COMMONWEALTH OF AUSTRALIA

Official Committee Hansard

HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

STANDING COMMITTEE ON EDUCATION AND TRAINING

Reference: Education of boys

THURSDAY, 9 MAY 2002

DARWIN

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HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

STANDING COMMITTEE ON EDUCATION AND TRAINING

Thursday, 9 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 Sidebottom and Mr Wilkie

Terms of reference for the inquiry:

To inquire into and report on:

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

WITNESSES

Committee met at 2.03 p.m.

DAVIES, Mr Kenneth Lindsay, Acting General Manager School Services, Northern Territory Department of Employment, Education and Training

DUNN, Ms Carmelita Mary, General Manager Indigenous Education Division, Northern Territory Department of Employment, Education and Training

CHAIR—Thank you for appearing today. I am obliged to remind you that the proceedings here today are legal proceedings of the parliament. Would you like to make some introductory comments and then we might proceed to questions.

Mr Davies—Can I start by talking to the submission that DEET put into the inquiry. I just premise it by saying that, as a department, we are anxiously awaiting the outcomes of this national inquiry because we have a program and a project set up ready to go where we are wanting to pick up on the key recommendations and start to move with it as quickly as we possibly can. That will become obvious as I go through what I am about to say now. Carmelita has specifically come along today to assist the inquiry and provide some relevance around the education of indigenous males in our schools and some of the critical issues facing indigenous males as a group. I will focus on the submission first and just summarise what we have given to you.

Boys as a defined group in the Northern Territory consistently do less well on school based English literacy tests and other aspects of schooling examined in the submission to you. The submission states that other factors such as socioeconomic status, ethnicity and location interplay with gender in different ways to produce success. I am hoping that Carmelita in particular will be able to assist with any queries you have in that area relating to indigenous students.

The current concern about boys' achievement is largely based on their performance in comparison with that of girls in national literacy tests and end-of-schooling examinations. In the early years of schooling the literacy levels of boys and girls are not significantly different, but I can state that we have some additional information today, which Carmelita may well table, that shows that they are still different, particularly in the area of literacy—it is not as broad in the maths area. Nowhere is the underachievement of boys in English literacy more acutely noticeable than in the upper primary or junior secondary years—the years often referred to as the middle years of schooling—with many more boys attaining lower scores in English than girls, proportionately.

In terms of how males and females respond to the different assessment models, our research shows us that boys are quite competitive when it comes to summative kinds of assessment: that is, the tests and exams. In assessment based work that goes on through the year, our research shows that girls do significantly better. This trend seems to continue into senior secondary studies. At the end of year 12 more girls than boys meet the requirements for the award of the Northern Territory Certificate of Education. The data we gave you is for 1999-2000 but that is still consistent with the data we have now. This is also consistent with the South Australian and the South-East Asian students that we have in our cohort who work through the SSABSA certification that is run concurrently in the Northern Territory and South Australia.

Over the period 1995 to 1999, on average 42 per cent of males in the Northern Territory and 59 per cent of females completed the requirements of the NTCE. The submission further states that in the NTCE there has been greater participation by girls and proportionately more girls have performed and scored better than boys. Interestingly, out of the whole range of subjects provided by the Senior Secondary Assessment Board of South Australia—SSABSA—chemistry seems to be one of a small number of subjects in which there is almost equal participation and equal success, at least in the higher grades, for both boys and girls.

The submission to you does caution that the fact that some boys underachieve does not mean that girls always outperform boys, given even terms. Girls who participate in high-level mathematics and physics are the more determined and capable girls in the cohort, while some boys consider that they ought to do these subjects by virtue of their gender and/or career aspirations; it is felt that sometimes the will is not there to go right through to full completion. Studies elsewhere indicate that social and economic resources available to children through their homes and communities also impact significantly on their achievement; as do location and ethnicity. The submission further states that boys and girls do not use secondary schooling to the same extent or in the same ways. The full labour market for young people seems to favour boys, who therefore rely less on completing schooling. Girls tend to rely more on school because their non-school work and training options are more limited.

Staying on at school is not a good indicator of relative gender outcomes. The kinds of subjects boys and girls take up after school and their life choices are more meaningful tests of gender relativities. This is based on the feedback in the submission. The submission concludes that, when developing programs that are good for boys or girls, it may be profitable to focus on school literacy practices and the assumptions upon which they rely. That is what the submission contends. The submission was written in late 1999-2000, and I can say to you that, as we do more analysis and as more data comes to hand and we get more feedback from our principals in the school sector, this is becoming a very hot topic. As I say, we are anxiously awaiting the outcomes of the inquiry to assist us in addressing what is definitely a gap in outcomes between the achievement of girls and boys.

Ms Dunn—I would like to talk generally about what it is like for indigenous boys. We cannot take the discussion away from the circumstances in which indigenous people in contemporary Australia find themselves—the disadvantage and poverty facing many indigenous families. For indigenous boys, some of those things are a whole life experience; it is not just geared to what happens in education. We need to look in a holistic way at what happens to young men and boys in indigenous communities. There is a lack of role models for a lot of indigenous boys—in their own homes, in the workplace and in service delivery areas. A lot of that is do with what happens to young men as they get older: indigenous young men are being caught up in juvenile justice in our jails and detention centres a lot more than young indigenous women are.

In the early years, there is not a great deal of difference in their outcomes. I am happy to table some of the reading benchmarks from 1999-2000. There is obviously a marked difference between indigenous boys and non-indigenous boys, but the difference between indigenous girls and indigenous boys is not as marked. It does change, as Ken said, in the middle years of schooling. A lot of that may be to do with young men getting older, dealing with discipline and also to do with a lot of the cultural practices in indigenous communities—young men becoming boys in a classroom context, with the discipline that is faced in that context. As they get older,

we start losing them out of our system—from the middle years. They start falling out of our system about year 8 and year 9. The trend starts in about year 7. Once we start collecting data on year 7 testing and year 9 testing, it will give us good data about what is happening to indigenous students and, more particularly, what is happening to indigenous boys.

There has been a lack of secondary provision to some of our remote communities. We have now developed some strategies about how we provide that to remote communities. For a lot of young indigenous men, school is not an option they are choosing particularly. They are voting with their feet, if you like, and leaving our system, and so what we are trying to do is ensure that we have good teachers, good teaching practices and curriculums that engage indigenous boys.

Critical mass is an issue as well. At the end of year 12, there is not a critical mass of indigenous students left in our system. Last year there were about 40 students who got an HSC. Of those, I think about 30 per cent or 40 per cent were indigenous men. There is such a small sample of indigenous students getting through our system that we are in the process of developing some strategies to retain them. We are developing strategies to put the work in—in the middle years and also in the secondary years—to ensure that we can do some work with indigenous boys and girls to keep them in our system.

I think I have talked to you about the non-engagement of indigenous men and boys in service provision. Across the board, there has not been enough engagement of indigenous men as role models. For a long time indigenous women have been very articulate about what is happening in the service delivery area. Very little of that has involved the engagement of indigenous men; they have been absent from that demand. There is a growing focus—men trying to get engaged in dealing with male issues. I think those are some of the things I talked about.

It is really important to understand the social context in which indigenous boys live and their lack of role models is hugely important. Their peers are in jail and detention centres; they think that is a better option than going to school. Obviously we are in the process of trying to offer our system as a better option than those other systems.

CHAIR—Thank you. That has been very helpful. I am sure my colleagues have a number of questions, and perhaps I just might start with a couple. Carmelita, you said that the literacy figures early on showed only a fairly minor gap between the level achieved by boys and that by girls. For the sake of the record, could you just elaborate on that?

Ms Dunn—The numeracy benchmark in 2000 for year 3 was 44 per cent, and for indigenous girls it was 49 per cent.

CHAIR—So it is a five per cent differential in numeracy?

Ms Dunn—In literacy, it is 19 per cent and 29 per cent. With literacy there is a huge difference obviously between indigenous boys and non-indigenous boys: 70 per cent for non-indigenous boys, and 19 per cent for indigenous boys.

CHAIR—So you said that for indigenous girls it is 29 per cent and for boys 19 per cent?

Ms Dunn—No.

Mr Davies—The data for numeracy shows that the comparisons are very consistent, regardless of indigenousness. The gaps are huge for achievement levels. But when you run a line across it—we will leave these graphs for you to have a look at—it shows that the gender issue, if you are looking for something to reinforce that, is consistent for both indigenous and non-indigenous boys.

Ms Dunn—Sorry; perhaps I can talk about it again. In the year 2000, the year 5 benchmark for boys was 30 per cent, and for girls it was 35 per cent.

CHAIR—Is that for numeracy or literacy?

Ms Dunn—That is for literacy. In numeracy, it was 35 per cent and 38 per cent. We have some 2001 figures for literacy: 28 per cent for boys, 29 per cent for girls.

Mr Davies—Are they indigenous girls and boys?

Ms Dunn—Yes. In numeracy, it is actually higher for boys at 33 per cent; and in 2001 it is 32 per cent.

CHAIR—Ken, in your introductory comments you said that you have a project ready to go. Could you elaborate on that for us please?

Mr Davies—There are two things that are happening. One is a new program being rolled out, which is a government initiative called TRY, which is Training Remote Youth. That is aimed at picking up males, starting at 14 years and up, out in our communities. We are envisaging that this is going to pick up—we do not know yet—significant numbers of disengaged indigenous males. That is a VET based program, which is about trying to re-engage them in some formal training, linked with some formal education. That is a new government initiative here that is running and getting some legs now and it has been allocated $1 million a year to get it going. That is one initiative.

The other that we have going is a 'boys in schools project', which is a joint Education Advisory Council initiative, which is an advisory body to the minister, the CEO of DEET and the principals of the Northern Territory. We have three positions set aside for three of our key principals to come on board. Critically, the initiative is about trying to identify ways that Northern Territory schools can improve boys' levels of educational achievement. We have formed the EAC side of the committee and we are getting nominations from principals now. We have a view that one of the critical reference points is going to be the information that comes out of this inquiry as well as us generating the local initiatives.

At the local level we have also got another project running which is called Boys Business. It is conducted by Dr Bob Smith from the NT Music School. It is a fantastic initiative that goes out and works in our primary and secondary schools, specifically involving music with boys. It involves a lot of physical activity. It does not involve a lot of sitting in perfect lines and sitting up straight. They do the haka; they get in and really get going. We are getting feedback from schools that it is making a significant difference to the self-esteem and engagement levels of the boys. There are school choirs for boys, and that is another initiative.

CHAIR—Could we have copies of that?

Mr Davies—I have got some information for you on it.

CHAIR—Terrific, thank you. Before I pass over to one of my colleagues, I have one other question. In the last paragraph of your submission, you referred to literacy—and you referred to this in your introductory comments. You said that, rather than tackling boys issues specifically, it should be profitable to focus on school literacy practices and assumptions upon which they rely. Could you elaborate on what you meant by that? What are the assumptions? Do you not think there is a place for specifically targeted programs for literacy for boys rather than a generic improvement?

Mr Davies—The argument is having a two-way bet there. What it is reinforcing is that the teacher plays a significant role in the literacy outcomes for the students in the classroom. In fact, the research shows that around 60 per cent of what kids learn is directly attributable to the teacher. It is saying that maybe we need to focus on the way literacy is taught and that some of the teaching methods that are used which may involve a lot of sitting down and research based work may not always suit the notion of boys activity. The assumptions being made there are that the teacher does play a significant role. Maybe it is not just boys and girls. I restate that this was written in 1999 through to 2000. The evidence shows that there is a significant gap between boys and girls literacy across the system. Obviously, we are going to need some targeted intervention programs for boys.

CHAIR—So you are not rejecting the idea that it may be better for boys than girls.

Mr Davies—Absolutely not.

CHAIR—My initial reading of that is maybe—

Mr Davies—That was one of the reasons that I was keen to come along and talk to this. In fact, we were having an each way bet there. Clearly, as the issues have emerged, we need some targeting if we are going to make a difference with these boys and, particularly, as Carmelita has said, for indigenous boys and boys in those middle years of schooling through to senior secondary.

Mr SIDEBOTTOM—I have a few questions to ask you. Kim might want to go on after me, and that might stimulate me to ask some more questions. What is the gender ratio between male and female teachers in the Territory?

Mr Davies—I was hoping you might ask that. I have got a set of figures that I will leave with you. I will run through some of the figures. If we pick it up at the 21 to 25 year age bracket—and these are classroom teachers in the Northern Territory of which we have 1,923—we have 84 female teachers and eight male teachers. That is what this data is showing. In the 26 to 30 age bracket, we have 267 female teachers and 41 male teachers. I can keep going across the data. In the 31 to 35 year age bracket, we have 217 females and 54 males. In the 36 to 40 age bracket, we have 216 females and 61 males. In the 41 to 45 age bracket, we have 258 females and 68 males, and on it goes.

Is that reflected necessarily in our promotional positions? Amongst our executive teachers—I can get you some more figures on this—certainly in the principalship there is a weighting towards males. In our senior teacher structure—I am talking here about assistant principals and executive teachers and I would need to confirm this data—we think there is a bit more of a balance in it. It is interesting because you go from this imbalance of males at the very early end, the teaching end, and then you get to the principal stage where there is not just a balance, there are more male principals than there are female principals. If you are talking about role models and children in classrooms we have children that could experience going through primary school and not have a male teacher. They certainly would have no chance of having an indigenous male teacher in the main. Would that be a fair comment, Ms Dunne?

Ms Dunn—Yes.

CHAIR—To clarify that, would those percentages roughly be the same for indigenous males and females?

Mr Davies—Are you talking about teachers?

CHAIR—Yes.

Mr Davies—They may be worse.

Ms Dunn—They are worse most probably. We could try to get those figures pulled together too. There are very few indigenous male teachers. There are a lot more indigenous women teachers. Most of our cohort is out in the remote communities where—I am making a big claim here—there are just about no men at all. There are a couple maybe.

Mr Davies—We would need to check that.

Ms Dunn—I would have to check that. Offhand, there are a couple in Tennant Creek.

CHAIR—If you could send us more information on that it would be very helpful.

Mr Davies—We would be very happy to help you there. Is that consistent with what you are finding?

CHAIR—The numbers of males and females are pretty similar. Roughly across the country it is about 25 per cent males, 75 per cent females, in primary and secondary and there is certainly a much greater imbalance in the younger age group although the 21 to 25 group might be even more unbalanced here than it is across the country.

Mr WILKIE—On the number of male versus female teachers, that is generally a trend that we have had across Australia. Do you believe that has had a negative impact on the education of boys? That is one of the key issues for the inquiry. Has that had an impact? We have had evidence that suggests it has not and that really it depends on the quality of the teacher as opposed to the gender of the teacher. I am curious to get your interpretation of the figures.

Mr Davies—I will let Ms Dunne go for that first for indigenous boys.

Ms Dunn—Because we do not have hard data, we would be generalising. One of the lessons we learn is that you need good teachers, good teaching practices and engaging curriculum. That is the bottom line. We do not have hard data to tell us whether or not it has impacted. I would say it may have impacted on the willingness of young men to go through school but, again, we do not have hard data because of the non-involvement of indigenous men in our schooling system. A lot of it is women's business and not enough is males' business. That is true of non-indigenous males' non-involvement in education as well. It may be gender specific but we do not have hard data to tell us that.

Mr Davies—My view would be that that would be a good question for the boys and I am sure you have been asking that. This is again anecdotal and not based on information that is supported by data but by going to the boys business workshop out at NTU. There were 70 boys up on the stage dancing and singing and their mums and dads all sat there. There was a discussion held once the boys had left about the wants of the parents. It was very clear from the parents in there—and I am talking mums here, in particular—that they wanted their boys to have an experience of a male role model in primary school and throughout their schooling. These statistics that we are giving you today would suggest that some children are not going to experience that.

Mr SIDEBOTTOM—Could I continue that a bit further. Is the gender ratio of teachers in the primary sector more fundamentally weighted towards females than males? Have you got figures for that?

Mr Davies—We have not got them on hand here but we can certainly get them for you. Speaking as a past primary principal, I can say the answer is yes, but we can get you the precise figures.

Mr SIDEBOTTOM—Thank you. Related to it, I suppose, is the training of teachers in what has become an emerging issue of literacy and numeracy. Could you tell us a little bit what the system is here? Does the department have a major input into what is taught in the curriculum for teacher training? To what extent is there a close correlation or relationship between what is taught and what is going on in the schools in terms of strategies for dealing with these issues, given the fact that you do have this 'gender imbalance' in teaching? I do recognise the importance of the teacher, irrespective of gender—clearly, evidence shows that—but I would be interested in your views.

Mr Davies—We are involved in extensive discussions with the faculty that deals with teacher education at NTU at the moment in relation to the sorts of standards and course coverage that our trainee teachers coming out of there will have prior to them going into schools for an internship program, which is one of the initiatives we are running in conjunction with NTU. One of the critical areas that we have asked them to focus on—as well as English as a second language, which picks up the issues around indigenous education and indigenous kids in our communities in particular—is behaviour management, which is a big issue for boys in our schools. Certainly when we look at our suspension rates and retention rates, boys are leaving school much earlier than girls.

In developing that relationship and making demands on them, we are not going to them and saying, 'Boys in education is a specific issue that we want you to deal with at the moment.' But in terms of what emerges out of this inquiry and how we gear up this project, all avenues are going to be explored. We have got a very strong relationship now with the NTU, and it is getting stronger, in relation to the requirements of the teachers that we get out of the Northern Territory University. Bear in mind that the Northern Territory also has teachers coming out of the Batchelor Institute of Indigenous Tertiary Education. We are working on a relationship with them, and Carmelita might like to add something on that. But, as well, a lot of our teachers are recruited from interstate, so there is that national issue about standards and expectations. We cannot necessarily have a direct influence on the state systems those teachers are coming from or on the interstate universities. We do not have a link with every university in the country.

Ms Dunn—One of the other things we might talk about, and one of the things we have also been talking about with NTU and the Batchelor Institute of Indigenous Tertiary Education, is that we have engaged three-year trained teachers and we are now asking for four-year, so it is about making demands on providers to give us what we want. Ken also talked about the ESL issue. I do not think it is just an issue for the Northern Territory. If we have a commitment to diversity, to a diverse Australia, I think all teaching institutions should be asked to put out teachers that have ESL qualifications. It does not matter if you go to Darwin or you go to Toowoomba, you are going to find an ESL student. And if we are fair dinkum about delivering to that diversity, we should be able to pick up teachers from Melbourne, Sydney or Western Australia who already have ESL qualifications, without having to invest in the professional development to give them those qualifications.

Mr SIDEBOTTOM—Has the department a specific strategy to increase the male gender of your teaching force?

Mr Davies—Right now, we have a recruitment and retention strategy in place. As yet, we have not set ourselves targets around male/female teacher ratios at all. Again, that is something, based on what comes out of this inquiry, that we might well be gearing up to do. We see that as being something that will be looked at as part of the Boys in Schools project that we have got going with the EAC. But does the department have specific targeting to attract male teachers as part of a direct effort to address the gender imbalance in our schools? No, not at the moment.

CHAIR—Do you have any ideas though?

Mr Davies—Answering this on my feet, the new government here is offering bursaries to teachers to complete their studies at NTU—

CHAIR—To go into teaching?

Mr Davies—Yes, to go into teaching. They are each worth $12,000 a year. We had a very under-represented proportion of indigenous teachers that went in through that, so we have decided to gear up on the indigenous area and make sure that we have a good representation of indigenous people who take up those bursary awards. We have not gone in and said that we need X amount of males and X amount of females.

CHAIR—So the bursaries are not loaded more towards males?

Mr Davies—No.

CHAIR—But there is a quota allocated for indigenous students?

Ms Dunn—We have not set a quota, but we are trying to target them because through a general submission we did not get enough indigenous applicants. So we are going back out again and doing some targeting.

Mr Davies—One of the things that this department found with indigenous education—I am talking historically here, and the Collins review clearly reinforced it—was that by dealing with an issue as part of core business, and I am talking here not about core business now but then, and by putting it away somewhere and just saying, 'We are dealing with these kids and we are dealing with the indigenous community,' we were not making the impact because we did not have enough targeting. Now Carmelita's area, in particular, is clearly gearing up to target and to push it as an agenda. If you were looking at a way of dealing with this issue, you cannot just mix it in with everything else. You have to pull it out and say, 'It is a real issue here, and we are going to target some resources to deal with it.'

CHAIR—How do you think it would be accepted by the teaching community if you were to, in offering those scholarships, allocate them in equal number to men and women and have a quota for indigenous and non-indigenous teachers as well? Do you think the teaching community and the student community would accept a quota that said that 50 per cent of those scholarships had to be for men?

Ms Dunn—In relation to indigenous education, I do not think that people would have a quota. We are 30 per cent of the Northern Territory population, so I do not think that quotas are things that people worry too much about. If you were going to make an impact on indigenous students, there has to be a role for indigenous people. The only way you are going to do that is to target as well. So it is really important to ensure that we develop good partnerships with indigenous communities, parents and individuals, as well as doing some targeting. As Ken said, we let the ball drop because we were not being specific in how we targeted.

Mr Davies—How do you sell a notion? You have to create a sense of urgency. It is not going to work unless there is a broad agreement out there that it is a key issue—if you create the sense of urgency. Certainly what Carmelita has been doing in the indigenous education area and what Bob Collins and Tess Lea did in their report created the breakpoint, particularly for this new government, to move ahead very strongly in that area. To sell it you need to create the sense of urgency. That is why we are critically interested in the outcomes of this inquiry.

Mr WILKIE—A comment on trying to attract more male teachers: I think that is where a lot of education departments would like to go. But it is curious that—and you acknowledged this earlier—there is no real data to suggest that gender makes a difference. It is a notion that you would like to have more males in. I do think Carmelita's comments were very valid, some of the best evidence I have heard yet to suggest there should be male indigenous teachers coming through the system. But based on this airy-fairy notion that we should have more males in the teaching profession, do you acknowledge that there is no hard data to suggest that should happen?

Mr Davies—There is no hard data around the difference that a male teacher makes as against a female teacher. The data clearly says that boys are underachieving as against girls. I think everything requires a balance and what we have at the moment is an imbalance. Whether or not that will make a substantial difference to closing the gap I do not know. Again, I am talking here generically about the targeting for indigenous boys. It could be said that balance could help; it is about a needed equilibrium, definitely.

Ms Dunn—If I can add to that—a lot of our indigenous families are single families and for a lot of indigenous boys the only male teacher they may see is in a classroom. If we are looking for role models, in a classroom it is really important. As I said earlier, a lot of male indigenous people die a lot earlier, or are in prison. There are a whole range of issues around indigenous boys. It is really important to find other role models who may not even be teachers—other indigenous people, indigenous men employed as gardeners in the school. They do not have to be teachers but good role models that are paraprofessionals, tutors in the schools. You can find good role models or indigenous men that provide supporting roles to schools.

Mr Davies—I would like to support what Carmelita is saying. We need to recognise that schools are made up of much more than teachers these days. At the previous school I was at, a few years ago now, we had a program where we got some fathers who were keen to help some boys who were disengaged. They came in and worked with us in the school. They volunteered their time and would come in and talk to the boys, sit down with them, maybe kick a football with them, maybe do some reading with them. They took an interest in them. We found that made a difference. There are things at the school level that can be generated but again it is this issue of trying to get males, and I am talking about fathers here, to engage with the schooling process as well. If you look at transition to year 1 areas, preschool in particular, there is always an overrepresentation of mums in there as against dads even though schools work hard. That could be a reflection of workforce, of a range of things. These role models, Aboriginal and Islander education workers and Aboriginal resource officers, are critical.

Ms Dunn—As you are talking about role models, a lot of the indigenous Australian Rules football players come from the Northern Territory. If you hold workshops, there are more boys than you could ever poke a stick at coming to school on that day. But we are looking for local champions, because it is the social capital and social infrastructure that we need to build up in our indigenous communities to engage young people to stay in our schools. I am most probably not telling you anything. Remote indigenous communities are very hard places to live. There is a lack of social capital and social infrastructure for indigenous people to want to stay there, so we are looking for some local champions. It is good to get a quick fix every now and then but, at the end of the day, you need things that sustain that local community.

Mr WILKIE—Mr Davies, you acknowledged that 60 per cent of what young people learn really comes from their teacher. I am a strong believer that it is really the teacher who makes or breaks the kids in the education system. What do you have in place in the Northern Territory to assess teachers' performance so that you can weed out the ones that are not actually delivering that 60 per cent?

Mr Davies—In the Northern Territory we have in place a system of probation for new teachers. Any teacher, even if they are an experience teacher coming from interstate, must go through a probationary process of six to 12 months—we prefer it to run the full 12 months—whereby the principal and the senior staff in the school assess the ability of the particular

ereby the principal and the senior staff in the school assess the ability of the particular teacher. We have a master teacher program called TEP, which is aimed at keeping our best teachers in the classroom: TEP1, TEP2 and TEP3—Teacher of Exemplary Practice program. It is peer assessed but it is a very rigorous assessment. Part of their responsibility, particularly in TEP2 and TEP3, is that they are required to work in the broader context of the school and also outside the school with other teachers, in terms of skilling and assisting them to deliver their craft.

There is also a system called Inability. If we have somebody who is not performing, with system support at the school level we can put them through the Inability process and move them on. Does this happen to a large proportion of our teachers? I would need to get some statistics on that for you. That is the process we use in the department. For promotion positions, people are required to go through a selection panel process which is merit based.

Mr WILKIE—Asking for a personal opinion is a curly one, but do you think the quality of teachers that we are getting from our universities now is any better, worse or different than it was 20 years ago?

Mr Davies—This is a personal opinion. I think that they came out of universities having the tools of their craft taught to them much more clearly. I was one of those people 24 or 25 years ago, and it was much clearer than it is now. How are we trying to address that? With the Northern Territory University program, we are developing a six-month period—we are calling it an internship—whereby graduates come out and will be required to work in the school with a teacher and with the school staff for six months prior to them gaining full employment with us. That is the way we are dealing with getting the balance of the theory and the practice in place.

Mr WILKIE—Thanks for that. I had a personal experience when I went through primary teaching some years ago. There was absolutely no emphasis on how to actually be a teacher. There was a lot of theory on a whole range of issues, but nothing designed around being a teacher.

Mr Davies—I have to perhaps balance that a little bit, too. We have had graduates out of NTU in our school. Given the full probation process—and schools have an obligation here, particularly in the orientation area—if a school environment is cooperative and professionally driven and there are high standards within the school, most teachers will lift to those standards very quickly. Coming out of a university always takes time to adjust, but, again, part of it is about the responsibility at the school level as well. In terms of the tools of the craft, that is why we are heavily involved in negotiations with NTU. We think there have been some shortfalls—definitely.

CHAIR—Are they showing a willingness to respond to that?

Mr Davies—Yes, absolutely. Professor Hill, who runs the Faculty of Science, Information Technology and Education, is very keen to firm up this partnership. We in fact are in the process of a secondment arrangement with the NTU to get one of our good practising classroom teachers into the faculty on a direct exchange project so that they can network with the people who are doing the university lecturing.

CHAIR—It would seem, anecdotally at least, that your observations are borne out around a fair part of the country. A lot of teacher training establishments are dealing perhaps more in the theory than in teaching the craft and the tools of the trade, particularly in training for teaching literacy and numeracy.

Mr Davies—With your permission, Chair, I will throw to Carme here, because we have another couple of initiatives around getting prac teachers out into our indigenous communities.

Ms Dunn—One of the issues for us, obviously, is getting and retaining good teachers in remote communities. It is very difficult for remote and regional communities to attract and retain expertise and good staff. One of the initiatives we are running this year is in partnership with the University of Sydney. We are offering some teacher practums to master teachers, and we have engaged about 15 master teachers with a view to doing their final practum for the next semester in remote communities and staying on in our system next year. We are also doing that with the Northern Territory University. It has been very difficult because, if you wanted to do your teacher practums in remote communities, you actually had to self-fund those practums. We are paying for those practums. It gives the principal a look at that particular teacher, but it also gives the teacher an opportunity to make some decisions about whether or not they want to be in remote communities and live in remote communities.

We were able to leverage some other things out of the University of Sydney—and we are going to be developing that with the Northern Territory University—but one of the things we said to them was, 'If you want to send teachers out there, we want them to have ESL qualifications.' If they were not going to have ESL qualifications, we could not see the need for them to be out there. They are also developing scaffolded literacy—I think it is called accelerated literacy now—methodology, which is much more appropriate to teaching indigenous students.

Mr WILKIE—This is another question in relation to boys versus girls. There has been some evidence given to us in the inquiry that the way boys learn is different to the way girls learn and that sometimes teaching methods need to match the gender. Is that your experience?

Mr Davies—I think, again, it is about a balance. If you get a really good quality classroom teacher working with kids in a classroom, then I do not think that that difference occurs. That would be my view but, if you were to get a disaffected lad in a primary school and if you had a role model or support model in the school who is male, that can make a difference. It does not necessarily have to be a teacher—it can be one of the support people in the school; it could be a dad out in the community who is keen to come in and help. When girls get into trouble in a school, they do not usually go to a male teacher, in my experience; you always have a caring woman teacher who they can relate to. It is fair to say that boys probably need the same as well.

Mr SIDEBOTTOM—Regarding the argument about the very good teacher and some of the evidence that I have looked at saying how important it is, it is interesting if you logically extend your argument. You say a very good teacher, no matter what the gender is in the classroom, will hopefully have much more positive outcomes. If we do have a problem with boys, and it is to the extent that we might think it is, then, in a sense—I may be wrong—isn't it reflecting on the nature of the teaching? In other words, if a good teacher has the strategies to be able to deal with both genders—and I know there are socioeconomic differences you have to look at and

whatever—and if we have major problems of disaffection and alienation, are the strategies in the average classroom up to putt? It seems to be a logical extension of the point you are making.

Ms Dunn—Having learned our lesson for indigenous students, most probably we have not done enough research and data collection. We have not paid any attention to the detail. What we should be doing is some targeting. Some of the programs that we are doing now are much more into targeting so that those things are not issues at a later date. It is the middle years where we lose indigenous students and, a little later, we lose the non-indigenous boys. What is happening to boys at that time is an issue as well—and the distractions and the expectations around boys.

Mr SIDEBOTTOM—Some of the evidence is suggesting though that the issue itself goes back further. It goes right back into years 3 and 2 and the literacy and numeracy issue as well. This emphasis we have had on middle years is almost pre-dated now. I do not know what you think of that.

Mr Davies—There is no doubt that there is a view up here in particular that, dealing with our indigenous cohort, it is critical that the kids get a good start to their schooling. It is absolutely fundamental in the way our preschools work and link into our transition programs which are non-compulsory school age up to five years and then into our formal year 1 classes which are for six-year-olds. The grounding that kids have and the confidence they have to achieve success start right there and then. There is no argument and no doubt about that.

I do not know that gender plays as big a role at that end of the school at it does later on. That is just my view. The middle years and the senior school are probably where it kicks in. Certainly, the quality of teaching at that end of schooling really has to be spot-on. It works best when the family is actively engaged in supporting and helping the child through that process. There is no doubt about that.

Because of our poor literacy and numeracy outcomes—and it is in the public domain—we have the worst outcomes in Australia. Our next nearest colleague state is Western Australia which has similar numbers of indigenous students, but their indigenous student cohort is only two per cent of the their total cohort, whereas it is 40 per cent in the Territory. If their achievement gap is 54 per cent of kids achieving benchmark and for our indigenous kids it is around 20 or 30 per cent, then we would argue, based on any measure, that we need some support to close that gap just on the basis of equity. We cannot just do it by ourselves.

In our literacy and numeracy area, we have a whole strategy ramping up now that says we are going to require schools to teach a solid couple of hours of literacy and numeracy every day. We want to know what that is going to entail and for it to be not just busy work. We are going to be targeting kids being picked up as falling out of the system. Evidence would suggest that there will be more boys than girls. They are the sorts of approaches that are going to make a difference rather than saying, 'You need to change the whole teaching fraternity.' I think it is the targeting and lifting and profile giving that is going to make a difference.

We have to remember, too, that, in Australia, the average age of a teacher is 45 years. Many of them have been teaching for 25 years. So there is a lot of experience there. We keep talking about going back to the universities because we are going to fix it at that end, but really we have got to work with the work force we have got as well. In relation to initiatives and things to get

change in place, that is where the sense has got to be, too. When I attended a MCEETYA task force on teacher quality at the national level, we discussed the cohort that is coming through our universities and whether we know how many males and females there are in trainee teacher programs. It is very difficult to get that data across the nation. We do not even know what the trend is three, four or five years out or whether it is consistent with what we have recruited here in this diagram. They are good questions.

Ms Dunn—Another initiative that we have is the early childhood initiative, obviously for indigenous students, to give early exposure to English numeracy and literacy. Seventy per cent of our cohort is ESL students in remote communities. So we are rolling out early childhood mobile preschools. Obviously, the other thing to do some work around is attendance and retention of indigenous students.

CHAIR—Have you had any indication of the success of the mobile preschool?

Ms Dunn—We are just gearing up this year. I am happy to get some paperwork together for you on Bob Collins's review *Learning lessons: an independent review of indigenous education in the Northern Territory.*

Mr Davies—It is a fantastic document; it is well worth a read.

CHAIR—Could you make that available?

Ms Dunn—Yes, we can get a package to you.

CHAIR—Thank you.

Ms Dunn—It told us that there were two areas that we really needed to get involved in and pay attention to, and they were early childhood and secondary. Obviously, we have gone on further in terms of the middle years. There are other things apart from the social context of indigenous people. In most remote communities in the Northern Territory a lot of indigenous people say, 'Education for what?' There is a limited labour market in remote communities. The prospect facing many indigenous young people coming out of our system is CDEP, which is the equivalent of Working for the Dole. I think that is an issue as well.

CHAIR—Yes.

Mr Davies—And it is probably fair to say—and Carmelita might be able to correct me on this—if you go where the jobs are, a lot of the workers in the health clinics, the schools and the council offices are either non-indigenous or those who are indigenous are mostly female. Would that be true?

Ms Dunn—Yes.

Mr Davies—So where the paid jobs are—

Ms Dunn—There are a lot of women in those jobs.

CHAIR—It is a bit of a chicken-and-egg argument, though, isn't it? A greater level of achievement at school will increase the opportunity for employment. But equally you say that there is a lack of motivation because of the perception of lack of reward at the end.

Mr Davies—Yes.

CHAIR—Kim, did you have any other questions?

Mr WILKIE—I would like to thank you for coming along and giving your evidence. I thought it was excellent. We should really apologise for not getting up here earlier, given the date when you put in your submission.

CHAIR—It has been very helpful, and good luck with what you are doing.

Mr Davies—With regard to the information that we have promised to give you, we might leave some with James now, and we will get the rest to you.

CHAIR—Thank you very much.

[3.11 p.m.]

CHRISTOPHERSEN, Mr John Lyne, Interim Chairman, Northern Territory Indigenous Male Health Reference Group

CHAIR—Thanks for your submission and for coming in. It is very helpful and we are looking forward to what you have to say. You have some introductory comments to make, and then we will proceed with questioning.

Mr Christopherson—I would like to make a few statements. The previous submission to the committee here began on some things that I would like to highlight. One of the things that Carmelita mentioned is the number of older people in our community and the state of health in our community. I would like to start off by saying that the health of our people and the education of our people are inextricably linked. It was interesting that you, Chair, made the chicken and egg statement earlier on. In our position, the chicken and the egg situation is: is it poor education outcomes because of poor health or is it poor health outcomes because of poor education? In that sense they are inextricably linked.

The average life span of indigenous males in northern Australia is 55 years. The average life span of non-indigenous males is 76 years. So there is a 20-year gap. When you talk about the retirement age at 65, non-indigenous people have 10 years in retirement to spend with their youth and their children as opposed to indigenous people, who are 10 years dead. So when it comes to an education process, we do not have our old people around to impart knowledge. To rely solely on an education system to educate our people is not the way it should be done. There should be a lot more of our community involvement in the education system. I say that in the sense that the colonisation process and what has happened—the imposition of the education process and the desired outcomes from that education process—do not take into account considerations such as that it is an education of the intellect, of the brain, but when it comes to nurturing the emotions and all that sort of thing there is no account for that sort of thing. That is actually part of being an indigenous male: to understand within yourself what it is you are. When you think about it, when somebody mucks up you say, 'What is wrong with that boy's brains?' but if he does a good thing you say, 'He's got a wonderful heart.' So there is something there that needs to be looked at more deeply in terms of the overall emotional and social wellbeing of our community.

When we talk about cultural education—the cultural roles and means and methods of education—it is not one teacher and many kids in the classroom. It may be many teachers and many kids but not specifically between eight and 2.30 with a recess and a lunch in the middle. So when it comes to young indigenous males in the education system, and particularly considering the figures that I heard earlier on the ratio of female and male teachers, it is probably little wonder that we are having great difficulty educating our males in the system. In fact a lot of our males need a male. It was highlighted here before with the role model type thing. If we do not have a male figure imparting knowledge to a group of kids that perhaps do not have their own models at home outside of the school system, it is going to be very hard for them to take in what they need to take in to develop their intellect for what is desirable outside.

There are a couple of other issues. My two mates dumped me; we were going to share this around. One thing that we need to take into consideration in the education of males in the community is the usurping of the male role as part of the colonisation process and that being marginalised in many senses. You have to face the facts that there is excessive substance abuse that needs to be addressed. Our male reference group is trying to come to terms with those sorts of things. We have got together in Darwin a group of men who are prepared to face that head-on. We can go into that a bit later.

Most of the things that are happening now have been taken over by women in the community. That is not to say that is a wrong thing. It is just that, because our blokes have been so marginalised in terms of health and education in particular, the women have sat up and said, 'If you blokes are not going to do it, we will do it,' and away they go. The women's liberation movement and that sort of thing have helped with that process, so we have become further and further marginalised. It has got to the point that if we are talking about male health and male education issues, which was the example in the previous submission, we have females representing males on all the different forums. That makes it really hard as well for our males to grab the bull by the horns and say, 'This is the way we are going, because I have there a bloke that is showing me the way.' They are the sorts of issues that we are trying to deal with.

When it comes to male health in the Northern Territory, we have had a couple of Territory-wide conferences. They are all underpinned—like I said, it is the chicken and the egg—by education and health. Those are inextricably linked. There is an education process to get all males to deal with health issues, but our main aim is to look at youth in particular when you take into consideration that in a period of five weeks, about two months ago, eight males in the Darwin area committed suicide. That is unacceptable. But how do we deal with it? There has to be an education process. It has to start at the very basic level. When it comes to health and education, the health service that I work for—Danila Dilba—is hoping to establish a new health centre. We would like to be able to have children come in as part of a creche program so that we can start on nutrition and education at a really early stage. The sooner we start on that as an equal process for health and education the better the outcomes are going to be later on. There were a couple of other things that the other blokes wanted to talk to me about but I have not got notes on those so we will leave it there.

CHAIR—Thank you, John. On this issue of male teachers, what are your suggestions as to how we could get more indigenous males into teaching?

Mr Christophersen—The way to do it is to encourage those that want to be teachers to be able to teach more than the 3Rs. If they want to become a teacher they should be able to take a bunch of kids down the creek and do some fishing and mud crabbing, or maybe borrow a dinghy or find a decent tree and make a canoe. They have to make it more than just the 3Rs. It may be more than just from eight until 2.30. Any kid at school does not mind going away to a camp but make it that they do that a bit more often and the learning process then is not just in the classroom, it is around a camp fire. It is not from eight until two. It could be up until midnight. If kids are more comfortable in their environment and the things they are doing, besides learning the 3Rs, there is a good chance that they will learn more. As it is now with the systems that we have in front of us, it is eight until 2.30 and these are the things that you will teach.

CHAIR—So you are saying it is a lack of motivation, are you?

Mr Christophersen—Not necessarily a lack of motivation but the structure does not allow for teaching things outside of what the curriculum decides.

Mr WILKIE—Far more flexibility needs to take place?

Mr Christophersen—Yes.

CHAIR—And that is affecting the ability and willingness to learn of young men and young indigenous men especially?

Mr Christophersen—Yes. Up at Coburg Peninsula we had a young female teacher helping another female teacher. We had nine to 10 kids at school, probably six or seven were young girls and three or four were young boys, but their school was not just eight until 2.30 in that little classroom. They would jump in a car and go down to the creek and fish or whatever but at the same time they would sit underneath a shady tree and read a book or do a bit of artwork. Kids used to get up the next morning and think, 'I'm going to school today', because there was a different environment to learn in.

CHAIR—John, of the indigenous boys who go through and complete high school, how many of those would go on to university in the Northern Territory?

Mr Christophersen—I could not tell you. I do not have any figures on that. From my personal experience and from what I have seen, straight out of school not many. But then there is probably a gap of two or three years where something sinks in and they think, 'I need to get a bit more education', and we get a few more then going into universities or higher institutions as mature age entry or things like that.

CHAIR—Do you have any idea of why not many of them want to go on to teaching at that stage?

Mr Christophersen—It may well be that it is because of the structure that they have worked in and how they have seen how things operate. It may well be that it is considered a woman's domain. But having said that there are some Aboriginal male teachers out there, such as Maurie Ryan and Frankie Spry who produced that document. A few others have done teacher training but to keep them in the profession is another story. Maurie Ryan is an example: he was doing good work in his profession. He was a housemaster at Kormilda College and then something happened and he drifted away from it. You would have to ask him but it may well be that he had concerns about whether he was actually achieving anything within the system.

CHAIR—We have got Kormilda College coming in next.

Mr WILKIE—Do you think the programs that are being put forward by the education department here will have a positive impact?

Mr Christophersen—We have had lots of programs put forward. I will be a bit blunt here: it takes more than a government department or agency to employ three or four Aboriginal people to come up with these programs and then try and introduce them. If you want to get something introduced in the community, it needs the community involvement. It needs the community to design and then help implement as opposed to working from the top down.

We have had a lot of different programs introduced from the top down. They are doomed to failure because people have not been involved in the whole process. All of a sudden this thing drops out of the sky: 'This is the new program.' What do you reckon? There is going to be negative reaction just because of that system. It remains to be seen whether it will work or not.

Take a school like East Arnhem Land, Nhulunbuy, where Mandawuy was the principal. In some of the programs that are happening there, the education process is not just eight till 2.30 for the kids. It is from the time they wake up till the time they go to bed, because they have Aboriginal teachers and an Aboriginal principal and their whole education process begins at home when they wake up and ends at home when they go to bed—as opposed to Darwin where people consider the education process to be eight till 2.30. You go there to learn your three Rs and then what happens outside of that is different. It makes a bit of difference.

I was listening to the previous submission. My young son is going through primary school at the moment, and I am going to have to start thinking about that. There is a possibility he will go through his entire schooling in the Northern Territory and not have a male teacher. I am involved in his education at home. We sit down, we read books, we talk about things, but it is not just an education in the three Rs. I would like to think that he would go to school and have a male teacher talk about the three Rs and talk about a few other things—emotional things or interrelations, social things, between males.

Mr WILKIE—Where do you think it would be more important that a male teacher be involved in children's education—in primary school or high school?

Mr Christophersen—It would probably be in the formative years of primary school. I would hope that by the time they get to high school they would have had the right form of education process—and I am talking about the emotional, social wellbeing of the person overall as well as the intellect of the person—so that they have the capacity to be able to deal with their personal issues and social issues. So, the earlier the better.

Mr SIDEBOTTOM—Reading the submission and the reports, it is a huge issue because of the whole question: what does education mean to indigenous people? You are right: it is the whole life cycle business. It does not just begin and end at a certain time. We talk about, and you have mentioned before, men's business and women's business. If we could try and translate that to schooling for a moment, do you think the concept of having single-sex groups or classes in more formal schooling is more appropriate to indigenous students, or don't you think it matters? Do you have any view on that?

Mr Christophersen—I think it should be part of the process in the sense that, maybe for one lesson a day or two or three or four lessons a week, you get all the young boys and the young girls and you sit down and deal with issues. There are issues that you know yourselves you would not feel comfortable sitting down in a schoolroom full of boys and girls and talking

about. So you suppress them and nothing gets done. You continue on, learning about the three Rs, and your personal or emotional issues just sit there not being dealt with unless you get home and you get the opportunity to deal with it at home, or maybe with your mates after school. But by the time you meet up with your mates after school it is not an issue any more and other things become priorities.

Mr SIDEBOTTOM—You talk about the three Rs almost as if it is a box of dice that we do not want to be mucking around with. Don't you think that reading, writing and arithmetic, the more formal subjects, should be a vehicle to allow boys to express how they feel, their emotions, the heart stuff you talked of, as well as the brain stuff—and also the girls? Do you think it might be that a good teacher can use the three Rs as a way of allowing young people to express themselves, male or female, rather than saying that boys cannot express themselves with the three Rs?

Mr Christophersen—The 3Rs are part of the education process that relate to employment prospects at the end. If you are talking about a system where you do not have to worry about employment prospects, do you need to be able to read, write and add up? If you want to leave school, go to university, get a job and earn X amount of dollars a year, you need your 3Rs. But if, at the end of the day, you are not going to have a job or some menial work, CDEP or whatever it might be, why do you need to have the 3Rs? It may well be that the emotions or the feelings of the individual are more important than the 3Rs. By emotions I am not just talking about how that person feels in themselves but how they relate to other people. It may be that you have a great emotional attachment to somebody—whether it be an uncle, aunty or grandmother—that you are prepared to drop out of school for. You may be prepared to forget the 3Rs and go and look after you grandmother until whenever.

Having said that, I understand that we are living in today, 2002, and you cannot get away from the 3Rs. If you want to watch TV or read what is in the newspaper or read whether your football team won on the weekend or things like that, you cannot get away from it, but I suppose there has to be a bit more balance. That is what I was talking about: school between eight and 2.30 is designated to expanding the intellect, and all of the emotional stuff is outside of that. There should be a bit more interaction because there is interaction between them. I know that from sitting down with my son and getting him to read. He says, 'What's this?' and he ums and ahs over it. If he read that on the page before, he becomes a bit emotional. I do not mind him becoming emotional about it, but you have to nurture those things as well. But if it were somebody else, they might say, 'What are you whingeing for? Stop your sooking. Get in and read the book.' It is a different story again.

Mr SIDEBOTTOM—I get your point.

CHAIR—John, you mentioned before the fact that education has to be from when they get up to when they go to bed, that the whole process is a learning process. Obviously, as you said, at a lot of schools what happens between nine and three or 8.30 and 2.30 is not relevant to a lot of boys. Are you aware of any situations where schools that do not have, say, an indigenous male teacher are bringing males in from the community to assist in other ways? For instance, one of our earlier witnesses talked about having men in the school in some of the other roles, helping out the gardeners and the maintenance people at the school and interacting with the boys in that way. They are showing the boys that there is a purpose in getting through school

because you get employment and so on. Are you aware of many cases of that sort of thing happening?

Mr Christophersen—Not really, not particularly.

CHAIR—Do you think there is merit in that?

Mr Christophersen—Absolutely there is. If I can just go back a bit, I do not think I was saying that school between eight and 2.30 was irrelevant.

CHAIR—No, I understand.

Mr Christophersen—There is merit in that; there should be a capability of learning institutions to bring males in. When it comes to role models I have a concern—and Carmelita touched on it earlier—about promoting football stars as role models. A role model can be a garbage collector: if he gets up in the morning, goes to work, does his job, comes home, feeds the family and kids, maybe has a beer and looks after and nurtures his family, that is a role model. He might be just a garbage collector but he is a role model. I think there should be more of that. It could be anybody who is able to come in and say, 'Look, I have this because of this, and part of my being able to achieve this was being able to finish off my education. Even though I might have left education early, I might have done this or that, there is no doubt that you need an education to achieve.' That is the end of it, I suppose: you do need an education to be able to survive in this world—it has just got to be an appropriate education. The problem is that most of our youth today do not see it as appropriate. They would rather be out hunting than sitting in the classroom, so we have got to try to learn to combine the two.

We took a bunch of kids, 15-odd youths, down to Batchelor last year for a youth camp. In town here we are pretty lucky because we can buy these straight bamboo canes from Indonesia, so we went and bought a mob of them—we did not have to straighten them on a fire—and the boys and the girls made spears. That was great fun for them. They learnt something. And at the end of the day they took a spear home and that is something practical that they can use: they can go down to the beach and spear a mud crab. If you can encourage that sort of thing in the school it will make a hell of a lot of difference.

CHAIR—How do we actually get that to happen, to get more male role models of the sorts of things you are talking about into schools?

Mr Christophersen—We started in the last 18 months with this Top End Indigenous Male Health Reference Group. We have got a bunch of guys together and we are working on the premise that to have a healthy community you need healthy families, to have healthy families you need healthy males. We have a lot of unhealthy males in our community, therefore we have an unhealthy community—and you can see that in all the negative statistics. So we have got a bunch of 20 or 30 blokes that are prepared now, we have got some shirts made up and we are going to get some business cards made up and put little sayings on the back of them. We have probably 30 or 40 sayings that we are going to cut down to 12, and one of them may be: 'Spend a lot of time looking for the woman of your dreams—why bash her when you find her?' That is dealing head-on with the issue of domestic violence. There are a whole lot of a little things that

we have got to start doing and there is a bunch of blokes prepared to do that. We need to encourage that.

One of the things that we want to do is, on every second Saturday night, go around to the pubs and the clubs. We are not going to tell blokes to stop drinking but just to moderate their behaviour, to drink less. We are going to tell them: 'Don't become so aggro!' And: 'If you start looking after yourself that means the kids are going to learn off you, but if you are going to carry on like a jerk, well, the kids are going to learn that.' I am working on the premise in relation to the kids in their formative stages—and I am thinking about my own son—that they are like computers: you put rubbish in, you are going to get rubbish out.

So there is a bunch of blokes out here who are prepared to do it. The Aboriginal and Islander Women's Shelter have heard about us. They want us to go and help them to talk to male perpetrators of domestic violence. That is a health issue, and that is the way it should be dealt with, but at the moment perpetrators of domestic violence come into the criminal system. There are underlying health issues that we should be dealing with. So there is this bunch of blokes prepared to do it and I think governments can only win by helping these males help themselves. And that is what we are trying to do.

We have had conferences in Alice Springs and Tennant Creek dealing with male health. People get down there—we had 250 people in Tennant Creek. Everyone sits around talking about the problems with male health out there, but when you sit down and think about it realistically, it is not the health problems that are out there but the ones within the group we had. We need to be able to sit down and start dealing with the ogres that are on own shoulders. We have to deal with those individually, then collectively, and then we can go from there. If we have a bunch of blokes who are prepared to do that, it would not hurt the education and health systems to start nurturing that and allowing males to help themselves and the community.

Mr SIDEBOTTOM—When you say you have a bunch of blokes who want to do this, who are they? You do not need to name them, but are they people who have an interest in this and want to help or have they developed strategies to help? Obviously, not only are you interested in this, but it is very important to you. In the culture, in terms of the men's relationship with the people that they are dealing with, is it accepted that they as a bunch of blokes want to do something and off they go and do it? Do you have strategies and training for this type of thing?

Mr Christophersen—No. There are probably 20 guys, of whom 60 per cent—probably 12 of them—work in the health field. There are other people—some football coaches and some basketball coaches—who are interested in the whole thing. One of them is involved in the control management area. He has a number of people who work for him around the nightclubs and so on. If we can get him involved and start talking to his employees, they are the frontline in the pubs and clubs. If we can get his employees to start taking notice of the behaviour of specific people, we can start educating these bouncers to have a yarn with a bloke—they can say, 'Hey, bro, you know you've got a problem; go and see these guys,'—or to come to see us and say, 'This bloke here has got a bit of a problem; you should go and see him.' We need to start nurturing that.

Mr SIDEBOTTOM—But regarding that men's business, is there an acceptance that, if someone were misbehaving, as you put it, and you came along, you would actually go into dialogue? Is that acceptable or would they ask what you were interfering for?

Mr Christophersen—There is going to be some negative reaction. There is no doubt about that. If we are going to be fronting up to a pub, there are going to be blokes at different stages of inebriation or whatever, and they will say, 'What are you sticking your faces in our business for?' We will say, 'We are not actually sticking our faces in your business, bro; we are here and we just want to let you know that if you have a problem we are prepared to spend our time to make ourselves available. You can either make use of that or not; we are not going to be in your face all the time.'

CHAIR—Have you made any sort of formal approach to the education department to get into schools across the Territory on a regular basis to talk to young kids about those issues—drinking, domestic violence, substance abuse et cetera?

Mr Christophersen—No. We are only in the formative stages at the moment.

CHAIR—Is that an aim, perhaps, to go in that direction?

Mr Christophersen—It is an aim. We need to look at the whole cross-section of our community. Everywhere that kids and youth are in one place at one time and we have an opportunity to talk to them, we would like to talk to them.

CHAIR—It would seem to me that that is the sort of thing we have been talking about with positive male role models. If your group were able to have access to schools, to go in to give real life examples to the kids of people they can look up to—people who are working in the community and are concerned about these issues—and to talk to them about the sorts of things that might lead them astray outside school, that would be very helpful.

Mr Christophersen—When I first started at the male centre we wrote to all the football clubs. We had just completed a healthy lifestyle program. We probably had 30 males who participated. It dealt with things like domestic violence, nutrition, substance abuse and a whole range of issues. We ran it after-hours, one night a week for about 10 weeks, I think. It was a really good program. At the end of it, I ended up changing my behaviour because of that program. It was a simple thing—the amount of fat you should eat. I love my bacon and eggs, but now bacon and eggs are out. That is just a simple thing from participating in the program.

It was after that that we wrote to the football clubs and asked whether we could go down and talk to the footballers. Unfortunately, we only got one response, so that was a real disappointment. You expect footballers to be at least halfway fit if they are going to play sport, but we are not just talking about their physical fitness; we need to look at the fitness of the mind, the body and the spirit—the holistic approach to people's health.

So that was rather disappointing, but we are going to pursue it again. It may be that we will look at having a couple of control groups—we might do some work with two or three football teams and leave two or three without or we might change the programs for two or three and leave a couple out. I think that will be interesting. It is all part of an education process and if we

can get some of that to start drifting through to the juniors it will make a bit of difference, hopefully.

CHAIR—Thanks very much, John. That has been very helpful. Best wishes with the program that you have embarked on: it is very important.

Committee suspended from 3.47 p.m. to 3.58 p.m.

KINSELLA, Mr Stephen T, Principal, Kormilda College

WILLIS, Ms Julianne, Deputy Principal, Kormilda College

CHAIR—Thank you for coming today. We appreciate your time and look forward to what you have to share with us.

Mr Kinsella—I have prepared a few things to bring to your attention and to give you some context of the college and what we are engaged in. Kormilda College is an independent, coeducational, multicultural day and residential secondary school—it is a long description—serving the people of the Northern Territory by providing an excellent, affordable Christian education. That is the basis of how we are organised and of what we are endeavouring to do. It was founded by the Northern Territory government in 1967 to provide access to secondary and further education for Aboriginal students living in isolated communities. Since 1989, it has been operated jointly by the Anglican Church and the Uniting Church, and it operates as an independent school. The whole campus was handed over to the churches and they have been running the college since that time. It still has a focus on providing a full secondary residential education for Aboriginal students from isolated communities but, since 1989, it has expanded its horizons and now has 800 students enrolled—31 per cent of which are Aboriginal. The rest are from the greater Darwin area and represent the whole cross-section of the Darwin community, so it is a truly multicultural environment in which learning takes place, but there is a great emphasis on the education of Aboriginal students.

With the special focus of this committee being the education of boys, I have some statistics to give you a bit more context. We started the year with a total of 805 enrolments—about 220 of those were boarders and I would say about 200 of those were Aboriginal students from isolated communities; the other 20 would be non-indigenous boarders. As I said before, 31 per cent of our school community is indigenous. We offer programs for those Aboriginal students at three levels: the first is the intensive English level for the students at the very low levels of English literacy and numeracy; then there are the supported secondary classes for more advanced students, to help them establish routines for and an understanding of mainstream classes; and mainstream classes themselves. We have students at all those levels.

In addition, we offer vocational education and training courses, which are proving very popular with our students, particularly our indigenous students. We are also offering what we call the year 13 program for students who graduate at NTCE level. That is providing them with further support beyond school, to help them get established in tertiary or further study within the context of what was home for them at the college, acting as role models for the students.

If I had to sum up our strategy for our Aboriginal boys, it would be to retain and to give purpose. Those would be our two main goals in what we are doing. Students with low levels of literacy are given intensive programs to try to equip them as quickly as possible to move into the supported secondary and then the mainstream classes. We have carefully structured our curriculum, again to achieve those purposes of retention and purpose. We have a wide subject choice for the students, particularly aimed at the needs of Aboriginal boys. We have very strong

links with work and further study through our VET courses, through our school based apprenticeship programs and through our year 13 program, as I mentioned before.

We follow a very clear pedagogy in our classroom, particularly focusing on the needs of boys. I guess you have heard lots of submissions about that area, but we are also shaping our curriculum to try to address those needs. We are supporting the curriculum with co-curricular activities that are attractive to our Aboriginal boys, to try to give them another reason to keep coming to the college and to engage in their study. We have very strong outdoor education programs linked with the curriculum. We have an emerging and very strong Duke of Edinburgh program. The Army cadets corps is established, as is St John's Ambulance. Sport is very strong at the college, and there is leadership training. All these programs are designed to give the students coming to the college purpose and to give them an environment where they are happy and able to engage in their studies.

We have deliberate programs of trying to engage in partnerships with the parents and families which, as you can imagine, is very difficult. Our students are drawn from over 40 communities across the Top End and communication is very difficult. Nevertheless, when issues relating to the education of the students emerge, we do all we can to maintain the connection with the parents, in order for it to be a true partnership and in order to have their support in achieving outcomes with the students.

As I have mentioned, we are trying to develop a very clear pathway from school to work, so that students can see why they are at school. It is not to be 'Kormilda-d' or to get this mystical secondary education which will open up the future and employment and wealth and happiness. We try to have very clear links showing where specifically Kormilda will lead to for those students. We have also had a strategy of trying to employ indigenous staff for the students, to act as role models and to give cultural advice. There is a whole range of reasons for that which I can go into if you wish. Again, the employment of indigenous staff is very difficult at a teaching level at the secondary level. When our positions are advertised we do not have people applying who are indigenous and have the ability to teach at a secondary level.

In terms of how successful we are, I would say we are struggling like everyone else to achieve better outcomes for Aboriginal students. We are having some success, but when I say that, please do not interpret that as meaning that we have the perfect answer and are achieving things no-one else can achieve. We are struggling like everyone else. But, if I can give you an example, at Kormilda in year 12 last year we had 10 indigenous students graduate at NTCE—Northern Territory Certificate of Education—level; we had many other non-indigenous students at that level as well, as you would imagine. Eight of those 10 indigenous students were from remote communities when they came to us and they started in our intensive English program. So we see that as a sign that we are developing programs which do work and are successful.

Another five students of indigenous background just missed out on getting their NTCE because of the rules associated with the award of that certificate, but they were able to pick up other VET certificates and so that was still a stepping stone to further study and employment for them. In comparison to the Northern Territory, in a ministerial statement put out by Sid Sterling recently, he said that in 2001 there was a total of 40 indigenous students who graduated with the NTCE. That means that we achieved 25 per cent of the graduates of Aboriginal background, which we are very proud of. Of that 25 per cent, eight of the 10 were from remote communities

and starting off at very basic levels of literacy and numeracy. So we are seeing students coming through and graduating at secondary level, and that is providing great role models for students, and encouragement to staff to continue working in a very difficult area.

In terms of retention—to give you another example of what we believe is a success—prior to 2000, we provided our own 'bridging course' for year 10 Aboriginal students to try to give the students basic skills to be able to move on to the workplace in some way. Our retention rate from term 1 to term 2, as an example, was about 65 per cent. By term 4, retention was very low. So a student of Aboriginal descent starting in year 10 who was not in the mainstream was highly likely to have dropped out by the end of year 10. To try to give purpose and direction to the students coming to the college and to help retain them, we introduced VET certificate 1 courses. The course was Aboriginal Preparatory Education; it was running in the year 2000-01. It was a general course in literacy with practical applications, such as form filling in, phone answering—very basic levels of literacy, but nevertheless specifically designed to equip the students to get into the workplace. We found our term 1 to term 2 retention rate, as the indicator, had increased to 75 per cent.

This year, we are offering VET courses on campus or in conjunction with a similar school nearby: St John's College. We are offering specific VET certificate courses in horticulture, sport and recreation, business services, and one called Access to Further Education. These have very clear pathways to employment for the students, and I am pleased to say that this year our retention rate from term 1 to term 2 was 100 per cent for boys and girls. There is a total of 30 boys in those particular programs.

Ms Willis—Also, those programs there are just the programs being offered to the students within the intensive English program, so we actually offer access to a whole range of other vocational education courses as well as those ones listed.

Mr Kinsella—But this is a particularly difficult group of boys—year 10 boys. You would have heard and will be aware of the difficulties that the students face at that age: boys maintaining engagement is very difficult while they are being attracted by the things that attract year 10 boys. Certainly, education is not one of those things that come naturally. But we have focused on where it is leading, and given purpose to them being at Kormilda and being engaged in their studies, and we are just ecstatic about that retention rate. That tells us that this is an area where we need to continue to develop. There can be a clear link between coming to Kormilda and where students go beyond Kormilda.

Coming to the final part of my statement, if you like, I would like to look at what our constraints are and what is stopping us from improving. Certainly the literacy and numeracy levels of students are very low on enrolment. For example, in the same ministerial statement I spoke to you about, I remember reading that only five per cent of the students at year 5 level from remote area Aboriginal communities are at the indicative level for their age. So that is something we struggle with. Students come to us to access full secondary education, but more and more of our resources are going into basic literacy and numeracy because of the crisis at the primary level.

There are socialisation problems with students coming and settling into boarding routines. It is quite a shock for students to come from remote communities to a community of 800 students,

with 250-odd in the boarding house. There are problems with social dysfunction originating in home communities. Whatever the problems are in the home community, the students bring those with them to the college. Again, more and more of our resources are going to problems associated with substance abuse, violence and social dysfunction. That is not to say that every student is like that. That would be a misleading statement to make to you. We have some excellent students who come in, settle in and do very well at the college. Nevertheless, more and more of our resources are going into dealing with social issues.

As I said, continuity of enrolment is a problem, and we are having some success in countering that. There is the potential for disengagement from the learning process which is common to all teenage boys. Aboriginal boys are no different to any other boys who hit 14 or 15 and find school no longer has a high priority. There are cultural constraints too, as you would be aware. Often there are cultural issues that impact on learning—ceremonial and other requirements. Another problem is the availability of indigenous staff, and certainly funding issues are always an issue for us. Under the ERI system we are a category 12 school, so funding is an issue for us. If we had more resources we would certainly be able to do more things, but I would not be the first person to sit before you and tell you that. I hope I have given you some overview of the college. If you care to ask us some questions, we will be happy to oblige.

CHAIR—Thank you. I'm sure we have a lot of questions. Just before I hand over to Mr Wilkie, just as a background question I would like to ask how you choose the students from remote areas or how they choose you and how they afford the school's fees if they are from remote aboriginal communities?

Mr Kinsella—We have an open enrolment policy, and there are places specifically set aside for Aboriginal students. I would say the fees of the vast majority of the Aboriginal students from remote communities that come to the college are paid for through Abstudy. So they pay their fees but it is because they qualify under Abstudy. That is the source of the majority of the students' funding.

CHAIR—How do they choose the school though? Are they referred by someone?

Mr Kinsella—If a student is looking for a full secondary education, there are probably three schools and they are all independent and provide boarding. Those are the only alternatives they have, unless they can come to family arrangements with local high schools or go through open learning or are able to access the community schools, which in some communities go up to the year 9 level. But, for a full secondary education, the option for a student from a remote area community is to come to one of the three private boarding schools in Darwin. Kormilda has been going, as I said, since the 1960s so there are a lot of parents out there who are ex-Kormilda students and so there is a lot of goodwill towards Kormilda and a lot of expectation that when their children and their grandchildren are old enough to go to school they will come in and go to Kormilda or to St John's.

Mr WILKIE—Thank you. I note that Kormilda has moved, as many schools have, to include year 10 in upper school. I am wondering why that has happened and what the evaluation has revealed about it. Has it worked?

Mr Kinsella—This is the first year where there has been a clear structure of year 10 being in the senior school, and so I cannot give you any long-term data on how successful or otherwise that has been. It is very much linked to creating a reality for the students that success at year 12 starts with good study habits that develop at early stages. In years 8 and 9, we can engage in holistic approaches to learning. But by year 10 the imperative of NTCE, or the International Baccalaureate that we also offer, requires fairly traditional and systematic study habits and methods. We find that being part of the senior school is part of creating that ethos of 'we are now seniors; we are now focusing on year 12,' and developing, if you like, that culture or tradition that 'the middle years have ended, we are now approaching senior school'. It is also trying to overcome the disengagement that occurs around years 9 and 10—for boys in particular.

Mr WILKIE—Does that appear to be working?

Ms Willis—Perhaps I can add something to that. There has been lots of discussion about the fact that at some stage in year 10 students turn 15 generally, and that is the end of compulsory schooling. Also, with the end of the compulsory schooling and the introduction of a range of options—there has been a growth in vocational education opportunities for students—from a developmental point of view, there is quite a distinct difference between a student at the beginning of year 10 and that same student at the end of year 10. There was an observation of growth and maturity over that time that was distinct.

With that combination of factors, we had a discussion at our school about how we could make school relevant and meaningful and also effectively prepare the students for postcompulsory schooling—senior secondary. Some of the responses to that were to diversify curriculum to allow students to have choice and to treat them more as adults as opposed to adolescents. The creation of the middle school was part of that whole push to create a senior school which was distinct and different from middle schooling. Another part of the discussion has been about this college considering primary education and that middle schooling potentially includes years 6, 7, 8 and 9. That is another dimension there.

Mr WILKIE—Thank you for that. I also note that schools are involved in programs like the Solar Challenge and also the motor sport program. How important has that been in motivating the boys in particular? From some of the student lists, I notice most of the participants are boys. Has that been an effective tool in motivating them in their education?

Ms Willis—I cannot say I can give you evidence of a direct link. I do know there has been growth of both of those areas, the solar car and the motor challenge. The number of students involved and who continue to be involved has grown as those programs have grown. The opportunities for older students who have, say, been in years 11 and 12, who have supported and been role models for students at years 8, 9 and 10 have been quite significant. So, just from observation and having been at the school for eight years, I have seen the group grow from perhaps four or five kids to something like 25 students involved at the Solar Challenge—and with the motor challenge it is the same thing. They are staying at school, potentially; I have not looked it up.

Mr WILKIE—So it does have some positive impact that you have been able to witness.

Ms Willis—Yes, and self-esteem in particular. There is one boy who comes to mind. In that part of the school, he was a real role model and leader; in other areas of the school he was really struggling. But he stayed through to year 12 and finished it successfully—and I think that was a big part of it.

Mr Kinsella—It is important to offer a variety of things to give you the chance to engage with a student, wherever they are at, and it happens in unusual and unexpected ways. There is a training sailing ship, the *Leeuwin*, for example, which calls in from time to time. It was advertised in a brochure that came through. We have a student in year 10 who has difficulties at times and is showing all the characteristics of a year 10 boy; is he going to be engaged or diverted in other ways? The head of the senior school said to him, 'Hey, have you thought about this?' The head of the senior school came back to me and said, 'He's shown some great interest and he's thinking of applying to go on this training ship'. Suddenly, in association with school and study, there is this other dimension that is interesting and positive, and it creates that overall environment of providing a happy experience in which good learning takes place.

Mr WILKIE—Is that the *Leeuwin* that operates out of Fremantle and comes right up the coast?

Ms Willis—Yes.

Mr WILKIE—A fantastic program; I have put a lot of young people on that myself over the years. With the Solar Challenge and the motor sport program, I realise there are a lot of private sponsors involved. I am wondering how those programs got set up and was there any funding from government.

Ms Willis—No. They have been an issue to the staff who have been passionate about it and got involved. We also had a sailing program. When there was the yacht race from Darwin to Ambon, our school was highly successful in that program, particularly with boys. Again that was because of passionate staff who were really interested and developed it. With the motor car, our business manager and one of our heads of residences are revheads themselves so that is how it has happened.

Another component that has had support from different organisations over the years, including government, is boys in relation to football. We are very lucky in that if boys have real aspirations for football championship—excuse my terminology—they have to come to Darwin to be involved in the local competitions. A lot of the boys see our school, and also other schools, as a pathway to that. They come to us for football; they do not really come to us for anything that Stephen has just talked about. It is the training programs in particular that they like because they all see themselves as football stars. And it does work. Edward Darcy who graduated at the end of last year is now down in South Australia training I think with Port Adelaide. There are real aspirations related to football that attract many of our students.

Mr Kinsella—That is probably the exciting thing about the figures that I was quoting to you before about the 100 per cent retention, term 1 to term 2. In the past, most of those year 10 boys have come in term 1 to play football and then would disappear into the communities, be involved in all the community sporting events and maybe reappear in term 4. But those same boys have stayed on and it is because they can see value and purpose in what they are doing.

That is an exciting thing. Football may be the reason for coming initially. But they may develop a passion for horticulture or sport and rec. They see the role models who have gone before them saying to them, 'This could be you. You could be running your own business or you could be involved in sporting programs,' and they do not just see Aussie rules as the only pathway to a future.

Mr WILKIE—It is the only football code worth following!

Ms Willis—Rugby has taken a really big place in our school as well as basketball and netball!

Mr Kinsella—I note this committee is turning nasty!

Mr SIDEBOTTOM—I did not actually hear what your student mix is in terms of gender.

Mr Kinsella—It's about fifty-fifty.

Mr SIDEBOTTOM—Is the boarding side of it similar?

Ms Willis—Same.

Mr SIDEBOTTOM—What about your teaching staff?

Mr Kinsella—In teaching staff the majority would be female. What we are finding is no different to anywhere else in Australia—that teaching is not seen as a profession for males—particularly in secondary education. More and more boys are choosing not to go in to teaching. That is now showing through when we interview. We rarely would get a male applicant.

Mr SIDEBOTTOM—Do you see this as having implications for education and your school?

Mr Kinsella—Absolutely—in getting positive role models for boys. Within 10 years people of my generation will have retired, or be very close to it, and you will see many more females in senior positions within the school. I am thinking of our own school: Julianne is Deputy Principal, the director of studies is female and more and more senior positions—most of the heads of department—are now female; whereas, going back 15 years, heads of department would still be a male domain. So what we are seeing is, I suppose, a feminisation of the teaching profession.

Ms Willis—It is because we are more intelligent!

Mr SIDEBOTTOM—What do you think, then, of the argument that it does not matter what gender the teacher is, it is the quality of the teaching and of the teaching-learning relationship that goes on, so does it matter whether or not there are enough males in the teaching profession? I am interested in your professional responses to that.

Mr Kinsella—I would say, in a pure teaching sense, male or female will be able to connect with students and good teaching would take place. But the curriculum is much broader than

learning your economics lessons or how to differentiate; and much of learning in schools is not just the hard curriculum, it is about life and how you interact with people. People need good positive role models. If you spoke to most people they would say they think of the teachers that they had as being among their important roles models as they have gone along. If you take away the male role models for some students, and particularly for some boys, they need a strong male role model to show them appropriate ways to interact. When you think of the number of non-nuclear families that our students now come from, where those role models are is not clear for many students, and so teachers are those role models. Did you want to say something, Julianne?

Ms Willis—I would probably agree with what Stephen is saying. I would also add that for any group that starts to become marginalised by our education system—we were talking about girls 20 years ago; and we talk about indigenous or migrant students being marginalised—if a teacher caters for the individual differences in their classroom and uses good methodology, then all of those students can feel included and can learn effectively. The reality is that a lot of teachers cannot, do not, do that. So that is more on the negative side of education. But also, linked in with what Stephen is saying, the picture of education is not just what happens in the classrooms, it is the whole student experience within the whole school experience. One of the things we have been talking about with our teachers this year is that just because you teach English does not mean that you are not concerned with the whole student. We cannot chop the student up into little bits in different subject areas and say, 'Okay, that is my bit and I am going to forget the rest,' because of that whole student and their interactions with other whole bodies in a whole variety of environments.

Mr SIDEBOTTOM—Again, I am drawing on your experience as experienced teachers and I value that very much. You have used the words 'not naturally interested' in relation to boys, and I do not know whether it is not naturally interested in school or in education. In your lifetime of experience in education, do you think boys have become more and more alienated from schooling? Do you have reasons for that increase in alienation? Do you think it might have something to do with the quality and nature of the teaching and learning that is going on? And do you think the feminisation, or non-feminisation, of the work force has anything to do with that? I am asking you for your experience, and it is putting you on the spot a bit, but we really do value this.

Mr Kinsella—I find that difficult to give an opinion on, except reflecting anecdotally. I would say that the pedagogy available for teaching boys now is clearer and more appropriate. We have the theory of how to teach and engage boys, which has progressed far from the chalk and talk days of when I was at school, for example. It is a hard question. I would need a bit more time to think about it.

Ms Willis—I am pretty keen to work this all out because I have an 11-year-old son who hates school at the moment. I would probably say yes to a lot of the things that you have asked. Are boys more alienated? Possibly. I think that education has changed over the last 30 years. You had, particularly in secondary schools, your academic streams and your technical colleges. Kids were split fairly early on. Some of that was to do with wealth and some of that was to with all sorts of different experiences. We then moved to a system where we were trying to provide education for all students all of the time. Many more students stayed at school right through to year 12. That was actually seriously encouraged. The curriculum documents in all of the states and territories around Australia were catering for any student who stayed at school to the end of

year 12. Certainly the culture of education was that you had to get your year 12 certificate before you could even go out to work. There were higher expectations placed on students: you had to have this before you could access. Whereas you hear stories—even my dad used to say, 'I only got up to grade 4 and I went out working.'

I do not think that the quality of education has changed. I think it has developed and our understandings are clearer. Whether it has improved or not would be another question. I am not sure. I think our expectations of all students were maybe too narrow when we had a system that expected all students to complete year 12 successfully. There have been developments in the last five years with vocational education and the notion of diversity, and also national accreditation and national systems of accreditation.

One significant change has happened at Kormilda College. When I first arrived there were all sorts of home-grown courses particularly for indigenous students that had no validity outside of the school. Lots of work and effort went into the kids working through these pathways, but they did not lead anywhere. The growth of vocational education, school based apprenticeships and that whole area, has challenged schools to look at really good links between what happens to you at the age of 15, 16 and 17 and then beyond. The conversation in our school is no longer: 'You've just got to get to year 12.' It is: 'Okay, you're 14 and you are feeling really unhappy. Are you actually passionate about anything here? Well, let's have a look at some of those options there. Do you realise that once you are 15 you can actually go here? Do you realise that you can go into the armed services?' Once a student reaches 15, there are many more options. There is not the stigma—and that is certainly one of the things that has changed, too. If you do not actually finish year 12 but you go on and do a certificate 1 or 2, certificate 2 is actually equal to year 12 except you can do something where you are passionate about all the time.

One of the most highly talented students that we have ever had at our school was doing the International Baccalaureate in year 11. It is supposed to cater for our more academic and university directed students. He was progressively doing no work, destroying everything, rolling cars, into drugs, sex and rock and roll—everything. You name it; he was into it, to the point where, at the end of the first six months, I was having meetings fairly regularly with him and his parents about what on earth we were going to do. Here was a kid who was off the scale in terms of IQ, but who was completely dispossessing himself of everybody and everything. The only thing he was really interested in was information technology. He loved his computer. So we ended up finding a pathway for him, through the university, to go and do certificate I and certificate II in information technology. He is able to complete that at the same time as he would have completed year 12. My understanding is that he is doing brilliantly. In the information technology world, that is equivalent to him having year 12 anyway. As far as I know, it has worked well for him. Those sorts of things opening up are really making a difference for many of our students who would normally either come out with a sense of failure or drop off—and who knows where they go?

Mr Kinsella—The distractions at the year 9 and 10 level have changed over time. Boys, in particular, have been at risk of being obviously disengaged. Girls have also been disengaged at that level but, because they tend to show it in different ways, it is not as noticeable. I will not continue—it sounds as though I am talking about stereotypes. But boys usually show their disengagement in an overt way and, therefore, it is obvious that they have become disengaged, as I was saying to you. An understanding in teaching that people learn in different ways and at

different rates is one of the big breakthroughs in my teaching career. We can now accept that if someone is struggling with oral skills, for example, they may be brilliant in kinaesthetic ways. People can have intelligence and learn and understand in a whole range of different ways. As we start to break down those institutional barriers of learning sequentially—everyone starts high school at year 8, finishes at year 12 and is judged by the magic mark that they get—the more we can get away from that then the more we will be able to cater for the needs of boys and girls.

Ms Willis—We have moved from education being a secret where only some kids are able to discover the secret and work out the answers at the end. With the development of competency based training, you have a list of the things that you have to do. It is the same as outcomes based or outcomes focused education. To me, that is also the potential transformation, because both teachers and kids can see what they are supposed to do to be successful. I am looking forward to those developments developing further.

Mr WILKIE—Julianne, you made the comment earlier that, in talking about teachers and their relationships with young people, sometimes they cannot or do not cater for the differences of the students. Is that something that has been brought about because of university practices and the way they teach teachers? We have had evidence that would suggest that sometimes the curriculum now used for teaching teachers does not actually teach them to be teachers. It teaches them a whole lot of theory about a lot of other things, but not the specific skills you need to be a teacher. I am curious about your comments.

Ms Willis—That varies between universities and training programs. We have had student teachers from some universities who have been absolutely excellent. They have come in and been so good that we have offered them jobs. Other students coming from other institutions have not been so good. I think the teacher training programs around Australia are quite different. I was involved in teacher training programs before I was at Kormilda College and I know how they struggle to find relevance and to help students move to being teachers. That whole dilemma is really complex. That is probably part of it, but it varies, too, from university to university.

Mr Kinsella—If you think about it, though: who are the people that are most likely to move into teaching? People who themselves learn best in a traditional academic way. Therefore, they go into the classroom after their teacher training and who do they warm to immediately? The clones that they are seeing in front of them who learn the same way as them. The task for us as administrators is to broaden the horizon of our teachers to see that while one person writes a really good essay or has good comprehension skills, there are other people in the class with other skills. Our task is to involve them in much more of a collaborative approach to learning, where people who are learning in different ways are sharing skills and learning from each other. That is the real task for us: to break the mould which teachers naturally have, because they have been successful in a system which is self-perpetuating, and to break out of that. If we can break that it will be exciting to see where education goes, because we would have people being successful teachers who, in a traditional sense, would be a head of department's nightmare.

Mr WILKIE—A question follows on from that—and it is probably one that you could answer but a lot of principals could not because they get their teachers as graduates and do not actually get to choose them. What do you look for in a good teacher? You get to choose your teachers, don't you?

Mr Kinsella—There is one other factor in the Territory: it is very hard to get trained staff to come and teach in the Territory.

Mr WILKIE—In an ideal world, what would you look for?

Mr Kinsella—The first thing I look for is someone who loves children and loves teaching children.

Ms Willis—Absolutely.

Mr Kinsella—If they warm to the children and have the teaching skills and the pedagogy to approach that then I think you will get good outcomes. If you have got someone who sees it as 'a job' or 'there was nothing else to do so I became a teacher' or 'I am unemployable unless I stay in this job', once you get those negative attitudes towards teaching that flows through to the students. The students are very perceptive. They learn best when they feel the teacher is on their side and is supporting them. If they see a teacher going through the motions, disengagement sets in very quickly.

Ms Willis—I have seen teachers use different methodologies and still be equally successful because the key ingredient is that they love the students that they are teaching and they actually engage with each of their students as human beings and individuals who have something special to bring. In our roles we are involved in coaching teachers a lot, particularly ones who have difficulties. If there is a key ingredient that is missing when they are doing poorly it is that they teach to a mass. They teach the same thing to that whole group and they never interact with little Johnny who is sitting in the back of the class. If you had asked me this question 15 years ago I would have given you a great thesis on methodology, but now I would absolutely support the fact that it is people who love kids and who want to talk with them as people.

Mr WILKIE—How do you identify the teaching staff that need that extra support?

Ms Willis—There are all sorts of characteristics. Often it is parent complaint. It is also that the teachers look stressed. Other teachers observe things. The kids behave badly. If you get a group of kids who behave perfectly for one person and then they are a riot in the next classroom, that is a fairly good indicator of what is going wrong.

Mr Kinsella—The thing I notice first is the aura of injustice that seems to surround the teacher. If there is one complaint from a parent against a teacher, you say, 'Okay, I will note that.' But if you constantly hear, 'My child was dealt with unfairly, not consistently,' or, 'My child's mark was low and they put a lot of work into it and they do not understand why', you start to get issues of justice. There is this aura of dissatisfaction. It all reflects that the students do not feel this sense of engagement—of love, of empathy—with their teacher. If you think back to the teachers you had, you know the good teachers, and they were your best mate in many cases or someone that you knew respected you and dealt with you fairly.

Ms Willis—Actually, it is not your best mate. We have got teachers who try to be friends with the kids and that does not work either.

CHAIR—Let us go back to a couple of things that are happening in the school. At what age do the students come into the school?

Ms Willis—They are 12 and 13.

CHAIR—How many of those have substantial literacy problems at that age?

Ms Willis—Indigenous students or all of the students?

CHAIR—All.

Ms Willis—Of the 220 indigenous students, for example, there are probably about 160 that have real literacy issues. In our mainstream area it is probably about 20 per cent of our population.

CHAIR—In addressing those literacy issues, what sort of approach do you take? Is it very much a phonetically based approach, a structured approach or a whole of language approach? Is it a bit of everything?

Ms Willis—It is eclectic; it is a bit of everything. In terms of our indigenous students, we are using some of the mainstream methodology that was developed in South Australia. It has been implemented in the Northern Territory as a professional development program for staff, and that has been the basis for these kinds of programs. It is a combination of genre theory—so it is actually making genre explicit to students, genre being the different kinds of texts and things that you speak or write or read—and literature courses as well as basic phonetics.

Our indigenous students with hearing problems do not hear specific sounds in the English language. A few years ago we had a program where we were working with the Menzies School of Health and we had an implementation of a sound filled system where a teacher would wear a little microphone and there were speakers in the four corners of the room. The system was not to amplify the sound; it was to equalise the sound that was coming. Even if the indigenous students were sitting anywhere in the classroom, they would be able to at least get equal hearing space no matter where the teacher was sitting. There was a phonetic program that was actually attached to that because of the linguistic differences between English and indigenous languages. In terms of our mainstream students—non-indigenous students who have literacy problems—we have a special education program which includes in-classroom support. Students are in classrooms and they have additional support in the classroom with them and some withdrawal, so it is a combination of all of those.

CHAIR—Has tackling the literacy problems that the indigenous students have when they first come in been reasonably successful?

Ms Willis—The success is consistent with the statistics that we have there, for all sorts of different reasons. One of the problems we have as a school is that, particularly in that area because of our student enrolments, our staff employment has been relatively volatile and therefore we constantly have coming in new people who do not necessarily have an ESL background, so we are constantly training them as well as implementing ESL programs and

intensive programs all the time. There are varying levels of programs being implemented because of that volatile context.

CHAIR—Looking at the senior level of the school, one of the issues we are really trying to deal with is the differential performance of boys versus girls. I know with the NTCE or the IB that the score you get is not the be-all and end-all of school, but what is the difference in the performance of boys and girls at that level? Also, what is the difference between boys and girls coming out of your school in the success of going from school to successful employment—full-time employment? Is there a noticeable difference?

Ms Willis—The girls from years 8 right through to year 12 in our school are higher achieving.

CHAIR—Substantially higher?

Ms Willis—In terms of numbers we have a smaller number of boys who are equally achieving, so it is proportions. It is not ultimate scores. But in terms of success I would say—I would have to go back and check this; it is on the basis of my experience over the last few years—there are probably equal levels of success in accessing either employment or further education. I have not noticed a distinct difference. There is a distinct difference between numbers of girls compared with numbers of boys who are in the high achievement bracket.

CHAIR—Is it the same with completion rates?

Ms Willis—No. They would be fairly equal. We have looked at that in particular with our indigenous students because many people have said to us it is the girls, particularly indigenous women, who are more successful. In our school that is not the case. In fact we often have more boys at year 12.

CHAIR—Maybe it is because of the sorts of things you are doing to keep them there.

Ms Willis—I am not sure what is going on in that respect.

CHAIR—What about in terms of the non-differential in employment and the differential that is there in final school scores? Is that differential greater or lesser for indigenous students than non-indigenous students? Does it stand out at all in one way or the other?

Ms Willis—No, I wouldn't think so.

CHAIR—So, for your indigenous students there are probably similar results in terms of employability between girls and boys but in terms of final score the indigenous girls are doing better than indigenous boys?

Ms Willis—No. I would say it flattens out more there for our indigenous students. But our indigenous girls are the ones who we are hearing are employed back on communities, in particular. Our boys are not necessarily.

Mr Kinsella—I spoke to you about our year 13 program for students completing the NTCE last year. This is the first year we have run it. We opened it up to all the students and we had three boys and three girls moving into tertiary education.

Ms Willis—One of the things that I have reflected on is whether because we are so focused on indigenous education that is why there are equal outcomes there. Because of the nature of indigenous education a lot of energy and time and effort goes into it.

CHAIR—How explicit is the Christian ethos of the school and does that have any effect, do you think, on retention rates et cetera?

Mr Kinsella—The Christian foundation of the college is very explicit, and is certainly in our material. We are employing the model put out by Peter Vardy. I don't know whether you are familiar with it. It is a holistic approach to Christian education that includes integrating the Christian values of the college into all aspects of the curriculum. There is no doubt in terms of indigenous parents in particular that those who have come from communities with a history of being run by missions in the past are looking for those explicit values. The Uniting Church and the Anglican Church being the foundational organisations for the college is an attraction to them. Certainly the Christian values of the college are a factor that people look for when enrolling their students. I don't know if I have answered your question.

CHAIR—Do you think there is any benefit there in terms of the retention levels and the success rates throughout the school?

Mr Kinsella—I would hope so but I have no basis for saying whether it is or not.

Ms Willis—I can do a bit of a comparison. I do not want to do a 'state versus independent' sort of fight but, having worked in state education and then in a Christian school, one of the differences that I see in a Christian school is being able to talk about things that you cannot actually talk about in a state school a lot of the time—that is, about love and death and compassion and ethics and a whole range of things that in my past I have not been able to talk about with kids. A very significant part of a whole human being's life is their spirituality.

Mr Kinsella—We like to deal with our students in a holistic way, and that, by definition, means there is a spiritual dimension. Apart from the curriculum, as I described, we have two chaplains who are heavily involved in the pastoral care of the students. For example, if there is a death in the community, we can get the students together in our chapel and our chaplains can work through the issues with them, pray with them and give them the support that they would find in some of their communities as well.

CHAIR—Are the chaplains men or women?

Mr Kinsella—They are both male, at this stage.

CHAIR—Back to the issue of positive male role models and so on, do you think that is positive and helpful?

Mr Kinsella—Yes. We have female counselling staff as well.

Ms Willis—To be a member of our school community you do not have to be a practising Christian, however. We have many students and families who come to us not necessarily because we are a Christian school and they do not leave us because they feel that we have tried to convert them. The Vardy program is very much about ethics and values across the curriculum. It includes explorations of the Christian faith and other faiths as well. If you come to our school, you are not confronted with the in-your-face notion 'You have to be a Christian; otherwise you're a baddie.' The positive side of it would be about the whole relationship building that happens there.

Mr Kinsella—There is a very clear Christian context to the college, though. We have regular chapel services as part of our assemblies. Daily devotions are placed on the notice sheet for staff to use with their home groups and so on. There is a very clear Christian context but it is to help students work out their faith themselves rather than proselytising.

Ms Willis—Our past chaplain would call it 'critical dialogue'.

Mr SIDEBOTTOM—We could have an interesting debate on that one. I would hope that values, love and relationships, and all those types of things would be part and parcel of a classroom and issues that belong to everybody. I would hope that good teachers would be part and parcel of that. If you felt in the past that you could not do that as a teacher, I reckon there was something wrong with the system somewhere.

Mr Kinsella—Very clearly, in the early days of my teaching with the department in New South Wales, to actively promote a particular set of values was discouraged. We had to teach in a value-free way, which was a nonsense.

Mr SIDEBOTTOM—I do not know how you can do that.

Mr Kinsella—As each teacher brought their own values to the classroom, there was inconsistency quite often between teachers and classrooms. Having a school that has a clear faith statement and mission statement sets the parameters for the values that are expressed in teaching. That is not to say there are not differences, but there is a basis from which the value formation is coming.

Ms Willis—I was not meaning to set up that debate because I am a passionate state education person as well.

Mr SIDEBOTTOM—I did not take it that way. Have you trialled or looked at single-sex classes? Have you seen any possible need for that?

Ms Willis—We have talked about it a lot. Certainly, there has been an argument for it with our indigenous classes, too. I suppose there has been a principle decision made every time we have had that debate about making sure that we cater for individual differences in our classes. The more you try to separate and group students into what are perceived as homogeous groups, the more you set up an idea that you can actually treat them as a homogenous group. We did not want to go down that path. We want to keep people thinking that it is diverse and complex and we all have to cater for individual differences. Up until Stephen came, the debate always ended up at that point and it has basically continued. That is his position, too.

Mr Kinsella—We are a coeducational school and I am encouraging professional development for staff to be teaching in a way that addresses multiple ways of learning that the students have in the classroom—not an artificial divide of male/female, although I know where your question is coming from. If someone came to me with a proposition to trial something and it was in an area where there was obviously no success, I would give it consideration. But it is a coeducational school and I would not be looking to just willy-nilly separate boys from girls at this stage.

Mr SIDEBOTTOM—I was interested in the differential in learning and particularly if, in the cases of boys being alienated, it might be a literacy program, and some of those emotional, spiritual things can come out in boys talking amongst boys and so forth. I was just curious and you have obviously discussed it.

Mr Kinsella—There are times in our pastoral management of the students where we will get the boys aside and the girls aside. I certainly know amongst our indigenous boys there have been times when our support staff will take the boys away and speak in a culturally appropriate way about things that they are doing.

Ms Willis—That happens in health education as well, so for specific purposes classes are split. And, interestingly, in one of the classes that we talked about, where our indigenous students do vocational programs on campus, it is actually all boys. That is not by choice; that has been by definition of the groupings that have been made.

Mr Kinsella—We have not trialled a boys only English class to improve English results, so no, we are not heading that way.

CHAIR—You mentioned support staff. Have you got specific indigenous support staff there to help?

Mr Kinsella—Yes.

CHAIR—But they are not necessarily trained teachers?

Ms Willis—No.

Mr Kinsella—No, we do not get applicants.

CHAIR—Do you think that is a possible way ahead for schools who cannot get indigenous teachers but still need cultural male role models for their indigenous students—to have support staff there?

Mr Kinsella—Definitely.

CHAIR—Does it happen very broadly throughout the Territory, or not? Does it happen in other schools?

Ms Willis—My understanding is that the Territory has got an Aboriginal and Islander education worker program and that people are deployed in almost every school in the Northern Territory.

CHAIR—In that sort of role?

Ms Willis—Yes.

CHAIR—Any final comments?

Mr Kinsella—Yes, I need to reflect on one thing. Julianne picked me up when I was searching for the right words: I talked about the best teachers being your best mate, and I do not believe that for one minute, but what I was searching for was the issue of respect and empathy. I would hate it being said that the best teachers are the best mates of the kids; I actually discourage that.

CHAIR—I understand that. You will not be misquoted: we are the ones who are misquoted frequently, not you. Thank you both very much for the time that you have spent with us; it has been very valuable and there have been some very helpful insights. You are obviously doing some good things with retention rates. What has happened to retention rates here is obviously very encouraging, so keep up the good work.

Mr Kinsella—Do you want me to read the list of constraints again?

Ms Willis—More money?

CHAIR—We are aware of that one. Thank you very much.

Mr Kinsella—And thank you for the opportunity.

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

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

Committee adjourned at 5.09 p.m.