COMMONWEALTH OF AUSTRALIA

Official Committee Hansard

HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

STANDING COMMITTEE ON EDUCATION AND TRAINING

Reference: Education of boys

WEDNESDAY, 8 MAY 2002

MORNINGSIDE

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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 Elson, 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

Committee resumed at 2.39 p.m.

McDONOUGH, Mrs Simone, Literacy Tutor, Cannon Hill Anglican College

RECEVEUR, Mrs Pauline, Literacy Coordinator/Tutor, Cannon Hill Anglican College

SWALLOW, Mr Gavin, Senior Teacher, Literacy, Cannon Hill Anglican College

CHAIR—I would like to thank Mr Greg Wain, Mr Gavin Swallow and everybody else involved in the literacy program here for inviting us today and for your hospitality. We have found what we have seen so far very interesting. I will invite you to make some introductory comments and we will then throw it open to questions.

Mr Swallow—I would like to thank the committee for taking the time to come here. We are very proud of our program here. We are proud of the results that we get. We would like to do a lot better but we are proud of what we are doing and what the students are coming up with. I will make a few points. One is that everybody in education should be aware that it is quite a massive task to remediate a whole school. To remediate a school system is obviously many times more massive because students tend to carry with them a lot of habits from the past that are not helping their literacy. Let us call them 'bad habits'. While we putting in new habits and new information and new learning that is getting interfered with all the time by their old ways which have failed them in the past.

Secondly, schools undertaking a project something like this need to define where they are going to allocate their resources, because the resources are never enough. When you have one-third of the student body with literacy problems—and we interpret literacy here as spelling and reading—then you ultimately have to leave somebody out. We have chosen here to put most of our effort into primary—because we now start from year 4—but it means basically that anybody from year 9 and above now virtually gets no assistance. With our resources that we have with our 10 tutors and me, that is all that we can handle. It is not so much a question of money; it is a question of manpower.

It is fairly useless to spread your people around a large number of students. I did hear a year or two ago of a school where the children were each getting 15 minutes per week of literacy assistance. I cannot really think of anything more useless for anybody, either the student or the teacher that was trying to cover the territory in that time. We have chosen to give our children a reasonably adequate number of hours but to give it to fewer people, which unfortunately means that somebody has to decide where the cut-offs are and who misses out. We are helping the younger ones simply because research shows, and I guess commonsense shows, that they learn faster and it is easier for the younger students to drop any bad habits they might have picked up.

Thirdly, a lot of people worry about students being labelled as 'dumb' and 'retarded', as the students call each other from time to time—not often but now and again. That 'dumb' label is something that our students had in our remedial classes when we first began but it disappeared within about a year because, as you saw in the class this afternoon, a number of these students are getting As and Bs in English. There is certainly nothing wrong with their intelligence. Also, once you get all the school footballers and so forth through the program, nobody calls them dumb anyway. Within about 12 months you get the very, very rare comment. Somebody might

make the very rare comment that somebody has gone into the 'dumb English class'. When a significant proportion have already been through it, that disappears fairly quickly.

The fourth point I would like to make is, as you can see in that document—and that is a representative group—our general ratio of boys to girls in the English skills class in year 8 and in tutoring is about two to one. In other words, about two-thirds of our clients are boys. We have found that boys particularly respond to this kind of structured learning—you have seen that it is a fairly highly structured approach—and to providing them with the means for logical thinking. Through providing them with rules and teaching them a code as we do, they are able to apply a bit of logical thinking and work things out for themselves. It becomes a tool that they can use themselves for all their literacy work in future. We are not just teaching a whole lot of words. You cannot teach 500,000 words of English to people. You can teach them 'how to'. We also work on the approach that the left brain is possibly a little bit stronger in boys. This is all arguable, but perhaps that is why they tend to favour an approach where logic can be applied rather than an approach where they will be guessing and anticipating from context and so on.

I mentioned before that our work is based on the research of people such as Spalding and Bonnie Macmillan—I have given you an excerpt of some of her work in the material that I sent to Canberra. One interesting facet of this is that teachers—around this state, anyway—are snapping up similar kinds of programs. The THRASS program is holding workshops all over the state; I think there is another one called First Steps; and there is another one called Jolly Phonics, which is English in origin. You will find that there are workshops being held all over the state, and, if you are able to look around an educational bookshop, you will see that lots of book titles will incorporate this kind of learning. So there is already a grassroots movement towards this kind of literacy course.

As far as teacher training goes, with this kind of program the teachers—and tutors, if you are having tutors as well—need to know specific information themselves, as you saw in the classroom upstairs. They have to develop a few skills, but it is not an overwhelming amount. Our tutors learn most of what they need to know in a 60-hour course. If we really had to trim that down—if there was an emergency of some kind and we had to trim it down—we could probably get by with the very basics in about 20 hours.

Mrs Receveur—From my point of view, being the literacy coordinator, I work more one-to-one, and I have seen the success that using phonics has achieved, particularly with boys. It is an absolutely wonderful program. I cannot understand why people do not have phonics from preschool to year 3. We would not have these problems in year 4, when we are filling in gaps. When they get to year 10 and year 11 and they are going off to work experience, it is very difficult to be teaching them how to fill forms out. I hope that something can be done from preschool to year 3, where they can use phonics.

Mr CADMAN—In your experience, have you been able to link behavioural problems in boys with lack of literacy?

Mrs Receveur—Yes.

Mrs McDonough—Yes. We encounter them all the time. I think that boys, more than girls, may be embarrassed about their inability to cope with reading and writing. They can generally

speak very well, but they cannot read, or translate their thoughts into writing. They have had to develop other means of coping with their 'disability', so they use bad behaviour. We have to deal with some pretty awful behaviour that sometimes comes up—some very attention-seeking behaviour and some very disruptive behaviour—so we have to get around that before we can get them to settle down and learn.

Mr CADMAN—Do you notice a change then?

Mrs McDonough—Once their attitude changes to, 'Yes, they are here to help me' and they settle down and listen, we get a much better response. We can see that they do improve dramatically, yes.

Mrs Receveur—For a long time a lot of boys have used strategies for getting out of situations, which has probably added to their poor behaviour. They do not appear to be interested in anything; they tend to always forget books, or they do not have a pencil, or they cannot come today, or they do not have their glasses today. They always use these strategies and that is also a behaviour patternn too. Obviously, if they are in a large class, they are going to be left behind. Some of them can be very quiet, too; they just sit there and do not say anything. That can be another strategy, which I think is worse because they get left behind.

We find that when we are working with them one-to-one, these strategies cannot be used because we are aware of them. They know we are going to make them do something. They are not going to get away with it, they are not going to hide under the desk and they are not going to run outside. There is nowhere for them to go. They are just sitting at a desk with us. Once we talk to them, we find that they work very well one-to-one. We get excellent results from them. We get parents coming in and saying, 'We cannot do anything with them. We cannot get them to sit down. How come you can get them to sit down?' If you take an interest in them, and they are interested in what you are doing, it works for them. Behaviour problems are dealt with by lunchtime detentions and deduction of points.

Mr Swallow—Incentives.

Mrs Receveur—we do not have problems with them.

Mr Swallow—One thing we try to do is to give them some early success too. For example, there is a little rule about doubling—in words like dinner and so forth—and when you should double and when you should not. That is one of the early things we teach. You can often see the light dawning physically—you can see the lights come on when they realise they can handle it. A lot of them come to you thinking that they must be stupid, brain damaged or something and when they see they can handle something that is probably the biggest incentive of all.

Mrs ELSON—I want to ask a couple of questions. Through your experience this appears to be working—from what I saw today it looks a very simple way of teaching and I understood it a lot better after seeing it in person. Are student teacher colleges and universities actually adopting this way of teaching students now? Has anyone come to see you? When your tutors need to be trained where do they go to get the 60 hours of training?

Mrs McDonough—I did the course at the end of last year through the University of Newcastle. It was a very good course. It involved a fairly thick booklet with three assessments through it. You did an assessment at the end of that particular lot of reading. It involved history, information on how to teach to get your point across, how to revise—there were a lot of facets to it. I already had a basic knowledge of phonics—I was able to teach my own son just by thinking logically. This course filled so many gaps in my knowledge so that my ability became a skill. I did not have to do a two-year course—I was considering a two-year course in teaching but then I thought that I would only end up like the teachers who say that they cannot cope with the students or that they are not allowed to teach phonics. I did not want to be in a position where I was not allowed to teach phonics so I did opt for a course that was short, explicit and which brought me up to speed with everything I needed to know in a very short space of time.

Mrs ELSON—They are not teaching it at teachers colleges in Queensland?

Mrs McDonough—Not as far as I know.

Mr Swallow—As far as I know, it is not being taught in university courses. We have had anecdotal evidence in the past, through a voluntary organisation that I was associated with, that phonics was pooh-poohed in colleges and universities and people would be ridiculed if they put up their hand in a university class and said, 'But what about sounding out.' There is lots and lots of anecdotal evidence about teachers being told not to use any of this at all—nothing anywhere near this approach.

Universities at the moment, from what I can glean, seem to be sidestepping the issue. For example, there is a seminar coming up in a couple of weeks time where the professor of education from the University of Queensland, Professor Luke, is running a seminar and it is all about literacy. But there is nothing there—none of the topics are actually about how you would teach it. There are strategies for schools to organise themselves, there are strategies for organising the class and organising groups, and involving parents and the community, but there is nothing there about the nitty-gritty of how you actually teach it successfully.

Mrs ELSON—It would be very similar to the way phonics was taught 30 years ago in schools, wouldn't it? I can remember—my children are that old—four being taught by sounding the words out and four being taught by looking at the word. The four that learnt by sounding out actually love books and the reason is that they understood words that they could not understand by just looking at them and forming the words.

Mr Swallow—We have to go into a lot more detail than was gone into in those times in schools because we are undoing one system and trying to put in another system and give the complete system, so there are hopefully no gaps in it. We go into it more fully than would be necessary if we were starting with a clean slate.

Mr SIDEBOTTOM—Thank you, Kay. You raised an issue that we talked about this morning, about what could happen and should happen in schools and what is happening in teachers' colleges—without having a go at teachers—and really whether the reality matches. On the point of learning phonics 30 years ago, we are about the same thing, which is that it is a lot more client orientated—student orientated—now and of course you have things like tutorials and trying to case manage each individual. Pauline, you were saying you were surprised that

people have reached this stage and cannot do it. Well that says something about the system and what is the bandwagon these days and how it is changed. I do value your points there. Back to this issue of boys alienated in learning and from schooling; you said there was a relationship between bad behaviour—or misbehaviour although I suspect it is all relative, but bad behaviour—and doing a literacy class. Would you say that the majority of boys who are doing your literacy course, the special skills course, have behaviour problems?

Mrs McDonough—My son went through the course and I would not say that he was not badly behaved, but when it came to writing he was the master of avoidance. He would use tactics, anything to get out of reading or writing. That causes a flow-on to the way they talk to you, the way they handle other situations, because they are always trying to cover up for a problem that they have. Although I am not denigrating my own child, he was not the person you would expect him to be. He constantly avoided facing the problems he had, and he became deeply depressed and things like that as well.

Mr SIDEBOTTOM—So you are seeing a change? Once they are feeling more competent with the literacy side and do not feel a failure—whatever that may mean—you are actually seeing behaviour improve?

Mrs Receveur—Indeed, self-esteem definitely.

Mrs McDonough—A lot of children want to do their homework on their own, they do not want parental involvement. They put in a lot of effort and then they come back with a C+ and they get depressed because they have put in a hell of a lot of effort and they have got nothing to show for it. You try to tell them, 'Well, you have got to practice your writing separately from writing an assignment because it is like if you are playing tennis, or any other thing, you have got to put in the practice before you can go and have a match. It is the same sort of thing.' So very often they do not come and ask you for help or, conversely, if they cannot do an assignment you will get so much parental involvement that the assignment is actually not theirs. You want to get to a stage where you can give them self-confidence to do things and be successful on their own.

Mr SIDEBOTTOM—Can I ask you one more question? What about the person who says, 'Look spelling is not important, it is my meaning that is important and my willingness to vocalise and articulate what I want to say. And when I get on my computer—on our chat lines—we can type at a million miles and hour and we do not need spelling.' So aren't you flogging an old, dead horse—I am putting it in their perspective—and do they see the relevance of spelling correctly? Do they really see it?

Mrs Receveur—I would say that it depends on the individual person. I have had boys who have been in year 10 who really do not care whether they can spell or read and write, with massive behaviour problems. Some will say, 'Oh yes, but I can spell a few words—I just have to look them up on spellcheck.' Most students with these problems have trouble using spellcheck correctly and this is evident when they read the text. Success gained through the school's literacy program enables a student to be more confident in the outside world after school days are over. In my experience, few students rebel against the program.

Mr Swallow—Could I just come back to that point on behaviour. I would say that probably 80 per cent of the boys who have been in serious strife here would have been through either our tutoring program in primary or through the English skills followed by tutoring in secondary. I made a note here that whenever in a staff meeting somebody gets up and says, 'Johnny Bloggs is in a lot of trouble. Is there anybody who knows anything about Johnny? Come and see me later,' the first thing I do is go downstairs and check my record of the 100-word spelling test that we give in January. About 80 per cent of those names I would find are under 50 per cent in the spelling test, which generally means they have a serious literacy problem. We feel for these kids who sit in class year after year not really understanding, not knowing what is on the board; it might as well be Chinese for a lot of them. What do you do? There is nothing else to do; you have got to succeed at something.

I have also made a note on the business of spell check and spelling. There is a strong carryover into reading. A lot of children will sound like they are reading reasonably well, but when you listen very closely to it you will find that they are leaving words out, that they are slipping little words in, or that they are saying the wrong word. As we were saying before, they might be saying 'horse' instead of 'house', or 'taken' instead of 'taking', which is basically the opposite. They will be running right over the full stops and commas as if they are not there, which tends to destroy meaning. By the time they have done that half a dozen times at least on a page, they are not really comprehending much. As far as the spell check goes, a specific example of that one is: when I had a year 12 class last year, three-quarters of them wrote about 'how much his conscious was bothering him' and it was straight off the spell check. They went to write 'conscience' and they got to 'cons', then they went to spell check and they looked down the list and they saw 'conscious' and that looked like it so, bang, they all hit the key for 'conscious'. That is the sort of thing that you see. Sometimes there are far more outrageous words like that. When you see a word that is obviously right out of context you can bet your last dollar that it is from spell check.

Mrs McDonough—I think everyone in education would probably agree that there is a strong correlation between reading and finding meaning and then being able to use the words that you understand back in writing. If you do not read widely enough, if you do not come across difficult words and absorb them and know what they mean, you will never use them in your writing because they are simply not part of your active vocabulary. The more widely you read and the more you understand what you read, the more likely you are of having a mature, sophisticated, active vocabulary when you are older. People who rely on spell check will find that they will not have many words to spell check because they will not be using the difficult words.

Mr Swallow—Could I add to that. When people say 'reading for meaning', that is precisely what we do, but we want reading for 100 per cent accurate meaning so we have to get the words 100 per cent accurate first. When the girl read the other day that Amelia Earhart was 'taking prisoners' instead of she was 'taken prisoner', with that little change from 'en' to 'ing' she totally reversed the meaning of the whole thing and got no meaning at all from that sentence. I have heard somebody say, I forget who, that the sound is the meaning. If I say 'cat' you know what my meaning is. But if you look at something and you do not know what it is and you skip it or you say the wrong thing, then there is no meaning.

Mr PEARCE—Gavin, in particular I am interested in your comments about contrasting your teaching experience and also what the actual outcomes would be. With the class we saw earlier, if that had been a class of all boys or a class of all girls, would it have been a different dynamic? Would you have known things about boys versus girls? Would you have approached the class in a different way? Would your expectations have been different in terms of the outcomes from that class?

Mr Swallow—Yes. I would expect, generally, the girls to work more quietly and to learn faster. I would expect the boys to, conversely, work more noisily and be harder to keep on task and a little bit harder to get them to do things the way that we think they need to be done. For example, we were talking about pencil grip and saying their sounds with the letters, which they think is babyish. Yes, I probably would have slightly different expectations, but I would expect them all to be able to read and write quite well by the time I had finished the course, definitely.

Mr PEARCE—How would you have modified your approach for both of those situations?

Mr Swallow—For boys and girls?

Mr PEARCE—Yes. What would you do differently?

Mr Swallow—As a teacher, I would probably be a lot quieter with the girls. I would not move around quite as much. I would slow down the pace and be slightly more thorough, whereas with the boys I would put the pace up a bit and keep them busy. One of the good things about the way that we do it is that we keep them busy all the time. We are not discussing why c-k says 'k', we are learning that c-k says 'k' and what the rule is. We keep them busy printing, sounding, going on to the next one with a bit of dictation and so forth, so they are busy, busy, busy all the time in that highly structured environment. So they do not have a lot of time or opportunity to go off the rails. If the girls are not going to go off the rails I can perhaps slow down a little bit and tell them a few stories along the way about the Earl of Sandwich and so forth, whereas with the boys I generally leave that stuff out.

Mr PEARCE—So you would modify your approach, but would you expect the same outcome?

Mr Swallow—To be perfectly honest, probably not. I would anticipate that the boys would not generally learn as fast as the girls.

CHAIR—The results here are very interesting and certainly very encouraging, and I notice that they seem to bear out what we intuitively would have thought: the percentage improvement for boys seems to be a little higher than it does for girls. That probably indicates that the boys had suffered more under their previous approaches, have benefited more from a more structured approach and are making up ground. Would that be a fair conclusion?

Mr Swallow—That is pretty well it. It is the law of diminishing returns. In our four classes during the year—the ones that we start off with in term 1—I think the highest percentage was 30-something. We had 17 people and the highest percentage was, let us say, about 36 per cent in our 100-word spelling test. We expect a lot of them to more than double their score by the end of the term, whereas when we get to term 4 we are looking at a group that is getting between

about 63 and 70 per cent and we are hoping that they will be able to add about 15 to 20 per cent onto their score.

CHAIR—I notice here, in one of the other tables you gave us—Table 2: LIP and January 1999 test results: year 8 (term 3 1998) cohort—that there were a few students there whose performance actually deteriorated. Have you analysed why that is? Were there just particular personal factors at the time?

Mr Swallow—Was that the spelling mark or the reading age?

CHAIR—That was the difference in exit reading age, and there were one or two in spelling as well.

Mr Swallow—With the spelling one, there is always a small percentage of students who, for their own reasons, refuse to have anything to do with learning of any kind, and sometimes more so with what we are doing. This is particularly so if we have taken them out of physical education, art, graphics or tech to come up and do the tutoring. If we have taken them out of English or maths, they are usually in a much better frame of mind.

CHAIR—So, with these particular students who did not improve, are you satisfied that that was for other reasons, such as the one you have suggested, rather than the different approach, which perhaps does not suit them?

Mr Swallow—Yes, I am satisfied. Pauline draws them to my attention if they are coming through tutoring. We always sit down a couple of times a week and look at cases. We look very closely at the work they have done in their book and what the tutors have done with them, and we talk to the tutors and try to find out if there is some peculiarity about that person, as there sometimes is, that means that they have not been able to learn. It might be something as simple as saying c-a-t but not being able to make 'cat' out of it. That is reasonably common. There was another boy who had trouble with sounds and was not learning much, and I think it was Pam who noticed that he had an odd tooth growing from the roof of his mouth, hitting his tongue and destroying his speech. There are all sorts of odd little things that can happen that we try to pin down. I guess I am blowing my own trumpet here, but sometimes we are the first ones to find these things, and armies of speech pathologists and educational psychologists have not been able to identify them.

CHAIR—Do the improvements that these tables show, and the other tables that you have provided to us as well, continue? Is there any regression over a period of time if this particular approach is not being reinforced, or does it carry through with them into later years?

Mrs Receveur—We have found that after the holidays, particularly over the long summer holidays, some of them do regress. They come back from eight weeks holiday and a week later they are tested. But we looked at those cases and we found that maybe they had not had as much tutoring time as others in the program. They may have been away sick and missed important parts of the program. But we found that once they returned to the program, most of them were back up to where they had currently been the year before. You would be surprised at what they had forgotten over the holidays but recovered with revision.

CHAIR—What about longer term once they go into, say, year 8, 10 or 11 without that obvious emphasis on the phonetic approach during those years?

Mr Swallow—We have not done specific research on this. But looking through their results a couple of weeks ago I drew up a list of people—which I do not have with me—who I felt had slipped back more than I would have expected them to. There was also a list of people who had improved more than I had expected them to. The ones who had slipped back I thought had not slipped back very far. I was quite happy with them. It is an area that I would like to research more and get some specific figures on rather than just having a quick scan through the results.

There is another thing I should point out here, too. Somebody who started off on 20 or 30 per cent might finish our tutoring getting, for argument's sake, 60 per cent in the test and then we find in January they are back to about 50 per cent. We have looked at their tests. I have written an example down here. Before any tutoring they might have been spelling, in this example, scotch as s-t-o-c-k. They were spelling it as s-c-o-t-c-h when they finished with us. Then back in January six or eight weeks later they might be spelling it s-c-o-c-h. So their result has actually dropped back a bit because they got scotch wrong, for example, but s-c-o-c-h is a lot better than s-t-o-c-k. So there is often a big improvement in the quality of their writing so that you can actually figure out what they are trying to say, even though the mark is not going to be up where we would want it to be.

Mr CADMAN—I noticed that you mentioned Spalding and the Spalding method. Obviously you looked at that. Did you consider using Spalding totally?

Mr Swallow—I perhaps should point out—I think I did to the committee secretary—that I am a coauthor of the Nutshell program which is in some of the literature there. I suspect that is one of the reasons why I was employed here in the first place, because I had been out of the classroom for a couple of years. I have had a look at a number of those materials. The Spalding one is a very detailed program. I forget exactly how long—I think it is a number of weeks that the Spalding tutors do in training before they can start. They have a very thick manual. They treat, for example, a-u-g-h as in daughter and laughter as a separate phonogram whereas we just treat that as a kind of an exception. They have children writing numbers above sounds, as you have no doubt seen. If they do 'bath' I think they probably write a number 3 or a number 2 over the 'a' indicating it is what they would call the second or third sound of 'a'. We felt that amount of detail was not necessary, both in the program and in the school. We find children learn quite successfully without all of the very fine detail. Phonics is phonics. It has been around for 5,000 years. It was first written with sharpened sticks dipped in wet clay or drawn in the sand. It is a very simple concept.

Somebody famously said some years ago something about the drover's dog. I should not say that with my tutors here. I think with 30 or 40 hours of help, the average parent even without that amount, if shown the system, can teach phonics themselves fairly easily even if they miss out on the refinements and the finer points about the Earl of Sandwich or why you cannot use c-k in act. It does not matter a great deal to somebody who is getting 10 per cent in their spelling test. If they can get the rest of it right, if they can get up to 60 or 70 per cent then they are doing very well.

There is an English system, Letterland, which is fairly complicated. A lot of them will take the approach, 'OK kids, let's learn about the sound e today. So here is how you can spell e, the sound e. You can write it as e-e like in tree, you can write it as i-e as in grief, you can write it as e-i as in ceiling, you can write it as e-a as in steam. Let's learn all these.' To me that is very confusing and the whole book is written with that kind of system. Spalding is not like that. Spalding does them separately. Where we converge is that children need to know the code before they start putting things in writing, whereas in most schools they start off trying to read on day one and try to make the writing flow from the reading somehow.

CHAIR—Gavin, have you seen the improvement in literacy flow through to the HSC level? What do you call the leaving certificate here?

Mr Swallow—The senior year.

CHAIR—Regarding the final exam results, are you closing the gap or reducing the relative disadvantage of boys in literacy early on? Are your results in the HSC showing that boys are much closer to girls' performance than perhaps in other schools in the area? Probably a bit hard to say.

Mr Swallow—I honestly could not say. It is one of those things in the back of my mind that I would like to research.

CHAIR—Because we are clearly seeing over the past two decades, boys have got further and further behind at the HSC level, at the Year 12 leaving level. One of the factors that is contributing to that is their problems with literacy and the flow-on effect of that. We would think that if literacy levels are being raised in Year 7, 8, 9, relative performance should be better at the Year 12 level. Can I ask you this—has there been much of a difference in, say, the last three or four years between boys' and girls' results at the school leaving level?

Mr Swallow—I would only be guessing if—

CHAIR—Could you perhaps take that on notice and send us some information? We would be interested to see if the results were much closer for girls and boys than they are in a lot of other schools.

Mr Swallow—I could add that as they go on in to Year 11 and 12 more and more of their assessments are written in class under exam conditions rather than as assignments done at home. If somebody does have problems with literacy—and a number of those ACE students you saw in that classroom this afternoon would be in this boat—they will do very well when they can draft their assignment three times, check it on the computer, check it on the dictionary, have Mum and Dad check it, even if Mum and Dad do not give them the ideas. When they get in to that exam situation where they are actually writing, they will tend to go down. One of our big concerns with Year 11 and 12 is to get them to a reasonable level before then so that when they get into that situation they are going to perform better.

Mr CADMAN—Would it be useful to do a comparative study as a blind trial? Phonics conduct against nonphonics conduct. Is it possible to do something like that? Do not give

phonics to one group, give it to another group and let us see what conduct is like over a period of years. Is there any value in that?

Mr Swallow—If you could find a school or schools that would be willing to do that. I cannot recall, off the top of my head, ever seeing any research of that nature. I have seen research showing that children whose literacy is good tend to be better behaved.

Mr CADMAN—But academics have written books on why we should not have phonics in schools. Do you mean to say we have made changes without any reason for making changes, either to include or exclude phonics?

Mr Swallow—That is, unfortunately, exactly right. A number of those web sites, which I put on the second- or third-last page of the information that I sent to you, would give you some information on that. There are books around, such as *Dumbing Down America*, which go into it in a lot more detail.

CHAIR—Gavin, you mentioned earlier that some of the children having difficulty were those who had come from other schools, where a totally different approach, a whole of language approach, was used. Have you been doing any work with the feeder schools to perhaps encourage them to take up a more phonetically based approach?

Mr Swallow—Not directly. They have heard about us. Pauline, you would know, wouldn't you? They were starting to change at your school.

Mrs Receveur—Yes. I have a daughter, my youngest one, who is currently in year 4 and they have been doing phonics. I have showed them the program that we were using at the school here and they were really interested in that. They seem to be going more into phonics now than whole word.

Mr Swallow—I did an afternoon workshop for the staff at Bulimba State School about two or three years ago. I am not aware of what changes, if any, have been made as a result of that. It is a bit outside my terms of reference to go poking around.

CHAIR—I appreciate that; thank you. Are there any other questions?

Mrs ELSON—I would like to place on record my thanks to Barbara Sykes, who is here today. She put a submission into the inquiry, especially setting the Cannon Hill school as an example. She has Quantum Literacy, through which she supplies tutors to different schools and associations, and I would like to thank you for bringing this to our attention, Barbara.

CHAIR—Thank you, Kay. Thank you to the witnesses for your time this afternoon, for your hospitality and for your very valuable input. There have been some great insights here that will be very helpful to us in our inquiry. Good luck with the work that you are doing with literacy, with your kids.

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

That this committee receives as evidence and includes in its records as exhibits for the inquiry into the education of boys the documents received from Tallebudgera Beach School titled *Presentation outline*, from Elanora State School titled *Boys only class* and from Cannon Hill Anglican College titled *Information on literacy program*.

Resolved (on motion by **Mrs Elson**):

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

Committee adjourned at 3.25 p.m.