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**HOUSE OF
REPRESENTATIVES**

STANDING COMMITTEE ON EDUCATION AND TRAINING

Reference: Education of boys

WEDNESDAY, 8 MAY 2002

TALLEBUDGERA

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**HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES
STANDING COMMITTEE ON EDUCATION AND TRAINING**

Wednesday, 8 May 2002

Members: Mr Bartlett (*Chair*), Mr Sawford (*Deputy Chair*), Mr Cox, Mrs Elson, Ms Gambaro, Mr Johnson, Mrs May, Mr Pearce, Ms Plibersek and Mr Sidebottom

Supplementary members: Mr Cadman and Mr Wilkie

Members in attendance: Mr Bartlett, Mr Cadman, Mrs May, Mr Pearce and Mr Sidebottom

Terms of reference for the inquiry:

To inquire into and report on:

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

WITNESSES

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Committee met at 9.14 a.m.

BUHNER, Ms Veronica, Teacher-in-Charge 3R Programming, Tallebudgera Beach School

DANIELS, Mr Ron, District Director, Gold Coast South, Education Queensland

GRAHAM, Mr John, RTO Coordinator, Tallebudgera Beach School

RAFTON, Mr Allan, Principal, Tallebudgera Beach School

CHAIR—I declare open this public hearing of the House of Representatives Standing Committee on Education and Training inquiry into the education of boys. We thank very much the principal of Tallebudgera Beach School, Mr Allan Rafton; the coordinator of the 3R Plus program, Mr John Graham; and everyone else involved, particularly Ron Daniels and Veronica Buhner. Thank you for your hospitality today and for taking your time to appear before this committee.

While we appreciate that we are guests at Tallebudgera Beach School we do need to remind you that the proceedings here today are formal proceedings of the parliament and warrant the same respect as the proceedings of the parliament. I invite you to make some introductory remarks and to take us through the audiovisual presentation.

Mr Rafton—I welcome the committee to our humble beach school. First of all, I would like to introduce you to the documents that I have passed on to you. The first sheet is a cover sheet which basically outlines our presentation. I am starting procedures off, Ron will follow, Veronica will speak after that and then John will get down to the nitty-gritty, shall we say, of the actual proposal itself. If I may, I plan to use a PowerPoint presentation to replace the physical tour. I think this is more relevant given the operations that are currently happening here and the redevelopment that is likely to happen very soon. So, if I may, I would like to begin my presentation.

Slides were then shown—

Mr Rafton—What you see before you is a slide showing some of the activities that occur regularly at Tallebudgera Beach School. I think you can see from this slide—and you will see from later slides—that it is a unique, aquatic based outdoor education school working both with Education Queensland and with

Sport and Recreation Queensland, two government departments of Queensland. The presenters for you today will be me, as principal; Ron, our district director; Veronica and then John Graham. The who and what of our presentation is that I will provide a site context. I will tell you a bit about Tallebudgera Beach School, how it operates and, more importantly, how we got into the area of personal development and particularly alternative education. Ron will provide a community context, particularly for the Gold Coast region, and its relationship to this location which is, I think, unique in Queensland and in Australia. Veronica will talk to you about the actual 3R program as it currently operates, which I think will give you a good understanding of where we plan to go with our submission. John will provide the vision of our application: where we hope to go and what we plan to do.

My role is to tell you who we are, to provide snapshots of our operations and our success, to explain our involvement in alternative education to provide some relevance for you and to highlight some of the unique context around our submission and the unique opportunity that currently exists. It is all about our ability to deliver on our goals. What I would like to put to you is that the best measure of future success is past success, which we hope to highlight. Where are we now? The room that you are actually in now is our Tallebudgera Beach School library/sick bay. Just behind you we have beds. Hopefully we will have no sick students today; we have put a temporary sick bay downstairs. We are a working facility, as you can imagine. Our camps are going on; we have 240 students in two different camps operating as we speak. This is also the home of the 3R program. Using the library shelves behind me, we have three different sections where three different groups of students work. Veronica will talk to you more about that in a moment. These students are very much at risk: they are the ones we have identified with the greatest concerns, behaviourally, in the Gold Coast south area.

You also need to know—to understand not just the 3R program but also the total opportunity that exists with this site—what else we do here—and that will give you an idea of the potential that this site has in terms of supporting alternative education. Hopefully, I will answer the question for you: why did this outdoor education facility get involved? Also, and probably importantly, I will answer the question: why do local principals support this program at this particular location—I think there is a strong relevance there. This slide is an aerial shot of our unique location. This is a unique site. It is something that I have a passion for and I think it is something that you will hear about from the other speakers. It is bordered by the ocean—a marvellous beach, which we can use 52 weeks of the year—and also by the creek. You cannot see it in this photograph, but in the area below is a very fine estuary which allows us to do some very safe

aquatic activities. Three of the prize activities that we do are tobogganing, canoeing and sailing. This is not to outshine the importance of our national park, which on this slide is that green lump of volcanic matter in the middle. It provides us with a unique environmental, and also indigenous, cultural heritage—which we share with students who come down here each year.

I will take you through what the school is. We are not particularly modest—we have had to show many people the value of outdoor education, and we continue to do that. On the slide you will see, quite boldly presented, that we are the largest outdoor education centre in Queensland. We have, and have had, a very successful partnership with Surf Life Saving Queensland—something of which we are proud. It has also enabled us to become the largest surf education school in Australia. Here are some of the statistics: we have over 8,000 students attend each year from all over Queensland—and when I say all over Queensland, it is from the tip of the cape, right through as far west as you can go, to the southern border and Goondiwindi—and about 18 per cent of those 8,000 students come from the Gold Coast.

Equally importantly, we have 500 teachers that come each year, which is a potential influence of great importance. The nature of our operations is probably measured by us having 150 pre-service teachers that visit our site each year to learn more about outdoor education. Increasingly, we have TAFE enrolments of over 100 students that come here for work experience. We really are about outdoor education and personal development.

A typical day, a standard day—as you are probably aware from your past experience with outdoor education facilities—is a long day. We are a typical residential camp. Our features are long hours, on call at night, tired students by the end of the week, homesickness and relationship issues. When you put 201 students into 24-hour accommodation, the issues tend to rise. We have had a long history of dealing with relationships and personal development. One of the underpinning philosophies that we have here is that of our 4Cs: consideration, courtesy, cooperation and commonsense. We provide that as a proactive, preventative strategy for some of those relationship issues that crop up. It underpins our philosophy: our operations, our learning experiences, our goals and outcomes are all measured by presenting those four fairly simple yet vitally important characteristics. I will present a few more slides now which are straight from our orientation PowerPoint.

Slides were then shown—

Mr Rafton—When our students come each week, we try to incorporate their knowledge of the camp very quickly. The best way to do that is by visual stimulus as well as by explanation and a little bit of humour, as you will probably see from some of the slides later. Naturally, we have to be strong on routines and structure. Our students appreciate clear guidelines presented in an enjoyable manner. I am sure you will see, when Veronica talks to you about it, that these factors are consistently through the 3R program.

The point of this slide about our library is that we have both indoor and outdoor learning opportunities. Our restructure and redevelopment hopefully provide us with more of a virtual learning environment for people widely flung. Safety is a very high priority. We have never had a fire and we have never had an evacuation emergency here, but we have many safety issues we need to deal with—all of which I believe are being handled very well. Here is some of the humour—Tim Crawshaw is one of our teachers; he is the man that appears most in the slides. We have the usual and unusual problems of camp relating to confined living. You may remember that these slides are from our orientation presentation. Safety, obviously, and student welfare is our No. 1 priority. That is evident from our own perceptions and, importantly, we gather evaluation data each and every week about our operations. That is the No. 1 priority presented by parents—there are probably no secrets in that one, but it is something we treasure in terms of how we maintain student welfare.

In 1999, outdoor education for us became equated with personal development. We use the outdoor as the vehicle, but what we are really about is developing the individual. Since that time in 1999 when we made that miraculous discovery through our annual review process, we have been working on developing a range of programs across the personal development spectrum. The 3R Plus program is at one end of the spectrum—we do not ignore the full range of the spectrum. Probably at the other end of the spectrum, and in all places in between, are the leadership and professional development activities that we offer other students and other adult groups.

The question that must be asked is: how successful are we? The slide that you are looking at shows a typical team building type of activity. Our ropes course is located at the back of our B section. The learning experience that you are seeing presented there, in different and interpreted ways, is used for students from as young as year 1—and we have those coming through each year, which is a unique challenge. At the other end of that spectrum, we have had groups of principals who have been involved in team building activities. I am not too sure who presents the greatest challenge: the year 1s or the principals. The point is that

those learning experiences, adapted for the group, are universal. Personal development issues that we work with are also universal, whether they involve the youngster, the adult or the very experienced educationalist.

We are a large and growing site. A measure of our success is the 22 per cent growth that we have factored in in the last two years. Also, the 22 per cent figure reflects the range of programs that are now delivered in relation to those attendance figures. Our programs, quite simply, are increasing incredibly in demand. We turn away approximately 15 per cent of bookings each year because we cannot service the needs under our current structures.

It is very easy to get lost in the rhetoric of what you are trying to do and forget the real message. The message here is that learning experiences must be fun. If you can't have fun in learning, learning stops. One of the most important factors about lifelong learning is that it must retain some enjoyment.

We have a number of objectives that I will put forward to you. I will not read each slide; obviously, these provide a snapshot. But our learning experiences must relate to life. That is one of the advantages of outdoor education—it relates to the very life-like experiences that we have. What better way to learn about relationships than to have people actively working in what are often stressful situations. Our feedback highlights that our learning experiences are not only authentic but also reflect life.

Importantly, our program demonstrates that all students can excel here. You have all heard the debate about boys and girls and the different learning styles. As those statistics present for you, boys and girls learn equally well about our outdoor activities and also about personal development and relationship issues.

A safe and supportive relationship is an important factor of our programs. Our programs feature a safe and supportive environment; they build better relationships; they create successful learning outcomes; and enhance teacher and student relationships. I am quite proud that 66 per cent of students report that they get on better with teachers after being on camp for a week down here. I am also proud of the stimulus provided to many teachers by a refreshing experience of camp and by being able to enjoy their students in a different context to what they find in their classrooms.

We try to pack as much as we can into our programs. Margaret May has been involved with us in many ways, particularly in our environmental program. Our success runs in to that. We have had the cleanest beach in Queensland for two out

of the last three years. We have students engaged each year in preparing our dunes, making them far more enjoyable for future groups that come through. The nature of our programs is that we are sustaining a valuable community resource and, probably more importantly, we are enlisting community support for our activities here, which will enhance the sustainability.

Client evaluation reports that we develop self-awareness; that we enhance self-confidence; that we also enhance personal and interpersonal growth. Our teachers here are role models for this type of learning, and they are role models for other teachers who come down—over 500 each year. Importantly, our teachers and our staff here also enjoy what they do. When you make an experience rewarding and enjoyable, the staff satisfaction levels go through the roof.

What you see on this slide is the Education Queensland school opinion survey, which is conducted in all Education Queensland sites. Significantly, the evaluation of our staff about their work satisfaction in those categories that are represented is at least one standard deviation above the state mean in each and every category. When you are doing a rewarding job, and doing it well, and people recognise that, it makes life much easier for you.

So why the 3R program? We are a very successful outdoor education site, working with personal development. Why choose something which is very difficult? The answers probably lie in the points that are there. We have had success with boys. We have a strong activity focus, and that activity focus can be related to many of the challenges that cannot easily be presented in a school. We are different, and therefore match the 'alternative site' definition. John has done a lot of research in the development of the 3R program and the presentation of our submission.

One of the key factors for many students who are now disenchanted with the education system—many of whom are outside the education system—is that they cannot live with the structure that is provided in a school. To create that catalyst for a turnaround we need to have something alternative. An alternative site is often that first and significant step to change an attitude and to create a fresh approach. Effectively, we promote self-concept, self-confidence, teamwork and communication, and we have the structures here that allow us to do that very effectively.

We do not have the same community politics and parent perceptions of a typical school. Let me be quite frank here: most schools on the Gold Coast, by their support of our program, recognise the importance of alternative programs like 3R,

but very few of those schools have support from their community to house such a program on their campuses. They cannot afford the stigma and the parent perceptions that come with having those students on their campus. That is the reality. It is a very annoying and frustrating reality, but it is a reality. The beauty of what we are and where we are and the spectrum of personal development that we are doing is that we can afford to live with that—and do better than live with it: we can choose to have that as an increasingly important component of our operations.

The question is: why do local principals have faith in us? Let me present a few slides to show you. Importantly, our clients' satisfaction reflects how we have been able to work with others. The principals trust us because we have demonstrated that we can have productive partnerships with a number of other organisations and agencies—Surf Life Saving Queensland is one; and others include local tourist industry organisations. The University of Southern Queensland and Griffith University and the work that we have done with our 3R program of personal development also reflect that.

Where are we now? Our clients' satisfaction reflects how successful we are. And with success comes people wishing to be involved with you; hence our principals are being supportive of us. It is a unique opportunity that we present. It is a unique opportunity in terms of where we are at the crossroads of being able to extend the support that we have for alternative education. It is unique in terms of our unique location, which encourages people to be here—not just students but also adults and other learners. We have a community context, representative of current educational complexities. Ron will talk more about this. The nature of the Gold Coast area, in terms of population et cetera, really allows us to deal with those complex issues that are reflected throughout Australia. We have a successful base program already catering for many of the issues that follow. So our staff have the ability to develop training and resources to build the expertise required to work with alternative education students. We have—and this cannot be understated—a unique redevelopment opportunity to provide resources that support the wider community focus. And the key words there are a 'wider community focus'.

We realise that the nature of what we do relies on working with not just students but also those people around those students who have difficulties in relating to education and life. The parents, the friends structure and the family all need support. By having a centre which involves not just one government department but two, and working with other government departments and other private agencies, we have the ability to provide, ultimately, what every government

wants: an integrated service approach—something very difficult in individual sites. A pilot program such as this can, if you like, show the way for others. The redevelopment opportunity also provides for a small impact of dollars to contribute significantly to what happens on this site after the redevelopment—that is, for a small investment to create a big future. I will talk more about that in a moment.

This aerial shot I am presenting shows our unique environment—something we cannot afford not to maximise the use of. The slide may be difficult for you to interpret, but it basically shows our current site as it now stands. The large blue blob at the bottom of the slide is the development of a new two indoor court multipurpose hall that is being built. This, in conjunction with the third court, provides a unique facility for sports training and so on and also the training of those people who work with sports groups. Personal development is not just education; it relates to wide community groups.

The area at the top, apart from this building, will be obliterated in December and rebuilt. When it is rebuilt, it will look more like this. You cannot pick up the detail from this slide, but there are unique opportunities. What we have here is an upscaling of the quality of facilities. At the moment, we have difficulty attracting adults down here to work them in personal development, simply because of the quality of facilities. The near future holds an ability for us to have the full spectrum of lifelong learners who want to learn about personal development. We will also have the flexibility to deal with many groups that we cannot deal with at the moment. There are groups—disadvantaged and disabled students—who cannot attend on-site because of the lack of facilities.

This slide shows a fairly artistic impression of the types of buildings that will exist here. The buildings will be a dramatic improvement on what you saw when you were walking in, and they will encourage a wider spectrum of people attending. We are literally a school with a future, full of promise. Your support is required to maximise this promise for all students and their families. Our advantage, in terms of our site and history, is that we have proven success. We have proven that we can work with others in quality partnerships. You cannot overstate the importance of having the ability to work with others and to utilise their expertise to produce a combined outcome. We have demonstrated the flexibility to work with a wide variety of groups and individuals. We already demonstrate an integrated service approach, but we have only scratched the surface. We are trying to fight many of the barriers which prevent different government departments and different agencies working more effectively together. As we have demonstrated in one of our students, if we can combine the

resources being put to that student, we can create a difference. The very worst student we had on our program is now a vastly different person, and the catalyst for that was services becoming integrated—people working together and trusting one another.

We have demonstrated that our programs for students, teachers, families and the community can and do happen. We can demonstrate and provide those programs. We have a positive image in the community. Later speakers will highlight our success with alternative education now and in future, but what I hope to have demonstrated is that we have the ability to deliver on what we request in our submission. Thank you for your time. I will hand over to Ron.

Mr Daniels—Thank you, Allan. My task this morning is to provide some of the community context within which these proposals are embedded and also to reassure you that what Allan, Veronica and John are looking to do is in alignment with Education Queensland's strategic direction and is therefore fully supported by me and by Education Queensland.

When we think of the Gold Coast we think of glitz and glamour, sun, surf, sand, holidays, fun, prosperity and—for young people—schoolies week. It all presents an image of the Gold Coast as a desirable location to be; and indeed it is a desirable place to be. I have lived here for 12 years. I started teaching here 25 years ago. The Gold Coast is an attractive place for families and for people— young people in particular. But beneath the image of glitzy glamour, surf, sand and sun, there is another side. That other side is the one that we need to talk more about today. It is a side that does not get the kind of publicity it really deserves.

The Gold Coast Integrated Response for Youth at Risk Task Force is a group of government departments and community groups set up specifically to address the problems of young people in the age group 15 to 23 years of age. It was set up by the Department of Families, Youth and Community Care, and it has representation from Education Queensland—and that is me—the Department of Employment and Training and other groups, such as the Gold Coast City Council and various community groups. The task force has estimated, through its research on the Gold Coast, that five to six per cent of young people are at risk of homelessness or of harm; that is, 2,680 people. What sort of harm are we talking about? We are talking about things like homelessness, unemployment and lack of income support, abuse, neglect, family conflict and breakdown, criminal behaviour, self-harming behaviour, substance abuse, emotional and psychological disturbance. Indeed, there is a special task force addressing the issue of youth suicide on the Gold Coast.

The Australian Bureau of Statistics provides us with some interesting data to help us understand the seriousness of the situation that this proposal seeks to address. Here on the Gold Coast we have the second highest youth population aged 12 to 25. We have the highest population growth in the state. In our secondary schools alone, from February 2001 to February 2002, we experienced an 8.8 per cent growth in student enrolments. We have the second highest level of young people on the youth homeless allowance in Queensland. The number of births to young females aged 12 to 24 is the highest in places such as Beenleigh and Eagleby, which are to the north of the Gold Coast local government area. There are very high levels of youth suicide; in fact, we have the highest suicide rate of all metropolitan areas in Queensland. We have high rates of offending behaviour. We have the highest number of young people seeking advice from the kids helpline, and we have higher than average rates of unemployment, opportunistic prostitution, drug and alcohol abuse and, particularly—because of problems associated with homelessness—there are high levels of transients, with the highest proportion of young people frequently changing address than anywhere else in our state. All of these issues, of course, impact upon our schools.

As I said earlier, we had an increase of 1,070 student enrolments—an 8.8 per cent increase—in Gold Coast secondary schools over a period of just one year. All of these issues clearly impact upon our capacity to meet the strategic goals of Education Queensland. Our most recent strategic plan is called Queensland State Education—2010. Our prime objective is to increase the number of students who are completing year 12, from an average of 68 to 72 per cent to 88 per cent, by the year 2010.

The issues that I described a minute ago clearly impact upon our capacity to meet our objectives. We also have issues in tracking students. Students move from school to school, which seriously impedes their capacity to finish year 10 or year 12. Added to this is the fact that transport on the Gold Coast really does not serve people well—particularly those in the western suburbs. We have the Gold Coast Highway, along which the bus lines tend to run. The 3R program is readily available to students who live in that corridor, but for students to the west of this centre, particularly out to places like Nerang and Mudgeeraba, their access is severely inhibited. So when you look at the proposal that Allan and the team have put together, you will see that there is an element there seeking funding to assist in the area of transport through the provision of a bus.

What we really have to recognise is that the program that Allan and his team are proposing, the 3R Plus, builds upon the great successes of the 3R program. Ladies and gentlemen, you would appreciate that I spoke with you last year in Eagleby.

Having come down from the Logan-Beaudesert district to be here on the Gold Coast, I am really impressed by the quality of the 3R program. You visited Woodridge State High School last year, where you probably witnessed the alternative education program that that school runs on behalf of the Logan-Beaudesert district.

I am delighted to see that the program that Allan, Veronica and John run down here has the entire support of all Gold Coast south principals; indeed, I think it is the envy of principals in the Gold Coast north district. Nevertheless, principals in this area commit over \$180,000 in terms of teachers' salaries and funds from their own budgets to support the 3R program. What Allan and Tina are proposing with 3R Plus is to build on the successes they have been able to secure with students aged eight to 14 to another age group—young people in the age range 15 to 23 years of age.

As I said at the outset, Education Queensland fully supports the approach that Allan and the team are proposing. Why? Queensland State Education—2010 talks about enhancing the retention rate from an average of 72 per cent to 88 per cent. What Allan and the team are proposing is an alternative model for those students who are unable to meet the demands of mainstream education. That is not to say that our secondary schools are not attempting to be responsive to the various needs of different groups of students; indeed they are. However, there are groups of students who are marginalised, and this program seeks to support them. As Allan has put to you so well this morning, this centre is in the midst of a complete redevelopment worth \$18 million. I think that really is a very powerful demonstration of the state government's interest in providing this site as a real community asset.

When I first came down to the Gold Coast and spent time speaking with Allan about his vision for Tallebudgera Beach School I was very impressed with what he said. I do lots of listening, and he said all the right things. He was talking about this not just being a site for students in our public schools but a place for the community. It is a place for children from our public schools and non-government schools who visit here. The certificates 3 and 4 that John runs in government are a way of bringing the community into learning. It is a way of building that social capital, that community capacity, that we spoke about up in Woodridge last year that is so vital also here in the Gold Coast.

So the vision that the team has for this centre is not just for outdoor education. It is about this place being a real community asset, a centre for learning communities and for community development. So I believe that the \$18 million

that Sport and Recreation is prepared to put into this—in a very collaborative process that has involved Education Queensland personnel—will provide a site that is going to be quite distinct for the Gold Coast. It has the support of the local Gold Coast City Council. Mayor Baildon himself has been briefed by Allan and his team.

As I said, it builds on 3R, but it also builds on the most recent paper we have produced to further the object of the 2010. We have a document called *Education and training reforms for the future*. The original copy is called a ‘green paper’. This is just a photocopy. This one talks about pathways for students. It talks about a number of things. It talks about a preparatory year of schooling for young people. It also talks about the integration of information and communication technology into teaching and learning. But most importantly for this particular project it talks about different pathways for students. What Allan and the team are proposing with the 3R Plus program is to provide another go, a second start, for those students or young people who are marginalised. The green paper proposes that the education system takes responsibility for tracking students through a variety of pathways that we are yet to develop that link secondary education with TAFE, with university studies and with paid work. So what the group is proposing is at the cutting edge of some exciting proposals that are contained within the green paper.

In conclusion, I believe that you need to support this. As an experienced district director in one of the most challenging parts of the state in Logan-Beaudesert I am really impressed by the quality of leadership that I see down here, the commitment, the enthusiasm, the passion, and the real understanding of what education is about and of the needs of young people. I think we are on the edge of something really exciting. What the group comes up with will have application not just here in Queensland and not just here in Tallebudgera, but across the country. I urge you to support that. I publicly congratulate the team on their innovative work. I now pass over to Veronica, who will talk more about the 3R program.

Ms Buhner—My task today is to paint a picture for you of 3R so that you have an understanding of how it came about, how it works, why it works and perhaps an understanding of some of the children who access the 3R program. The most commonly asked question at 3R is: what does ‘3R’ stand for? 3R stands for retrieval of the students, giving them resilience and then reintegrating them back into the schools. We call it 3R. Other people refer to it as ‘Triple R’. Someone rang me up the other day and said: ‘Is this the RRR program?’ At the end of the day it is about retrieving kids from mainstream education who are having

difficulties. It is easy to say 'having difficulties'. What does this mean? It means they are not coping within their mainstream schooling. It could be because they are verbally abusive, they are physically violent, they are completely non-compliant, or they are incapable of following instructions. These children are definitely out there in our schools. When I started 20 years ago we perhaps had one child like this in our schools. All schools on the Gold Coast have experienced these sorts of difficulties with these children and in some schools they are in every classroom, at different levels of behaviour problems.

At the end of the day we can call these children 'naughty'; we can say that they are having all of these difficulties. But the reality is they are not coping within mainstream schools. They do not have the skills to cope. That is the aim of the 3R program. We almost teach or re-teach those skills so that our kids can then re-enter mainstream schooling and cope.

How do we go about doing that? The 3R program came about in 2001 because Gold Coast South principals gave up their behaviour management money. We were so successful—we showed our success at the end of 2001—that from the beginning of 2002 District Office said: 'It is going to happen for all principals.' In 2001 it was voluntary, and only those principals who gave up their money would access the program. In 2002 this is a facility that is accessed by all Gold Coast South principals.

Currently we have 15 students at 3R. We have talked very much about boys in education. We do have a girl at 3R and we had a girl at 3R last year—not the same girl. So this is the second girl who is accessing the program. The needs are very much in terms of boys in education, but some girls are also experiencing difficulties.

The referral system to 3R is that Gold Coast South principals first go through all the processes within their own schools: seeking support from teachers, support staff and guidance officers. Administrators spend an incredible amount of school time these days dealing with behaviour problems in their administrative areas. Rather than working on curriculum—all those key areas that we would like to see improving—they are dealing with behaviour. These students are then referred to the 3R program. We have a referral system where they detail all that information. The next step in the program is that I meet the parents and the student. During the meeting I tend not to talk to the parents at all. I am interested in the child: How can we help? What do they see their problems as being? How can we assist and re-teach skills? At this stage we have accepted all students who have been referred to the 3R program.

When students come to the 3R program, what we try to do, as I said earlier, is to give them some sort of resilience and to reteach those skills. Why are we successful? The student-teacher ratio at 3R is very low: five students to one teacher. That sounds like it is a breeze. It is not. These children are high needs, at risk, students. The smallest thing can set them off. Sitting at a table and moving a piece of paper a small distance can cause all sorts of problems, because these children react. They cannot cope socially within that environment. We want to stress the need for a relevant curriculum. This is definitely happening in our schools but, as case managers at 3R, we make a shared student learning plan. We do that in conjunction with the schools so that we are supporting the base schoolteachers. Each child here has a shared student learning plan where we address the academic, social and behavioural needs of those students. Parents are also made aware of the plan and we all agree on what we are targeting and the direction that we are heading in. We need to be fairly realistic. A lot of these children have problems because of their social backgrounds and we cannot and will not achieve a 100 per cent success rate in all areas after they have had intervention with us for a term. That is not realistic. But we do have successes, which I will touch on a little later.

As I go through, I will stress what makes us successful and, hopefully, how we can then support schools to have equal success. A low student-teacher ratio, a relevant curriculum and early intervention are really important. Later on I will show you some statistics that show—and studies show—that, if we can get these children early enough, we can make a difference. On page 3 of the document that I have prepared, you will see a timetable. This is a normal timetable of a 3R child. It is not all fun and games here. As I mentioned, we have a literacy-numeracy component. We also work on self-esteem, team building and conflict resolution skills. As I said, we stream and model those skills to help them when they are having difficulty coping in social situations.

I am sorry if I am going through this fairly quickly. On page 5 of this document I have documented some statistics about the types of children we have at 3R. You can see that some of them—not all of them; there is no typical 3R child—have histories of documented sexual abuse and physical abuse. You can see that over half of our cohort this year accessed Child and Youth Mental Health. I have not put medication statistics in there. Thirty per cent of our students are medicated. This paints a picture of the sorts of children who are having difficulty within mainstream schooling. We are in the situation at the moment where the types of students who are referred to us are at the extreme ends of the continuum in terms of behaviour. These are children who have very high needs.

So what sorts of successes have we had? I have listed there some successes with individual student improvement—and sometimes these kids at this program are achieving success for the first time in their lives. On a bad day at 3R, the success with those children could be that back in their school the teacher is able to teach and the class of 29 students is able to learn. Sometimes that is not possible with 3R children in a classroom.

I would like to paint a picture for you of one of our students who came to 3R at the beginning of last year. He was 11 years of age and he was almost excluded from his primary school. His behaviours were such that he was completely noncompliant: he was violent, he was verbally abusive, he could not sit still in class, he would not follow any instruction, he would laugh hysterically and scream, yell and run around the room. When this lad was first brought to us at 3R, we were quite hesitant to take him on. We agreed to have a trial period with him, and he still continues to this day. He is a 3R success, and I think he is probably the student Allan referred to earlier.

We did a whole lot of things with that lad that helped his success. It was not just us. We also received interagency support. We link very closely with family services and with child, youth and mental health. Various changes happened in the boy's life. First of all, he was taken away from his home situation, which was part of the problem. This is again a child who has a history of physical and sexual abuse, and he also had brain trauma, at birth and as a result of his physical abuse.

This boy was put into Harrison House, which is a halfway house between leaving home and going into a foster situation. Suddenly, he had consistency in the home. He enrolled in the 3R program. This boy suddenly had a low student-teacher ratio and a relevant curriculum; he had an absolutely fantastic teacher—that was me; and we managed to reteach a lot of those skills that he had either lost or perhaps not learned. It has been a long haul, and we have had some setbacks along the way—it has not all been complete success—but this boy is now enrolled in a school in the Gold Coast hinterland. He attends that school three days a week. He is successful, he is competent and he is capable within his classroom. His classroom teacher states that he is less of a problem than some of the other students in her classroom and he loves school. That is a real success story, and the reality is that, without 3R intervention, a year ago that boy was on a path that may have led to incarceration. Instead of being at school he could have been at your home, breaking in. A lot of these children are attracted to a life of crime, especially as they grow a little older, and that is a real difficulty. So that is a success story. They are not all success stories. Sometimes the successes are small.

Page 7 of the document I have prepared talks about the cohort we have had so far at 3R. In the last year—just a little bit over a year— we have had 43 students. Of those students, 61 per cent are primary students who have been referred; 39 per cent have been secondary students. The statistics that we have there—the data— clearly show that if we can intervene early enough with these children we have a chance of success. We have a chance of keeping them on track. I am very sad to say that in the secondary sector I have tried to track that 30 per cent this year but I cannot track them. I have rung their schools: they are in no school on the Gold Coast. I have rung their parents: they are having problems, in that four out of five of these students are actually running in gangs. They are involved in alcohol and substance abuse, and there is possibly a great deal more to that—that is a real risk—so the data clearly shows that if we can get these children earlier, with early intervention, we have a far greater chance of success. Studies show that too.

Allan said earlier that we are actually in the 3R classroom. This is it. Where you are sitting now is the secondary sector. We have three teachers. I am one of the teachers at 3R, and there are two male teachers. The year 8 and year 9 students work out of this room. This is also called the AV room—the audiovisual room— because it has a television. The year 4 and year 5 students work in this area here, and the year 6 and year 7 students work beyond that—they are the students that I work with. We are very lucky to work here. We access the technology areas, and we all work together, as I said.

I will quickly go through the other reasons for 3R's success: relevant curriculum, early intervention, student-teacher ratio and the support that we receive from schools, interagencies and especially the parents. A real plus for me as a teacher at 3R is the support that we can give to the parents. These are parents who in the past have been constantly called up to schools and told, 'Take your child home.' Finally they are coming here and their children are achieving success within the 3R program. Earlier, Ron touched on the problems with transportation. We have one boy who attends 3R from the Nerang area—he travels two hours by bus each way every day to attend 3R. There are students who in the past were truant. We have zero per cent of truancy at 3R. None of our children are truant; they all attend the program; they all want to come back here.

One of the common questions to us is: if 3R is so great, how are you going to get those children back into the schools? The reality is that, at the end of the day, our children wish to be back in their schools because that is where their peers are. 3R is multiage—we deal with kids in the age range of 8 to 14. That is year 3 to year 9. At some point those year 9 students—as I said, there are only five

secondary students—would much rather be back in their secondary schools. And that is the aim of our program.

We have come a long way. Our program has evolved over time. We still have a lot of difficulties. One of the difficulties is that, as wonderful as it is to work here, the physical location is not ideal. Over in the very far corner—you probably cannot see it from where you are—is a small, boarded-off area which is our time-out area. When our children are acting out, when they are unravelling, when they are not coping, that is the only area we can take them to. We had a situation a week ago where one of our girls spent two hours in that area using every swear word she could possibly think of in every grammatical context possible, while 14 other high-risk students had to continue working in this area. So obviously in the long term we are looking at facilities that can cater for her needs but also ensure that her needs will not impact on the needs of the other students.

Thank you very much for giving me your time and allowing me to talk to you about this program. I know there is some time for questions at the end of this session. I do not know if I have raised more questions. Please feel free to ask me anything that I have missed out.

Mr Rafton—I would like to introduce John, whose background is a little different. John is in his second career in education. He was my principal at Morayfield High School on the north side of Brisbane, an area which is renowned for having some fairly tough students. John took a sideways path and retired, but realised he had more to offer. Fortunately, he is offering it here.

Mr Graham—Thanks, Allan. Mr Chairman and members of the committee, I do not know whether sideways is the right word—I was bored out of my brain. A lot of things that I say openly in meetings and at gatherings not like this one with federal parliamentarians can be interpreted by some people as being to a degree blunt because I have the luxury, if someone says to me, ‘You are too blunt, John,’ of being able to retire to my boat and enjoy life.

I feel very passionate about this because it is a need that has been clearly identified and our society has a tendency to be crisis managers rather than proactive in the process. You are sitting in a unique position today because at this very moment you are in a school in Australia where there is not one single person truanting. There is at least one per cent of our student population that truants. On the Gold Coast today, as we sit here, there are at least 500 students who are not at school who do not have a reason for being away from school and whose parents do not know they are absent from school. Those 500-plus students are engaged in

a number of activities. For some it will be the first day they have truanted; for others it will be probably the fifth or sixth day. If they have truanted more than five days we have a major problem, because they are then headed on a path to nowhere. It is inevitable that a great percentage of the truants in our country today will become involved with the juvenile detention system. They commit a substantial amount of crime in our community and they are going to be the students who will prove to be the most serious burden on our social security system in the future.

The problem is not confined to the Gold Coast. It is not confined to Queensland. It is Australia. It is England. It is America. In England today you have the luxury of knowing that there are 400,000 students absent from school today, 50,000 of them truanting. In America the figures are staggering—thank God we are not in America. In America there are three million crimes committed by students who are truanting and that equates to one crime every six seconds of the day. While we have been talking to you here this morning, approximately 55 minutes, 11 cars have been stolen in Australia and that equates to \$700 million in insurance payouts on cars. Look at the mess we are in when it comes to legal liability in terms of professional negligence and so on. We cannot even get our fetes insured any more. We are an incorporated association here. It took seven months for us to get someone to insure us as an incorporated society for our public liability. We almost had to go down on our knees and promise that we would not carry out any fundraising activities that involved calling people in. We have reached a sorry state.

What is an alternative school? Alternative schools have been operating since 1960. In America the problem became enormous with behavioural problems and students staying away from school. In the late 1990s they introduced a zero tolerance program because of the violence that was going on in schools. One of the outcomes of the zero tolerance policy was that it gave enormous power to principals to exclude or keep students away from school. The corresponding result was that crime escalated to dramatic levels in the USA. As a result of that, they poured massive amounts of money into alternative programs and took students with behavioural problems or exhibiting antisocial behaviour and put them into alternative sites. Those sites were designed to provide another pathway for them back into the system.

Research has shown that alternative schools are a success. The simple truth of the matter is that alternative schools are a success for three reasons: they have relevant curricula, they have smaller classes and students are identified at an early stage. That is what we are on about here. The most critical component is early

identification. The federal government acknowledges this. For how long did we as principals beat our heads against a brick wall when we talked about literacy and numeracy standards in schools? It was not until the federal government bit the bullet as it were and funded literacy and numeracy programs in schools that we had mandatory and standards testing. As a principal of a high school, I can tell you that, if a student arrived at my school in grade 8 and could not read, I might as well have shown him the door in terms of his succeeding in school. Now that cannot continue so early identification is absolutely critical. In the document that was part of my submission I have covered a lot of areas. I want to highlight some of those today.

To me, when I started to write the document, early identification meant grade 8. I thought that if we got hold of these people in grade 8, we could do something about it. I was wrong. Grade 3 is where we should be starting—or grade 1 or grade 2. We know that, if we identify someone in grade 3 who has a reading problem and we do nothing about it, it is going to cost us six times as much to remediate in grade 8. The same applies when we are talking about these people with antisocial behaviour. If we do not do something about it while they are young, in primary school, the chances of them progressing through into a secondary school stage and completing formal education to year 12 is extremely remote.

I do not want to cast any brickbats, but, if we go back 25 years, of the OECD countries Australia was ranked No. 3 in the world in our retention rate. We are now 19th. That has to say something about the system. It is not your fault. It is not my fault. We are looking at a societal problem where there are such negative influences in society today that it is very difficult for some young people, because of their background, to compete and, particularly, to stay within a traditional educational setting. Does that mean we throw up our hands and say, 'It's not my responsibility; it's not my fault'? If I am a principal of a large school with 1,800 to 2,000 students and I have a student in my school who is continually disrupting classes—and I have tried everything within my power and resources to do something about that student and I have teachers on the verge of a nervous breakdown—what do I do? Do I retain that student or do I give him an ultimatum he cannot refuse? In the majority of cases, what I do is call his parents in and tell him that, unless he pulls his horns in, he is gone. In the great majority of cases, he is gone.

If you look at the figures across Australia, you see that the number of people who are either excluded from school or given options to visit another school—which really is not an option at all—is staggering. It is all very well to palm them out into another sector and not to do anything about it because there is a period, a

into another sector and not to do anything about it because there is a period, a hiatus, before something happens. But they are going to come back to bite us, because they are going to come back through the social welfare system or the juvenile detention system, and we have to do something about it. Every student who does not complete year 12 will cost the community \$74,000 more than a student who completes year 12. Take a look at the figures: in Queensland alone our retention rate is just climbing over 70 per cent. If you extrapolate that through the system, we are talking about putting into the economy in years to come something like \$1 billion a year to pay for people who do not complete year 12. The costs to society are enormous. We have to identify and do something about it.

We know from research that, if a person completes year 12, has had paid part-time work in years 11 and 12 and has an infrastructure that supports them, they will get a job. As the federal government, the hat should be going in the air at this stage because you can say to the electorate, 'We're going to make sure everyone gets a job'—hallelujah. The simple reality is that many of our students do not have that critical infrastructure. They do not have the social capital. They do not have a father or a mother who is in a bowls club or a Rotary club or has access to a sporting club. They do not have that family support that allows contacts to be made. Part of our program is to develop that social capital. We cannot rely any longer on the fact that somehow or other there is always going to be someone to pick up the bill. It has come as a rude shock to all of us with the collapse of HIH and the present mess we are in with medical indemnity and so on. This is very uncomfortable ground for us. It is very uncomfortable ground for me, as I am paying some exorbitant sum a month to remain in a private health scheme.

In the future we will not have people working on the ground. Because of our greying population there is not going to be forever the land where we will be able to support young people or people out of work. We have lived in a society that, unfortunately, has had an elitist mentality. We have believed that somehow or other the world was preordained: that there was only ever going to be 30-odd per cent of students who would need to go on to university from our system and that that other 70 per cent would somehow or other filter back down and would get jobs in the world out there. What sort of jobs? In the last 20 years, with the development of technology and computers, we have seen hundreds and thousands of jobs disappear off the face of the earth that once upon a time could have absorbed young people who did not complete appropriate levels of education. We have to step in and do something about that.

We cannot ignore those people that no longer fit the mould who will not go along to a traditional school and sit there in a group of 30 and do as they are told.

We have to face the fact that there will be a substantial proportion of young people who are never going to work in a traditional setting. That does not mean to say, and I am not saying, that all of those people are bad, or are going to ultimately end in jail. But there will be a substantial proportion of those young people, if they are not identified early and alternative programs that provide appropriate pathways for them are not put in place. That is what we are on about.

We are not saying either that this is a panacea—give us the money and we will put up a model and you replicate it all round Australia and hey presto the problem is over. That is a nonsense. What we are proposing here has the potential to demonstrate that there are other ways to treat students who are not coping in a traditional setting and that there are strategies that can be employed that will make it possible, once students have been identified at an early age, to put them on a pathway that will allow them to complete a level of education that will make them worthwhile citizens.

What we need to understand is this: for everyone who fails, somewhere along the line that person is going to cost us a lot of money. Now that is a very cynical approach but that is in reality what is going to happen. Are we going to ignore the emotional trauma that is created by that? We had a tragic incident on the coast, a year or so ago, where a young girl was driving a car and sniffing butane. The car careered out of control, a young girl was killed, seven other people critically injured—a tragic set of circumstances. Is that what we are going to look for— young people who truant from school, who are not a part of the traditional setting, becoming substance abusers? Are we going to do something about the spiralling rate of crime? Are we going to do something about programs that can at least stop a percentage of these people?

At the present moment there are 680,000 single parent families in Australia. Of those 680,000 single parent families, the head of the family in 85 per cent of them is female. A great majority of them are doing an excellent job. There are insufficient male role models in many of those families and that is one of the reasons why traditional schools have major problems with boys. Add that fact to the situation where the majority of high school teachers and the majority of primary school teachers are female. The supply of appropriate male role models is a serious concern, and it must be a serious concern to government and educators.

We have to do something about these young people. The proposal that we have put forward to you is unique in the respect that we are not asking you to fund something that we think is a good idea. We are not asking you to give us taxpayers' money on some airy-fairy notion that might or might not work. We

have got the runs on the board for a start. The problem has been identified clearly in the community. We need to start by demonstrating that there are best practices available that will allow some of these students to achieve a measure of success that they have never achieved before. Nothing breeds success, like success. The physical structure that we have here at Tallebudgera is quite unique. We are now part of an \$18 million expansion program and as Ron and Allan have both pointed out, an injection of funds at this stage means that we can put in place, additional classrooms, a computer centre, and the appropriate resources to support that program.

In the document I have pointed out how those students would be identified and how they would be referred to us. I would see that referral process not dissimilar to what we have now with our basic three-hour program. Any teacher in a high school and any administration would be able to identify students who are at risk. If we get them early enough, we can do something about them. It is so fundamental, isn't it? Why do we walk away from it? The earlier we get them, the easier it is. It is like cancer: you do something about it straightaway when you find it and you have got a chance; ignore it for 12 or 18 months and you are history. As one of my friends said when he knew I had turned 60 the other day, 'A short half-head or a pine box.' He happens to be a racing person.

The issue is early identification and doing something about it in an appropriate way. In this situation we have a venue which has no equal. We have an opportunity here to build classrooms that can support what we are already doing and then cater for the needs of a substantial group of other young people. By substantial I am talking 45 or at the most 60 young people. That will then provide a model. As I said a moment ago, I am not suggesting it is going to be a model that you replicate all over Australia, but it will provide a model. There will be best practices come out of this program that can be modelled in other places, and an awareness of the issue that early identification is critical.

The pathways that are involved here are terribly important in the sense of what is happening in our society. As the federal government, you are obviously aware that the division between secondary education and vocational education is blurring and there is an awful amount of money being spent at a level making sure that the pathways between secondary and vocational education and tertiary education become seamless. It is now possible for us to do that. In Queensland we have undergone massive change in that suddenly we are not talking about having a Senior Certificate based on five broad subjects or whatever it happens to be; we are talking about having a Senior course that may take two or three years to complete. Many of the students that we are talking about, those that have become

disengaged from traditional school, may take longer than that. The complexity of our program is such that it would allow those students to take time. They might only come to us one or two days a week. They may be engaged in some other activity. They could be engaged in work, they could be engaged at a TAFE college, but there will be a process that brings them together and directs them in a pathway that will ultimately lead to them exiting from this school with qualifications that will allow them to be worthwhile members of the community, supporting their families.

This is not pie in the sky stuff. The reality is that at the present moment only 33 per cent of students who complete Senior go straight to university. It is not until people reach 25 that we get that tertiary level up to around 50 per cent. That is not good enough any longer. What does a person do now if they do not complete their Junior? We are talking about making school compulsory until 16, trying to make students stay until 17. What are the occupations available to people? We are a society now that lives with people on part-time jobs. Every forklift, and that is pretty old technology, replaced 30 storemen and packers. One competent person on a word processor replaces seven clerk-typists. It is all very well for us to talk about restructuring; but every time the bank restructures it is 1,500 or 2,000 jobs down the tube. It is all very well to talk about having a society that is very technology conscious and being on the cutting edge of everything; but it means jobs. The only way people can get jobs is if they have the appropriate education levels. Our program here is designed to show that there is a pathway for those people who do not cope in traditional settings. We give them the second chance, a chance for their own self-esteem, a chance to take some of the trauma and emotion out of their lives and not to be as great a burden on society and social welfare.

Mr Rafton—We are happy to receive any questions that you have.

CHAIR—Thank you all very much for those very interesting and intriguing submissions. Congratulations on the work you are doing generally here at Tallebudgera, and particularly with the 3R program, and for your obvious passion and commitment to what you are doing. I am sure my colleagues have lots of questions. I might start the ball rolling by asking Veronica about the 3R program. You have identified some of the key elements—early intervention, an alternate program and very low student-staff ratios—and you talked about the example of the young person from Nerang who is willing to travel two hours to get here. To what extent do you think the success of the program is the location and the uniqueness of the site, near the beach and so on? Could a similar sort of program work in a much less appealing environment, in an urban environment? Is it a

matter of having the commitment and the right structures rather than this sort of location?

Ms Buhner—Kerry, I think you have hit the nail on the head—besides the fantastic staff, it has a great deal to do with this particular location. The reality is that if the 3R program was in a demountable down the back of any school in Gold Coast South, it would not have this great deal of success. We are able to access all the facilities on site. We have got a low-ropes course, we have got the multipurpose courts, we have got the gyms, we have got the expertise of Beach School staff—sometimes we pay for a supply day to utilise their expertise; I do not have that expertise in outdoor education—we have got the surf and we have got the estuary, so we can access all of the facilities that camp children do as well. So, yes, it does play a great part, and also the expertise of our 3R staff. The one thing I forgot to mention before is that we are successful because as teachers we are incredibly consistent, to the nth degree, with these children, and that is what they have lacked in their lives—consistency. That contributes to our success as well.

CHAIR—You mentioned the expertise of your 3R staff. Has there been any formal professional development or training for this, or is it just something that you have taught yourselves as you have gone along?

Ms Buhner—It has very much been throwing in at the deep end and learning on the job. We are all—I was going to say ‘just’ teachers; we are not just teachers but we all come from a teaching background. We are hoping as the program evolves and, hopefully, receives additional funding that we can have on board a part-time or a full-time psychologist. I think I touched briefly on the fact that some of our children who access the program have huge psychological needs, problems, difficulties, family backgrounds et cetera. We are finding that a little bit difficult at times because, when these children are showing those sorts of behaviours, we are not really sure of the reasons.

Mr SIDEBOTTOM—It is nice to be up here in Queensland. I am from north-west Tasmania—a beautiful place as well—and I found your comments about the location of these centres interesting. It reminds me of Hilltops a bit. Lots of locations throughout Australia will have their environment but, you are right, you cannot put it down the back of a school and say, ‘There is the alternative education centre.’ It sounds like you have got terrific things going here.

Just looking at the wider issue, there is no doubt, John, as you said in your comments, that early intervention is absolutely crucial. I think that is emerging

more and more. But I would like to ask you a few questions. You say your expertise is basically from being thrown in the deep end. Obviously with your dedication and your interest you see it almost like a vocation rather than a career. To what extent does teacher training in Queensland relate to what is actually going on in schools? We talk about the issue of boys, but we are really talking about students at risk—in the main they appear to be boys. To what extent is there a correlation between what is happening in educational training institutions and the realities of what is going on in schools with regard to behaviour management and identifying kids at risk earlier, along with—I appreciate—literacy and numeracy? Do you think there really is a correlation between training and the realities of what is going on out here in order to help with this early intervention stuff and to deal with these issues?

Ms Buhner—I have been in schools for 20 years. I am an extremely competent and capable classroom teacher. For 18 of those years I have been primarily an upper school primary schoolteacher of year 7 students. I have never had any behavioural problems in my classroom. When I applied for this job at the beginning of last year, I thought, ‘This’ll be a breeze—behaviour management.’ During the first term I was absolutely reeling, dealing with the sorts of children in this program—and I had worked in areas that were known as having harder schools to work in because of behavioural difficulties. I did not understand anything until I came to this program. Yes, I believe that universities and our teacher training do try to cater for this situation, with behaviour management and trying to teach those skills. It is not like the days when you went to school, and it is not like when I first started teaching. Some of the children we are working with now in schools come from families that are experiencing a great deal of difficulty. We have talked about alcohol, drug abuse, a lack of consistency in the home, a lack of parenting skills et cetera. We are addressing those issues, but there needs to be a little more than a lecture on behaviour management one on one to address them.

Mr Daniels—Here on the Gold Coast, of all places that I have been associated with, is a very proactive initiative on the part of Griffith University down here. They have a group called TEIAG—Teacher Education Industry Advisory Group—which comprises representatives of non-government and government schools. The purpose of that group is to provide feedback and input into the kinds of programs that are offered to graduate students. I think there is a very sincere effort on the part of Griffith University down here to respond to the sorts of things you are talking about.

I also believe there is a range of practical things that are being done to enhance a graduate teacher's capacity to manage student behaviour. We used to have a diploma of teaching; we now have a bachelor of education, which is a rather generic degree. In recognition of the need to refocus more on teaching, the University of Queensland now has a degree called—I think; do not quote me on this—a bachelor of schooling in the years 7 to 9, the middle years of schooling. That was in response to a report that was done here in Queensland called the *Queensland school reform longitudinal study*, which points out that we have a lot to learn about how we engage kids in deeper intellectual thinking and that teaching needs to be connected to the real world. It also talks about catering for a diversity of students and creating a safe, supportive environment.

When John talked at length about traditional schooling, I suppose I was sitting here thinking that, yes, there was a notion of traditional schooling but, as a system, we are really challenging what traditional schooling is and how we can actually respond to the kids more. What we are not trying to do with this program is to offload kids who do not respond to traditional schooling. We are trying to attack, if you like, the way we organise schooling. What I am suggesting to you is that there is a responsiveness on the part of institutions in teacher training to address those issues.

The other exciting thing is the increasing incidence now of internships. As Veronica said, you do not learn how to manage student behaviour by doing behaviour management one on one or the microskills of teaching. They are all important elements that you learn, but learning on the job is really what makes you. Increasingly, tertiary institutions are providing opportunities for students to have internships. I know that here on the Gold Coast you were in the classroom three days out of five and had sole responsibility for that. I think there is a lot of movement to provide the sort of experience and practical knowledge that teachers need to manage student behaviour.

Mr Rafton—Can I also add something? The nature of what we are trying to do here is very much about not just doing it but sharing it. The vision I have for the centre is to become a school of excellence in personal development. The 3R program is one area within that spectrum of personal development. In Queensland, we have a quality teacher program which is coordinated with the learning and development foundation and has teachers sharing the skills, the abilities and the understandings they have developed from their own experience. The school, I believe, and the benefit of the program is not going to be just working with the 40 to 60 students that our submission has. It is more what the people working in that environment can share with others. There is—and the redevelopment offers the

expertise through a virtual classroom—the ability to share quite dramatically the skills and the abilities of the people who are working in that environment, which people need to see to be able to interpret for themselves.

Mr CADMAN—Isn't there a deficiency in the teacher education program?

Mr Rafton—Both speakers prior to me have mentioned that teacher training had gone through a stage of reducing the amount of actual experiential time in the schools. That is changing. The internship is giving trainees more time in schools to develop the competencies that go with their understanding of theory. There can never be enough, but an internship from an extended stay, which is up to three months in a school, goes a long way towards addressing that. What we need to have, though, is that learning does not stagnate when you graduate and become a teacher and you have got a class of your own. Learning needs to continue and it needs to be specialised in its learning.

Mr CADMAN—In-service opportunities.

Mr Rafton—That is where we, as an organisation within the institution of education and whatever state we are in, need to share that information. The benefit of the program we are putting forward, I believe, is providing a resource to be able to do that.

Mr Graham—I would like to make a comment there, not wishing to be provocative. It is interesting to try and shift the focus now back onto teacher education when, in actual fact, schools are only ever a reflection of society. At the present moment, we are faced with hundreds of thousands of students in our schools whose parents have never had a full-time job. When you are dealing with students who are incredibly difficult to deal with, it is all very well to deal with them on a one-to-one basis, where you can; all the training in the world might help a little bit. But, if you have 30 other students you are trying to deal with in the room at the same time, the learning process is going to suffer dramatically. What we are on about is trying to cope with those students who, for whatever reason, have difficulty and it is not the teacher's fault.

I could not agree with you more that there is a problem with teacher education and the fact that we do not spend enough time on behaviour management. We have got to acknowledge the fact that this is not a problem located in Australia; this is a worldwide problem. There may be some respect for teacher education, but when we have a society where the highest rating television program at the moment is *Big Brother*, we have a few societal problems we have to look at.

Mr SIDEBOTTOM—Can I just add to that, if I may? I was not being provocative and blaming teachers. I am an ex-teacher—just left—as well. I am very concerned about the relationship—what goes on in teaching colleges, then having to come out and face the realities of it. You are right: classroom size is absolutely crucial. The relationships that go on in that classroom are absolutely crucial and the way they are structured is very important.

Ms Buhner—If I can add to that, Syd and Allan: first of all, I like *Big Brother*. The second thing, though, that we need to start thinking about is: who are the types of people who are actually attracted to teaching and from what level of society are they coming? They are middle-class people and some of the problems we are experiencing now are that we, as teachers, are finding it more and more difficult to relate to some of the students that we have to teach. Some of the teachers are perhaps fixating on, ‘Why haven’t you got your homework done?’ when the reality for that child might be that, the night before, mum and dad were dreadfully drunk, beating each other up and the child did not actually have any dinner. Sadly, this is something that is common to at least every single classroom. There are lots and lots of reasons as to why we are changing, and I believe teachers are really working very hard and making an effort to address that.

Mr PEARCE—I have two questions: one for Veronica and one for John. Veronica, you have touched on the point I was going to ask you about. You obviously have the basis of a great program here. Congratulations on what you are doing. What is the opportunity or the scope to extend this type of program back into the home? What I mean by that is that you can have people coming here for the three-hour program and you could be making a great difference, but they go back to the home. Except for extreme circumstances where they might have been withdrawn from the home, they are potentially going back on a regular basis into an environment that might not be as supportive of the 3R concept. What scope is there for the program to also develop into being some sort of re-education for the parents?

Ms Buhner—What we try to do—and all we can do is offer it; we cannot enforce anything—is to link up some of the parents with the different support agencies on the Gold Coast, such as Streetsmart and Reconnect. We offer parenting courses. When we hear information, we pass that on through our newsletters to parents. You are absolutely correct: a lot of the problems are strategies that are used in the home and the way the family has operated for years. We can only make suggestions, but our suggestions are trying to change habits of a lifetime and we are not very effective. Legally, we cannot do that, so that is a

huge part of the problem. We do what we can, but whether or not they take it up is another thing.

Mr Graham—If we had a facility like we are asking for, it would allow us to offer after-school-hour programs.

Mr PEARCE—So that is an option?

Mr Graham—Yes.

Mr PEARCE—Where you get the parents to come in and actually go through a program of their own, for instance?

Mr Graham—Yes, and it would also allow the students to stay after school to access the Internet facilities and so on. At the moment, that is not possible. If we have students for five hours a day and they are going back into a very negative environment, all the good work that we do during the day can be undone in a flash at home.

Mr PEARCE—Is that happening? Is that the situation for the young lady who was up in the corner for two hours the other day? Is she going back to an environment that is not conducive to what you are trying to achieve?

Ms Buhner—Currently, she resides in Harrison House. That is a problem in itself, because she is living with four other teenagers who experience the same difficulties as she does. It is also the situation in her home.

Mr Rafton—There is another dimension, too, which was mentioned previously: it is not just what our teachers here can do for the parents and the students and their families; it is what the other support agencies can do. Often, it is a case of linking or integrating that service, as has been mentioned a couple of times. Probably the best we can do is provide a means by which we can pilot those integrated services and make them effective so that people have access to them as they come through. That is something that I think needs to be replicated across Australia: a structure that allows that to happen effectively.

Ms Buhner—We are doing that to a degree. We have received a great deal of interagency support from Family Services. Two of our students actually receive funding from Family Services to support a teacher aide within a school. This is unprecedented. Yesterday, I attended a meeting for several hours regarding one of

our students. We are all trying to work together and we are all using government funding, so let us try to use that money a little more efficiently.

Mr PEARCE—John, you raised the issue of boys having mentors. That is an area that I am very interested in. You identified the lack of that and some of the statistics about single-parent homes et cetera. What opportunities do we have to correct that situation?

Mr Graham—On the Gold Coast, we are uniquely placed in that respect. It is basically the retirement capital of Australia and there are any number of very skilled people who are looking to become involved. There is a very exciting program that operates out of Coffs Harbour as far as the mentoring process is concerned. We have asked people to be involved in that process so that a young male could speak freely and openly with someone who can offer advice that does not seem to be biased in any way. I think there is tremendous potential for that.

Mr PEARCE—Who is running the Coffs Harbour program—the department?

Mr Graham—I make reference to it in one of the documents, but I think it is being run through one of the TAFE colleges. It is also being supported by the Dusseldorf Foundation, which does some very good work in that area. I have spoken to a number of Rotary and Lions clubs on the Gold Coast, and they are extremely supportive of becoming involved in any process of mentoring our boys.

Mr CADMAN—There was a statement made that socioeconomic status seemed to be one of the determinant factors—I think Veronica said that. Why are girls not affected by socioeconomic status and boys are?

Ms Buhner—That is a good question, Allan.

Mr CADMAN—Because you have not got girls—though you have had two girls.

Ms Buhner—Yes, we have.

Mr Graham—One of the reasons we have not taken more girls is because of the group dynamics that existed at the time. If we have 13 or 14 boys in the group and with the one or two girls that have applied that could have upset the group dynamics to such a degree that—

Mr CADMAN—Wait on. These have been identified by people outside this establishment, who are in the system, who have identified problem children on a definite scale of criteria.

Mr Graham—Okay. I will come back to the question. You asked whether or not socioeconomic factors were involved as much with the girls. There is clear evidence that girls are not involved as much as boys in antisocial behaviour—and we are dealing with antisocial behaviour in schools. Girls are not involved to the same degree as boys and if we are talking about a scale then there are more boys at higher risk than there are girls.

While there have been a number of girls referred to our program and while we have never said, ‘No’ to a girl, we have said, ‘It may not be appropriate at this stage to bring that young girl into the present cohort.’ Now when it has been appropriate, as has occurred in two cases, we have brought the girls on board. But the ratio in society for antisocial behaviour for people at risk is about nine to one. I do not doubt that girls are at risk in some cases but girls have a higher maturation level than boys and they do not get into the same degree of problems, particularly in areas of bullying and being violent in schools, that boys do.

Mr CADMAN—You have a five per cent better result with girls than with boys. The thing I am wondering about is that you are not getting many girls in but you are having better success with girls than you are with boys—five per cent but it is significant in the numbers that you have got.

Ms Buhner—Where did you get the five per cent from?

Mr CADMAN—From one of your slides.

Mr Rafton—That is in the outdoor education program?

Mr CADMAN—The outcomes of that.

Mr Rafton—That is of the 8,500 students that come through here each year. Our evaluation—

Mr CADMAN—You just give the figures in the outcomes: 96 per cent of all students report significant learning; 92 per cent of boys report significant learning; 97 per cent of girls report significant learning. To me that represents five per cent greater satisfaction amongst the girls than amongst the boys.

Mr Rafton—I do not think we can translate that five per cent across to the 3R program because they are two very different things. We are working within the personal development spectrum—

Mr CADMAN—So this is your personal development stats rather than 3R stats?

Mr Rafton—Exactly.

Mr CADMAN—Okay.

Mr Rafton—That was part of the snapshots of the centre.

Ms Buhner—I would like to address this a little more—this is probably more of a personal opinion on my part. I think it is an excellent question: why are we attracting more boys to the program? Why are we experiencing more trouble with our boys in our schools? We really have to start looking at how we are raising our boys: ‘Don’t cry’, ‘Don’t show emotion.’

When we look at statistics, and John is the king of statistics, who are the people in the teenage years who are committing suicide? There is a much higher incidence of boys committing suicide—they are not coping. I hate to talk about gender differences but there is a gender difference. If Margaret and I have a problem we might sit and talk about it for hours at length and bore all of you silly; whilst perhaps if you have a problem you may not talk about it, you tend to internalise it much more. We are looking at some of those problems.

I become somewhat annoyed when I hear about all the single parent families and the women who are in charge of those families. Where are the men? Why are we raising our boys to desert our families? I think it is an excellent point: we have to start looking at re-educating our boys to express their emotions, to be able to deal with situations.

With respect to the incidence of violence, assault, there are higher statistics against other males, not against women. So we need to change the whole way in which we are working with our boys. I am a little passionate about that subject.

Mr CADMAN—That sounds a bit like social engineering rather than looking at whether the curriculum meets the character and nature of the people involved.

Ms Buhner—Certainly not. Education definitely reflects what is going on in society.

Mr SIDEBOTTOM—This goes back to the observation made before about the relationship between our teachers, and the great job that they do, and the expectations of society and how we try to match those. We have talked about these problems for years. In the seventies we were discussing this—how boys learn and the skills that are needed to create better values, cooperation and the things you were talking about. This occurred back in the sixties and seventies. Curriculum was supposed to have changed or adapted itself to deal with this, yet it is burgeoning, as John has shown quite clearly. So something has been awry for a long time and we have not been tackling it. That is the point I am making. We can come up with this excellent idea of alternative education and opportunities, but it is mainstream stuff—it is in the mainstream. We have got under-educated kids, and undervalued kids as well. I think it is much broader. It does concern me. I was not having a go at teachers per se, but teachers have to deal with this every day. What is happening? Are we supporting them? Do we really allocate the resources that are absolutely necessary for this to happen? What about the generational changes in schools, for a start?

Mr Rafton—I do not know whether I can answer your question but I can probably talk about some of the issues there. The key factor in any educational experience between the teacher and the student is the relationship that exists between them. For many boys, the value of the relationship they see is not necessarily that of the teacher in the dominant position in front of the class within four walls and in a structure of sitting down, or even in group work in a classroom; it is the thing they see the teacher doing outside the classroom.

One of the values of outdoor education is that we are providing students and teachers with the experience of seeing each other in a different light, where the teacher can be seen to make mistakes, where the teacher can share an experience. They may struggle with a particular task. They may not necessarily be the teacher; they may be the learner in different situations. There is not much training that goes on for teachers, apart from their own experience, with getting them to work outside their comfort zone of the classroom. That is why I value outdoor education. That is why we see it here as being part of that personal development. I think the more we can do towards this, the more of these programs there are, and the more we can show teachers how they can work in a comfort zone and extend that comfort zone into a more authentic nature that children can interpret, the better we will be.

A typical primary school teacher in a classroom working with 30 students will have 25 that can work quite well; they have the resources and capability to handle the needs of those 25 students very well. The other five students make life a misery. What do you do to best enhance the education of all 30? I put it to you that part of that would be taking those students out to give them the skills so that they can work effectively in that group of 25 to 30 and allow the teacher to get on with what they have the resources and training for. We all know how much extra is being piled on to the teachers' workload each year which was previously taught by parents and other educators outside the classroom.

Mr Graham—There is ample evidence from overseas to support the fact that boys work better and do better in a very structured environment. The Manchester experiment that was conducted by a group of principals in the United Kingdom showed quite clearly that where you went back to a more formalised curriculum that had relevance and strong male teachers with difficult boys, the success rate was much higher. Draw from that whatever you want.

CHAIR—We have had a lot of evidence to support that.

Mrs MAY—I have spent a lot of time with John, Allan and Veronica. I visited the school when we had a few students here earlier in the year; we had not expanded at that stage to the full complement. I know a lot about the program but for the benefit of my colleagues can you outline how you got to that weekly program—either three or four days a week and then you have still got that link with the school. You are putting them back into school.

We have had a lot of discussion about a national program for at-risk students. A lot of comments have been made this morning about Tallebudgera School—the wonderful place you have got here. There is a lot of activity within the program too, particularly aimed at the boys and getting rid of that energy. What I would like to see, like the literacy and numeracy programs, is an at-risk program, or some of your ideas, taken nationally. But I do not want us to get stuck on, 'We have to have a Tallebudgera school all over Australia.' I believe this can work in communities, not so much in a school environment but, as you are doing here, feeding from those schools into a central point in a community. Can that work, John?

Mr Graham—I think the most important thing is that we maintain the link with the schools. By not accepting enrolments directly from outside, but by coming through the school, we maintain that link between the host school and our school. That is absolutely critical because it means that the school has to maintain an

interest in that student. If a student is expelled or removed from the scene, then somehow or other they are not quite as much considered as part of the school program. But if they come back once a week and they are supported by our teachers that go back into the school, then that is critical. While I think the site here is unbelievably important, I do not think it would be a factor that would preclude it working in other areas because the most important element is the staff and the program. It can work anywhere if you have got committed staff.

CHAIR—We are really over time here. I would like to indulge with one last question. You mentioned the problem of the shortage of male teachers. Just quickly, what three things would you do to increase the number of men coming into teaching and to retain more men in teaching?

Mr Graham—That would be a good one to answer when the press is listening, wouldn't it! Can I answer that over morning tea?

CHAIR—Okay.

Mr Graham—I think one of the things we have probably got to look at very carefully is the length of training and the appropriateness of the training and career pathways. That applies to women also.

Mr CADMAN—Remuneration?

Mr Graham—And remuneration. If you have got a transfer system that says someone has got to go bush for a promotion and all those sorts of things, you are going to have trouble—'Why should I come into a situation where my every move is going to be judged, as it is at the moment, in the light of what we are doing now. I am under scrutiny.' As Sid has said, 'What's wrong with my behaviour management training in school?' I do not need that.

CHAIR—We might pursue it over morning tea.

Mr Graham—I think so.

CHAIR—Thank you, John. Thank you very much. It has been a very helpful and informative session. Thank you again for your hospitality this morning.

Proceedings suspended from 10.58 a.m. to 11.22 a.m.

KELLY, Mr Michael John, School Principal, Elanora Primary School, Education Queensland

LOVE, Mr Barry Noel, Deputy Principal, Elanora Primary School, Education Queensland

TOWNSEND, Mr Graeme, Senior Teacher, Year 6, Elanora Primary School, Education Queensland

CHAIR—Welcome. Do you have any comments to make on the capacity in which you appear before you make an introductory statement? We will then have questions.

Mr Love—I worked a bit on the organisational part of the boys class we set up, and I assisted Graeme as a supervisor through the year to do some evaluation of the role.

Mr Townsend—I was the class teacher of the boys-only class which we started last year and are continuing this year.

Mr Kelly—My role here today is to give an overview of the school, and of the reason for setting up the program, and to allow Barry and Graeme to do most of the talking. Elanora Primary School is a very large primary school on the Gold Coast. It was established in 1986 and has approximately 1,200 students from preschool to year 7. It is located very close to the Pacific Highway, and there are some significant issues with that location because of noise, pollution and a whole lot of other aspects. The school itself has a mixed clientele. We have very few students who come from professional families. The parents of the majority of our students work in service industries and trade industries. We have a significant group of kids who live in some of the lower socioeconomic areas around Elanora, Palm Beach and Currumbin. Our school is a very high-performing school; we consistently top this district in areas of academic excellence. In all of the data that is collected on students in Queensland schools through years 2, 5 and 7, our students perform at the very top. Our school is a high-performing school in areas of sport, music, arts, drama and information technology.

In terms of school facilities we have a number of permanent buildings, but, as with all schools in Queensland, once we get past the facilities suited for 600

children, our facilities become temporary buildings—and we have a lot of temporary buildings in our school.

This program focused on boys and education commenced in 1998 and 1999 at the administration level. We are a school that is a risk taker. We are a school, we believe, that is very innovative. During 1998 and 1999 the administration at the school discussed the topic of boys and education. It was during 1999 that we decided we would try for a program in 2000 to put a group of boys together in a classroom with a male teacher. During 1999 we were able to send both our deputy principal, Barry Love, who is in charge of the senior school, and Graeme Townsend, a senior teacher, to conferences, workshops and seminars to give them the opportunity to gain ideas on the education of boys. The program went ahead in 2000 with a group of year 7 boys under Graeme's guidance. Because of the success in 2000 we decided we would continue it in 2001, and Graeme is once again teaching a group of year 6 boys.

The purpose is for us to do a whole lot of assessment on the way the boys interact with the teacher and the way the students perform both academically and socially. We certainly have not set out to establish a boys class permanently at our school, but the feedback and the data that we are collecting on this program during 2001 and 2002 will enable us to make a decision as to what we might do in the future.

CHAIR—Thank you very much. A number of schools do seem to be trialling single-sex classes. I suppose one of the difficulties is accurately evaluating the effect of that on performance and isolating the factors that cause an improvement—if in fact there is an improvement, and most people seem to indicate that there is—whether the improvement is because of the single-sex classes as such or because of the greater focus, commitment or awareness of the teachers in the context. Clearly, schools that are willing to trial these approaches are exhibiting a greater awareness of and focus on the issue of boys education, anyway. In your view, how do we effectively determine and how will you at Elanora effectively evaluate the impact of single-sex classes?

Mr Love—We looked at the evaluation of the program in a number of areas. Obviously, there are some reasons we may have set up the class. Some of those may have been for behaviour management reasons—although the class was not a class of behaviour management boys which we needed to modify; it was certainly not that. We looked at the issues of behaviour management over the year and plotted them with those boys in the class. We have records of the past and previous histories and we have found pretty great improvements in the behaviour

of those boys. We have listed that in the book. The suspensions dropped completely out of that class. The number of time-outs went down completely. Behaviour-wise, those boys made great steps forward throughout the year. Academically, we did pretesting at the beginning of the year—reading tests and maths testing—and then re-evaluated at the end of the year. We did see that improvement at the end of the year, which Graeme will probably talk more about. We think that was because of the strategies that he was using in the room.

An interesting offshoot to the whole aspect of boys education and the way that we did it was that we actually made a girls class as well. There was one girls class and one boys class next to each other and four multisex classes. We gave parents an opportunity if they wanted their children in a single-sex class—this is probably going back to the organisational part—and we had 30 or 40 parents of boys who wanted to go into the class and about 90 parents of girls who wanted to go into the class. So there was a high percentage of parents wanting to go towards this single-sex class trial. We did not give the parents a whole lot of information to make their judgments on, so I do not know what reason was in the back of their minds for wanting to see this happen. The girls class has made significant improvements as well—we have a report on the girls class—and the parents were very satisfied with it. The girls' academic levels rose; their confidence rose. All of those sorts of things resulted from this offshoot of the boys class.

CHAIR—Do you think that the improvements could occur just as well in the boys class if they had a female teacher? Is it a matter of strategies of teaching rather than the sex of the teacher?

Mr Townsend—As the class teacher, I think it is irrelevant whether it is a male teacher or a female teacher. One of the other things we did was look at the parents—the parent or families—that the children came from. In the boys class only about eight of them came from single-parent families; in the girls class there were about 19. So we were thinking that maybe I should be taking the girls class, and maybe the female teacher should have been taking the boys class, because the girls did not have a male role model at home. Your original question was basically asking: how can we judge whether a boys-only class is what made these improvements? I very much doubt that the boys being in a class by themselves made the changes. I think it was a change in my attitude, in my teaching strategies and in my expectations of what I did allow them to do, behaviour-wise, and the activities that I structured for them.

Mrs MAY—Can I just pick up on one point. I have actually been into Graeme's classroom, and the girls and the boys classrooms, when I visited the school.

Graeme, you touched on changing teaching strategies. I wonder if you could expand on that, on how you feel you have changed your teaching strategies by going into a single-sex classroom.

Mr Townsend—If you look at one of the pages of the booklet I handed out—

Mr CADMAN—Did you write this material, Graeme?

Mr Townsend—Yes.

Mr CADMAN—It is just that there is no name on it, and it is very interesting material.

Mr Townsend—It is on the front cover. The page is headed ‘Methods and Activities’. I will just run through them and expand on them very quickly. Boys needed to be in a cooperative situation. I have noted jigsaw puzzles there—I had activities for them to go on with. Girls can be told, ‘When you have finished your work, go on with something quietly,’ and they will find something. With boys, no. So I had jigsaw puzzles, model cars, model trains—things like that that they built. The boys that would normally not associate with each other—the machos, let’s say; the boys that are more involved with bullying—were getting with the quieter boys and they were actually helping each other and seeing each other’s strengths in these cooperative activities that I had running when they finished their work. So it had a twofold result: they wanted to finish their work quickly so they could get on to these fun activities and it got them to work in a cooperative way.

We used a lot of male models, and I got most of those out of the newspapers. When I was at a seminar only two weeks ago a survey was mentioned that had been done in the United States. It had looked at a certain newspaper for 12 months and at whether, when the word ‘father’ or ‘man’ was used in the headline, it was a positive or a negative story. Ninety per cent had been negative. So I tried to pull out all the positive newspaper articles and we would discuss them and have them up around the room.

We had very short lessons—boys have to have very short lessons, I have found. The girls class would have four, maybe five, lessons in the two-hour morning block we have in our school. I would have anything from 12 to 20 lessons—very short sharp lessons where there was bang, bang, bang, one thing after the other.

The boys had to have very short-term, very achievable goals. They had to know what they were going to achieve immediately, not in a week’s time, not in two

days time, but straight there and then. Everything was a lot more hands-on; the things they did were a lot more 'get out and do it'—and I could talk more about why boys need to do that. Everything was made 'real life': I tried to explain why they needed to learn this and where they would use it in the future when they left school.

We used a lot of competition. Competition seems to be a thing that people do not like a lot of. We used a lot of self-competition, where the boys plotted their own graphs of how they were doing in class and they would see their own results going up, which was very positive for them. They were not comparing themselves to the others; they knew where they stood with all the other boys in the class. They were able to plot their own graph, which taught them graphing skills and showed them self-competition. I tried to use a lot of humour in the class. Boys love humour. They love lots of jokes. We had joke sessions at times. Whenever we could use humour, we did. We needed to have a lot of order. The boys needed to know where everything was in the room so they could quickly go and get it. Everything had to be perfectly neat and tidy; boys have to have that—not looking at their bedrooms, I do not think, having three boys of my own.

If a boy needed to be spoken to about a behavioural problem, I never did it in front of the group. I always took them aside and spoke to them after a cooling down period. Any time I did try to confront a boy in front of the class, it would blow up into a bigger situation. So I quickly learned not to do that. When I was ever away and another male teacher came in and took my class, they would confront a behavioural problem in front of the children and often that led to big problems. The boys loved to have their work displayed and praised. Just because they are 13-year-old boys who like football and go outside and push and shove each other does not mean that they do not like praise. They like to show their work and take it up to the office to admin and have it rewarded and praised.

One thing that came out of the year of teaching the boys was that I heard, mainly from the female members of the staff, that the girls need to be in a class with boys or boys need to have girls in the class so that they can model their behaviour and see how to act. I am very opposed to that, because that seems to mean that we want the boys to act like girls—and boys cannot act like girls. All the physiological tests and results show that they cannot. Some can—they can keep a lid on their testosterone—but whether that leads to problems later in life, who knows. We did a lot of peer tutoring. That is one thing that I would like to continue, but with older boys tutoring younger boys in the younger groups, where the older boys can actually model—'Hey, I can read; I'll read to you.'

We tried to go outside a fair bit. During the cooler months of the year we started each session with some physical activity—going for a run; going outside to do some exercises. Even though that took 10 or 15 minutes out of each session, we actually achieved more work when we got back inside. I allowed a fair bit of movement, within reason, around the classroom. Most teachers say, ‘Sit down, be still, get on with your work.’ I allowed them to get up, as long as there was a reason for it and to move around the room. Often they would move around the room and discuss what they were actually doing. I had to keep a tight control on that; otherwise it would get too much out of hand. I purposely allowed there to be more movement, walking around and class discussion on the appropriate topic. Boys are very ‘now’ creatures. If I am marking tests, I call out their mark immediately. I do not wait until I have marked them all. They want to know immediately: ‘Have you marked mine yet?’ They want to know, so I do that. I set very high standards of work in the majority of books. I allow them to have a couple of books where they are allowed to just scribble and be a bit messy within reason, but other books have to be absolutely spot-on, perfect.

We did a test on the boys in the class to see whether they were a visual, an auditory or a kinesic learner—a physical learner. There was not one auditory learner in the class. We also tested the girls class, and we found that three-quarters were auditory learners. So these girls liked to sit down to learn by being spoken to. The boys were all visual and physical learners. They want to be quickly shown how to do it and then be allowed to have a turn. I again tested the boys class this year, and found not one auditory learner. The second most preferred style of learning of all of the 56 boys I tested was not auditory. Auditory was their last preference, except for one boy who had English as a second language. He was just learning English, so maybe his auditory level was up higher. So that was another thing that came out: the boys were definitely physical and visual learners and the girls were auditory learners.

I always tried to address behaviours in the classroom. If there was a behavioural problem, I did not isolate or single out that individual child. We actually addressed and discussed that behaviour in the classroom. Usually everyone knew who we were talking about, but we did not isolate that child. We discussed the problem as a whole and then we would discuss that.

They are the things that I have mentioned in there as the main things that I did in the class to hopefully change something. I was never interested in changing it academically, looking at the academic side of things. I knew that, with my teaching skills and what I was doing in the room, the academic side would be taken care of. I was going to cover the content and that was all going to be fine.

What I was looking at was changing the attitude of the boys towards school, their behaviour, so that there were fewer suspensions—we ended up having none—and fewer time-outs. That was what I was interested in with my class.

Mrs MAY—Did you volunteer for the role?

Mr HATTON—What made you decide you wanted to do this anyway?

Mr Townsend—As an individual?

Mr HATTON—Yes.

Mr Townsend—I volunteered. It was actually brought to my attention and I was asked if I would be interested in doing it. I had been teaching for 21 years. When you have been in the same job for 21 years you either start looking to go on a holiday and cruise down a bit towards retirement or you look for new challenges. I took that step; it was a new challenge.

Mr PEARCE—I have two quick questions, the first to Graeme. In comparison to your career in teaching, how has this experience been for you? Has life been easier in this format? When I say easier, I mean more enjoyable, with greater satisfaction as a teacher. How do you contrast it?

Mr Townsend—Yes, no, no and yes, I think are the answers. It was the most difficult teaching year of my career. I have taught in some very difficult schools in Sydney and western New South Wales; I originally taught in New South Wales. In the Cabramatta area in western Sydney, it was 100 per cent housing commission areas. I found last year physically more demanding than any other year. But it was probably one of the most rewarding years I have ever had. I do not think a teacher can do it for more than two years. It is very physically draining having a class of boys, because they are so full-on the whole time. With girls in there you have that mellowing part of the class who will sit quietly, but boys need to be kept busy the whole time.

Mr PEARCE—Before I ask Michael a question I just want to clarify something you said earlier, Graeme. If my understanding is correct, you said that you believe that it was not so much the boys being in a class of their own but more a change in your attitude and a change in the actual curriculum, or what you taught, that were the main drivers. Is that what you were saying?

Mr Townsend—For example, this year we are doing change. Most of the other classes are doing change in agriculture and change in other fields of the environment. I did change of weapons, how weapons had changed since the beginning of time, from throwing sticks and stones up until now. That was a slightly different approach to the curriculum because I thought that was more suited to boys. Also we did a little more hands-on: we made some weapons, we went out and had mock wars and things—

Mr PEARCE—But essentially you think part of the success has been through a change in your approach and to what you have actually taught. Is that a reasonable summary—part of your success has been as a result of those two dynamics?

Mr Townsend—There has been a change in my approach to classes. In fact, it is something that I have always thought to be true, but having a class of boys only—this is where I see the positive side of having boys only—it pulls out all these things about boys glaringly obviously in your face. They stand there and you say, ‘I wouldn’t have noticed this if it was half boys, half girls.’ And last year I could look through the window to next door and see the differences with the girls doing the same activities—how they behaved, how they acted—which caused me to see how these things were different. If I had had a normal class, I would not have noticed them as much.

CHAIR—So, given those sorts of facts about a change in approach and maybe some changes in the actual curriculum and what is taught, what ramifications does that have for your whole teaching staff across the school? There are some very revealing facts there that changing a couple of approaches does make a significant difference.

Mr Kelly—The important aspect of the report that Graeme has prepared from last year, and I dare say the report he prepares from this year, will be the strategies he has used—the way he has actually taught the boys, and how he has had success by using particular strategies with boys. He has just outlined a whole lot of those with you. That is the sort of information that we need to be sharing and will share with all of our school staff so that females and males on our staff will have the information that Graeme has gleaned from teaching in that particular situation.

At our school, we have 41 or 42 class groups and four male teachers. The majority of our teachers are females; we have very few males. But that sort of information is very powerful, and it is good to be able to share that with all our staff and to say, ‘Boys are different, and there are reasons why boys are different. Boys do learn differently to girls, and here are some of the strategies we can use.’

Graeme says in his report that he is not convinced that we need to have single-sex classes and he has concluded that classes of boys and girls are a successful strategy for the teaching of our students. But the sharing of the information that he has put together with all of our staff is what will enable us to teach our boys even better in the future, I believe.

Mr SIDEBOTTOM—Thank you for this, particularly Graeme. It is nice to read something where you understand what the person means. It is very clear. It reminds me of the study that was done recently in South Australia of boys in education particularly. Once you got through everything, the thing that came out as most important was the teacher. The critical factor was the teacher—the relationship that went on, the teacher’s competency, testing them, valuing kids, taking a little bit of risk.

You appear to be an excellent teacher. I know you will not blow your own trumpet, but you appear to be an excellent teacher. Regarding some of the points you have made, I would not have thought, for example, that you—not you personally but the system—should have had to go through this process to come to a realisation that auditory learning is so fundamental for girls particularly, if not for boys. I asked a question earlier about what goes on in teacher training and preparing those teachers—I am not having a go at the teachers but the reality of it. To then have to come to that conclusion after 21 years just suggests to me that there is something going astray in there.

The other thing too is that the South Australian studies said that kids learned best when they had a teacher like you. The tragedy is that they do not get a teacher like you all the time. So, whether you have single-sex classes or not, teachers seem to be the key—changing their strategies, understanding their students; those things are most important. I do not know how you react to that.

Mr Townsend—Very quickly, I would like to say that I believe the teacher is very important, but I think the system itself has to be looked at too. I saw a few heads nod, but I do not think you are aware of what I am going to say. Humans hate to think of themselves as being very similar to the rest of the animal kingdom. But let us take tigers, which have lived for 40,000 years in the wild, hunting and killing. Even if we raised them for 100 years in a cage, I do not think many of us would jump into that cage with a fully grown tiger. We would still be a bit fearful of it. Boys learned for 40,000 or 50,000 years to act spontaneously, to hunt, to learn from their male role models out hunting. The ones who were physically superior and could fight better, throw things better and hunt and do all those things better, survived. They did the breeding. Darwin brought all this up

with evolution. They are the humans we have bred for 40,000 or 50,000 years. We have only had formal education in schools for 100 to 150 years—a very short time—and we are expecting boys now to go from where in the past they learned out in the wild to hunt and to act spontaneously, learning by copying their fathers and the other males, to learning to sit in the classroom, being quiet and passive and listening. I think we need to look at that: we have expected boys to make this big jump in a very short time. A lot of people I say that to think I am crazy because they think that we are not like the rest of the animal kingdom, but I think we are and we have to take that into account when we are thinking about educating these boys.

Mr CADMAN—I want to compliment you for providing some real enlightenment in this area for this inquiry.

CHAIR—Thank you very much. I am sorry that we left ourselves rather short of time. We would like to pursue these things further. Thank you for the written submission. It is very helpful. Congratulations on what you are doing in the school. All the best. Thank you.

Committee suspended at 11.45 a.m.