them come from single parent families—one of the things they are not learning a lot of outside the school is about responsibility. I can see that that responsibility and all the things that go with it have been pushed out into other areas.

One of the great points that was made before—and it is true—is that boys left at 15 and 16 and went out and worked and stuff like that. Now they are still at school, yet they are old enough to vote, drive and go into clubs. They want all of these other things and they are legally entitled to all these other rights but quite often they abrogate their responsibilities at school. In other words, they do not treat their school studies seriously enough because they are too involved in what is going on outside of school and they have got access to it all. I find that is one of the biggest changes that has occurred, not only in education but in our society as a whole. It has certainly impacted on us because no longer are we just teachers; we are also welfare officers in many cases.

Every teacher here at this table is in the same position. We are the first ones to put our hands up and help any boy, I am telling you. But it becomes so time consuming that I think we very often spend more time with the boys treating welfare matters than we do in the girls schools. I have got a mate up the road at St George Girls High School who is deputy there whose welfare responsibilities, he says 'are virtually zilch'.

**ACTING CHAIR**—I am conscious of the time because we have got people on early flights. Are there any other comments that people would like to make? Could you make them brief because we have people who need to go, unfortunately.

**Ms Maakrun**—Certainly. Very much so. On the whole matter of cultural awareness, I think Deb touched earlier on the fact that schools need to become more culturally aware of who their market is. That is not an easy reform to make within the education process. You are up against a lot of barriers. I was born in Australia but am from a Lebanese background. I was dragged out of primary school and made to go to ESL lessons because I had the surname of Maakrun, where I had to sit there and say, 'this is a chair, chair, chair; this is a table, t, t, t, table,' and I missed out on art and craft. That attitude within education I do not think has changed very much. We do not look at the parents as an asset. We see the parents as a liability.

Last week a boy was shot dead at a bus stop. The media panic following that will accuse the Asian gangs of it, or whoever was involved, and then accuse the parents of being irresponsible and not protecting their son. The media will create a whole media hype around that.

There is research currently being conducted through the University of Technology, Faculty of Business. This book was produced—*Kababs, Kids, Cops and Crime*—which looks at dispelling

a lot of the myths around how we view those students and how we view those people. One in two Sydneysiders of a working age are now from first or second generation immigrants into Australia. I do not believe we understand them. I do not believe we have the management practices to deal with them and to work with them. We can complain about the P&C, yet Granville Boys High School has 30 fathers and mothers coming to their P&C meetings. They are not held after school. They are held during school hours with interpreters. Parents want to get involved. It is just that the school system does not know how to do it. The schools do not have the strategies, which is why they need to start using their communities a lot more.

**ACTING CHAIR**—Thank you for that. Any other comments? That was interesting. Have you still got sports day?

**Mr Billington**—We certainly do.

**ACTING CHAIR**—When is that?

**Mr Billington**—Sport is on Wednesday afternoon.

**ACTING CHAIR**—It is interesting. In many states of Australia, including my own home state, the concept of technical schools or enterprise schools is starting to come back. They disappeared. They became all comprehensive schools. I used to be a school principal. When you talk to colleagues who are running enterprise schools and those who are running academic high schools—and we have had people feedback on this to the committee—you cannot run both. You have to make a decision. The choices in New South Wales are far greater than they are in almost every other state. New South Wales has boys schools, girls schools, selective schools—the whole range of them. In some states, there are just the comprehensive high schools and nothing else. Do you think that it is a big advantage having got some choice in state education in this state?

**Mr Billington**—Asking that question at this hour! We do have a drain. Everyone at this table will have a frustration that some of our boys who scored outstandingly at the School Certificate last year now go to Sydney Boys High School. We are not talking one or two: we are talking about over half a dozen students who left this school, not because they wanted to, but because of parent perception about going to selective high schools.

It is difficult for a comprehensive high school. Last year, 12 of our former students were in the lead table, if you like, of the 1,000 best students. Two had gone on to James Cook, and the other 10 had gone on to Sydney Tech, Caringbah and Sydney Boys. They left us at year 10 after a lot of the work had been done, and they went into years 11 and 12 at those schools. I believe they would have succeeded as well here—as do they—but their parents had a perception. That is not a good question to ask at half past four, because you may not catch your plane. And you think I have a view? You wait until these guys have a go at you. I am very moderate compared with them.

**ACTING CHAIR**—I did not mean to be provocative right at the end of the hearing—I probably did, really.

**Ms GILLARD**—Just for the record, could you tell us what the total teaching staff complement is and what percentage is male and female, because that has been an issue everywhere we have gone?

**Mr Billington**—The whole staff?

**Ms GILLARD**—Yes.

**Mr Billington**—Of the total number of 68 staff, just under two-thirds are female.

**ACTING CHAIR**—By the way, none of the boys complained about the gender of the teachers. The only complaint they had was about the ability of the teachers. They really did respect good teachers.

**Mr Billington**—That is an issue.

**ACTING CHAIR**—Steve, we could carry on a lot further with this. Can I simply thank you, your deputy, Jill, and your staff for being prepared to participate in this inquiry. When we eventually get around to tabling our report in the parliament, copies will be sent to the school for your reference. I am sure you will recognise parts of what you have said in some of our recommendations. We hope they meet your wishes as well as ours. We may need to come back at another time to continue this debate. Thank you also for your hospitality during the day. It has been greatly appreciated.

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

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

**Committee adjourned at 4.37 p.m.730**