



COMMONWEALTH OF AUSTRALIA

Official Committee Hansard

**HOUSE OF  
REPRESENTATIVES**

STANDING COMMITTEE ON EDUCATION AND TRAINING

**Reference: Education of boys**

FRIDAY, 10 MAY 2002

PALMERSTON

SCHOOL FORUM AND PUBLIC HEARING

BY AUTHORITY OF THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

## **INTERNET**

The Proof and Official Hansard transcripts of Senate committee hearings, some House of Representatives committee hearings and some joint committee hearings are available on the Internet. Some House of Representatives committees and some joint committees make available only Official Hansard transcripts.

The Internet address is: **<http://www.aph.gov.au/hansard>**

To search the parliamentary database, go to: **<http://search.aph.gov.au>**

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

**Friday, 10 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**

|   |             |
|---|-------------|
| <b>MACANDREW, Mr Ross, Assistant Principal, Palmerston High School .....</b>  | <b>1307</b> |
| <b>MACLEAN, Mr David, Deputy Principal, Palmerston High School .....</b>      | <b>1307</b> |
| <b>MACLEAN, Ms Frankie, Assistant Principal, Palmerston High School .....</b> | <b>1307</b> |
| <b>MONKHOUSE, Ms Judy, Senior Teacher, Palmerston High School .....</b>       | <b>1307</b> |
| <b>OVERELL, Mr Craig, Senior Teacher, Palmerston High School.....</b>         | <b>1307</b> |
| <b>POLLOCK, Mr Aaron, Student, Palmerston High School .....</b>               | <b>1307</b> |
| <b>ROGAN, Ms Anne, Principal, Palmerston High School.....</b>                 | <b>1307</b> |
| <b>SKYVINGTON, Ms Susan, Counsellor, Palmerston High School .....</b>         | <b>1307</b> |
| <b>WADROP, Mr Joshua, Student, Palmerston High School.....</b>                | <b>1307</b> |
| <b>ZEHNTNER, Ms Margaret, Teacher/Librarian, Palmerston High School.....</b>  | <b>1307</b> |
| <b>SCHOOL FORUM .....</b>   | <b>1293</b> |



**Committee met at 9.48 a.m.****Student Representatives**

Bryant Cocker

Aaron Fleming

Danny Goetze

Floyd Haustorfer

Christopher Hurst

Benjamin Koller

Samuel Locke

Jon Malone

Stephen Ortner

Aaron Pollock

Jay Rossiter

Blake Sanders

Aaron Smith

Russell Sully

Saksit Thongham

Joshua Wadrop

Scott Winter

**Teacher Representative**

Anne Rogan, School Principal

**CHAIR**—Welcome. Thank you, boys, for coming in. Just to fill you in, you are probably wondering why we came up from Canberra to Darwin. A lot of people around the country have been saying that boys are having a harder time in schools than girls and that results are not as good for boys as for girls. So we are trying to find out whether that is true and, if it is true, what we can do about it. Are there any sorts of ideas? We figure that, instead of just sitting in

Canberra and talking to people from the education department and just reading books about it, we ought to get out and see what is going on.

Your school invited us here, so we thought we would come up and see what is happening here. We are just going to ask you a few questions. If you can tell us what you think, and be really honest about what you think, that will be really helpful to us and hopefully help the sorts of conclusions we might come to and answers that might help boys. The three of us will ask you some questions. Is here a good place to live?

**Aaron Fleming**—It is all right living up here. It gets fairly cold in the dry season.

**CHAIR**—Does it get cold?

**Aaron Fleming**—It gets fairly cold up here.

**Mr WILKIE**—What is cold?

**Aaron Fleming**—Not your cold. It gets around 20. I have been to Sydney a few times.

**CHAIR**—Sydney gets pretty nasty and Canberra is even worse. Canberra in winter gets down to minus three or four.

**Aaron Fleming**—I would love that.

**Mr WILKIE**—Last year we went down there and when we got off the plane on Sunday night, it was snowing and they were playing rugby in the snow. It was pretty cold.

**CHAIR**—Good on you, Aaron. Does someone else want to tell us what you like about living in Darwin?

**Bryant Cocker**—It is not crowded.

**Joshua Wadrop**—Not so many people. It is just the lifestyle. It is laid back; there is not as much pressure as there is in Sydney.

**CHAIR**—Do any of you come from Sydney or Brisbane?

**Unknown Student**—From Victoria.

**CHAIR**—That was a good move.

**Unknown Student**—From the Gold Coast.

**CHAIR**—You think Victoria is better than up here? Is that because you do not like the heat?

**Mr WILKIE**—That is funny; the people down there do not like the cold and you guys do not like the heat.

**Unknown Student**—It gets pretty hot. I just wish it rained a bit more.

**CHAIR**—How many of you work part time while at school? How many hours a week do you work and what do you do?

**Aaron Pollock**—Usually at weekends, or sometimes after school, I build semi-trailers. I work as a professional's assistant at a golf club. I usually do that every afternoon after school.

**CHAIR**—Very good. Do you think that is going to lead to a job in one of those areas?

**Aaron Pollock**—No.

**CHAIR**—Is that the idea or is it just to get a bit of pocket money?

**Aaron Pollock**—Yes.

**Mr WILKIE**—Do you like to play golf? What is your handicap?

**Aaron Pollock**—Yes. Eight.

**Mr WILKIE**—I am not playing golf with you.

**CHAIR**—How old are you?

**Aaron Pollock**—17.

**CHAIR**—That is pretty good. Who else has got a job? Do you want to tell us about that?

**Joshua Wadrop**—I work at the local pool shop with chemicals and stuff. I also do some work for Top End Sounds and other companies like that. I am interested in electronics and that sort of gear. I did my VET course in electronics last year. It would be nice if I was allowed to follow that up in year 12, but there is nothing offered.

**CHAIR**—The VET course was not offered?

**Joshua Wadrop**—It is only for year 11.

**CHAIR**—How many of you see that as a way to go in getting a job—by doing it through a VET course and then carry on and get a job in that field? Is that a pretty common way ahead here?

**Joshua Wadrop**—I do not think many people have done the VET course.

**CHAIR**—Who has done a VET course? Is it only year 11?

**Mr SIDEBOTTOM**—When we came in and I asked a couple of people about being in the library, they said that they did not come here because they did not read. Is that true? How many here read books?

**Aaron Fleming**—It depends on the book. If it is all right, I will read it. If it is not, I will just stick it back.

**Mr WILKIE**—Who has a book that they are actually reading for a class? Can you tell us what the book is?

**Benjamin Koller**—I am reading *Fortress* by Gabrielle Lord.

**Mr WILKIE**—Who else is studying that? Who is into sport? Who is into Aussie Rules or Rugby?

**Ms Rogan**—There is a competition on at the moment for Aussie Rules. About 15 or 16 of the boys are playing at the moment.

**Mr WILKIE**—Excellent. It is good to see so many people playing Aussie Rules. We were discussing this yesterday. We are from different parts of the country, so some like Rugby, some like Aussie Rules and some like League.

**Mr SIDEBOTTOM**—Could we go back to my question. This guy always leads me astray. I am interested in what you read, if you read at all, and how you get your information if you do not do a lot of reading. I am interested in how you get your information.

**Unknown Student**—From the Internet.

**Mr SIDEBOTTOM**—How many people have access to the Internet at home? How many use it a lot? How many use it a lot more times than, say, reading books? You must read it off the screen then. Is that right? You have got to get the information from somewhere. Kim asked a question earlier about whether any of you were reading books, like a novel. Apart from Ben, how many others are reading books? Could you tell me what you are reading?

**Bryant Cocker**—I am reading a series called the *Series of Unfortunate Events*.

**Mr SIDEBOTTOM**—What is it about?

**Bryant Cocker**—It is about three children. They are orphans. Their parents perished in a fire. They have to go to different aunts and relatives. One of their relatives wants to get his hands on their fortune.

**Mr SIDEBOTTOM**—Nasty!

**CHAIR**—What about the books that you are asked to read in your English classes? Are they generally interesting or not?



**Joshua Wadrop**—It depends on which level of English you are doing.

**Mr SIDEBOTTOM**—Tell us about that.

**Joshua Wadrop**—One book was *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest* for English studies.

**CHAIR**—Was that interesting?

**Joshua Wadrop**—It is a little better than some of the ones I have had to do.

**CHAIR**—Tell us about some of the ones that you had to do that really were not very interesting. Just give us an example.

**Joshua Wadrop**—*A Farewell to Arms*. It is an extremely slow, soppy love story that does not seem to go anywhere.

**CHAIR**—Would most of you agree with that, that you do not want to read slow, soppy love stories? Do you think too many of the books that you do read in English are like that sort of thing rather than the sorts of things you would rather read?

**Joshua Wadrop**—The teachers give us the older texts that they have all read and have studied for years. So that means we miss out on a lot of the modern stuff.

**Mr WILKIE**—Is anyone into *Harry Potter*? Does anyone read that?

**CHAIR**—Are they good?

**Aaron Fleming**—They are all right.

**CHAIR**—Do you have much choice in what you read, say, in your English classes? Do you get a choice? Do you get to pick?

**Bryant Cocker**—No, not really.

**CHAIR**—Do you think that if you could you might be more interested in reading them?

**Aaron Fleming**—Yes. I think that if people got to choose the books that they wanted to read people would be reading a lot more.

**CHAIR**—Do you think the girls read more than the boys?

**Aaron Fleming**—Definitely.

**CHAIR**—Why do you think that happens?

**Joshua Wadrop**—Because we are out doing other things.

**CHAIR**—Like working?

**Joshua Wadrop**—Work and sport.

**CHAIR**—Girls do not play as much sport? Not as many girls have a job?

**Joshua Wadrop**—I feel that a lot of the girls spend more time doing school work and other things where they do not leave the house too much. Every weekend blokes are normally out playing sport, or most are, so that cuts out a lot of our time.

**CHAIR**—So it is not that you do not like reading; it is just that you do have not have time to read because you are too busy doing other things?

**Joshua Wadrop**—Pretty much.

**Mr SIDEBOTTOM**—How many of you watch less television now because you use the Internet more? A fair number. How many of you think that you watch a fair bit of television? All right.

**Mr WILKIE**—What sorts of sites would you usually look at on the web? Are there any particular sorts of sites that you go for?

**Unknown Student**—Non-educational.

**Mr SIDEBOTTOM**—Do you mean non-school or non-educational?

**Aaron Pollock**—Car sites and sports sites.

**Unknown Student**—Chat sites.

**Mr WILKIE**—Who is into cars? I am one of them; I used to race them.

**Benjamin Koller**—Cartoons and things like that on computers.

**Mr WILKIE**—Would you indicate again: have most people been at Palmerston High School for the whole of their upper schooling? Who has been here full time since starting high school? Okay. Is there anyone who has not? Okay.

**CHAIR**—Some people seem to be saying that girls do better than boys at school. Do you think that is true?

**Christopher Hurst**—Yes.

**CHAIR**—How many of you think that is true? The senior guys do not, so maybe it is just in the junior school. Why do you think girls do better?

**Christopher Hurst**—Girls have bigger brains!

**CHAIR**—I would not admit to that. What other reasons do you have to think that might be the case?

**Christopher Hurst**—They pay attention to the teachers.

**CHAIR**—Why do you think that is?

**Christopher Hurst**—We just sit there and draw pictures and that while they—

**CHAIR**—Why are you not as interested as they are?

**Scott Winter**—We just get bored.

**CHAIR**—What can we do? If you could run the school for a while, what would you do so you could still learn but so you were not as bored?

**Unknown Student**—Make a water park.

**CHAIR**—What sorts of things could you suggest for still being in the classroom and not being so bored? Are there ways we could do that?

**Bryant Cocker**—Video games.

**CHAIR**—Would you learn much from a video game?

**Bryant Cocker**—Hand and eye coordination.

**Mr SIDEBOTTOM**—You would be on that 24 hours a day, if you could, would you?

**Bryant Cocker**—Yes.

**Mr SIDEBOTTOM**—You were muttering something about what you might be able to do. What do you think?

**Aaron Pollock**—To make the classroom more enjoyable?

**Mr SIDEBOTTOM**—Yes.

**Aaron Pollock**—Get better teachers.

**Joshua Wadrop**—Move away from the constant notes. There has to be some other way of learning than just copying page after page into your book.

**CHAIR**—So too much of that happens?

**Unknown Student**—Yes.

**CHAIR**—Probably every boy around the country would say that. I do not think that is a problem just here. Why do you think it is that girls do not seem to have as much trouble with that as boys do?

**Joshua Wadrop**—They have a greater attention span.

**Aaron Fleming**—They don't get as easily distracted.

**Aaron Pollock**—They don't get as bored as fast.

**Mr WILKIE**—Someone made the comment that one of the things we could do is get better teachers. I remember when I was in school sometimes you had a teacher that you would really work for and sometimes you had a teacher that you could not be bothered with. Without mentioning names, what makes a good teacher and what makes a bad teacher? I would not mind hearing from all of you on that.

**Joshua Wadrop**—One that is always happy to help when you ask for help with the work after you have attempted it; one that can explain a way to get around it. I find that some of the teachers just keep restating the question and do not really explain it in another way. Because you are already having trouble with the way they have first explained it, you need help with that, and if you cannot get that help you are in trouble. I find that is the biggest thing.

**Aaron Pollock**—A good teacher is easy going and a bit laid back. They just kick back and help you a lot if you ask for it and point you in the right direction. Most of the teachers I have are like that. I am pretty happy.

**Jon Malone**—I think a good teacher is someone that is lenient on homework and is fun in class, someone that you can have fun with as well as being serious with, and someone that likes to have a bit of fun and can still have fun while doing work.

**Jay Rossiter**—Just a good sense of humour and younger. Some of the old teachers get a bit annoying sometimes.

**Bryant Cocker**—I like teachers that are fun, not serious, that are just laid back and let you do what you want instead of making you copy page after page out of a maths book or an English book.

**Aaron Fleming**—Someone that does not give you as much homework. Homework is basically not learning anything, just doing stuff that you have already done in class. That is all homework is. So someone that does not give you as much homework and that is fun in class.

**Floyd Haustorfer**—A teacher that is not too uptight, that is fun and lets you muck around a bit instead of copying information all the time.

**Christopher Hurst**—I reckon a good teacher is someone that, if you are really good in class and you do all your work, takes you out and has some fun with you in the gym. A bad teacher

just gives you a lot of homework. You get so much work into your head that it pops out of your ears and you lose it all.

**Scott Winter**—A teacher who lets you talk to your friends in class, who does not give you much homework and all that.

**Russell Sully**—I like teachers that are nice, that play games during lessons—but with the work. That's about all.

**Saksit Thongham**—I like teachers who do not tell you off all the time and send you to the withdrawal room and who let you have fun.

**Samuel Locke**—A good teacher is no teacher at all.

**Benjamin Koller**—A teacher that does not bug you on little things.

**Mr WILKIE**—Thank you for that.

**CHAIR**—Going back to what happens in class, in the subjects where there is a lot more discussion—say, in English when you are discussing a novel or in history when you are discussing what happened—do you find that the girls do more of the talking than the boys?

**Unknown Student**—Yes.

**Unknown Student**—No.

**CHAIR**—Not at the senior level, but in junior school it happens. Is that right? That seems to be the case. Why do you guys think the girls do more of the talking than you do?

**Benjamin Koller**— Because women always talk. They will find a mirror and talk to it.

**Unknown Student**—They have always got something to say.

**CHAIR**—Do you feel at all embarrassed to talk? Do you feel a little bit self-conscious that the girls are there?

**Unknown Student**— No.

**CHAIR**—Some schools are trying having boys in one class and girls in another class for some subjects, such as English. Do you think that would make any difference or not?

**Unknown Student**—No.

**CHAIR**—Does anyone think it would? Does anyone think they would be freed up a bit to say what they wanted without the girls there listening?

**Unknown Student**—No.

**CHAIR**—You older boys say that is not an issue now and the boys talk as much as the girls in years 11 and 12. What about, say, three years ago when you were in year 9 or year 8?

**Aaron Pollock**—I still reckon boys talk just as much, maybe more.

**CHAIR**—Maybe it just depends on the particular group of kids at the time.

**Benjamin Koller**—It depends on the teaching as well.

**CHAIR**—Why do you think that makes a difference?

**Benjamin Koller**—I have Mr Baldock and no-one speaks for him.

**Mr WILKIE**—I am curious to find out who plans to stay in Darwin when they finish school and get a job up here, if they can. Is anyone not sure what they want to do when they finish school? For those guys who have determined that they want to stay and get a job, what sort of job would you like to have and what sort of qualifications do you think you will need to get that job? There were two guys at the front. Who else wants to stay here and get a job? Do you guys want to let us know—you sort of outlined before what you might like to do—what qualification you think you need to get in your upper schooling to get that job?

**Joshua Wadrop**—What do you mean—like physics or maths or something?

**Mr WILKIE**—Yes. Do you think you need those sorts of subjects in order to get ahead?

**Joshua Wadrop**—I am interested in electronics. Basically, you have to have physics and maths and a decent score to end up in electronics and engineering and whatnot.

**Mr WILKIE**—Do you want to go on to uni?

**Joshua Wadrop**—My parents are trying to push me towards the RAAF, which is basically uni.

**Mr WILKIE**—Who else was going to try to stay?

**Aaron Pollock**—To be an assistant professional golfer, you just need skills like knowing how to prepare clubs and give people golf lessons.

**Mr WILKIE**—So more vocational skills than an education.

**Aaron Pollock**—Yes, but you need maths for the club repairs, repairing shafts and everything.

**Mr SIDEBOTTOM**—And you would need communication skills as an instructor, wouldn't you?

**Aaron Pollock**—Yes. Customer service and everything.

**CHAIR**—Does anyone think they might want to be a teacher?

**Aaron Pollock**—I have thought about it, but no.

**CHAIR**—Why no?

**Joshua Wadrop**—We know how much crap we give them, so why go back and have it done to us? I would prefer to get out of the school environment after this. It does not do much for me.

**CHAIR**—So no-one would think about being a teacher? That is a shame.

**Mr SIDEBOTTOM**—They might but they might not be saying it at the moment.

**CHAIR**—Is there anything else you would like to tell us about how we might make school better for boys?

**Joshua Wadrop**—A bit more hands-on, with the practical side of things. That is what we enjoy, so more practical type things.

**CHAIR**—And linked with work placement stuff? Is that a good way ahead? What do you guys think?

**Benjamin Koller**—Change the rules. You know how you have to have a pass in year 10 maths and English to get almost any job: I reckon that should change.

**Mr WILKIE**—What would you like to see it changed to?

**Benjamin Koller**—Something else instead of a pass. You should be able to get it but you would have to have an understanding in it.

**CHAIR**—Thanks, boys. That has been very helpful. It is not easy sitting there in front of a group of strangers telling us what you think about things, but that is very helpful. We have been talking to some other schools around the place and lots of other teachers and we are hoping that out of that we will get some ideas of how we can make schools better for boys. So what you have told us today is very helpful and pretty much reinforces what lots of other boys in other schools have told us, as well. Good luck for the rest of school, with your jobs at the end of school and with your sport. Thanks for having us here today. Have you got any questions of us?

**Christopher Hurst**—Have you guys been on TV?

**Mr WILKIE**—Not recently. Occasionally we are, but usually only if we do something wrong.

**Stephen Ortner**—I want to know why they sell junk food and all that in high school but they will not sell it in primary school. They sell Coke and chips and all that here, but in primary school all you can get is water and stuff.

**Mr WILKIE**—That is a fair question. I do not know the answer to that. Maybe you need to ask your teachers that. Maybe it is part of the process of getting older that you start to take responsibility for your own decisions. Maybe when you are younger, schools and parents think that they need to give you more guidance. When you get older it is up to you to choose whether to have Coke or water, junk food or healthy food. It is a fair question, though.

**Joshua Wadrop**—I would like to know what policy the education department has on getting get rid of people who are not really here to learn.

**Mr SIDEBOTTOM**—Do you mean students or teachers?

**Joshua Wadrop**—Students.

**Mr WILKIE**—It probably depends on each different state and each different school. It would depend a lot on what the school's policy is and how they go about dealing with young people in that situation, I would think.

**Joshua Wadrop**—I think it is one of the things that the blokes have trouble with. It is always the same group of blokes that disrupts most of the class. We should get rid of some of them.

**Mr WILKIE**—So you think it would be good to see some of those people removed so the others can learn on occasions?

**Joshua Wadrop**—Yes, I do.

**Mr WILKIE**—Is it mostly the guys who do it?

**Joshua Wadrop**—It is in a lot of cases.

**Mr WILKIE**—Rather than girls.

**Joshua Wadrop**—If teachers, instead of just threatening to kick them out, decided to kick them out, it would solve the problem.

**Mr WILKIE**—Do you find you tend to learn more and actually enjoy class more where the teacher has got a fair bit of control, but also gets on with you? So you do not really like environments where the other kids just play up and you cannot actually learn. Do you find that difficult? People are nodding.

**CHAIR**—In those classes where you have got two or three who disrupt the rest of the class, can't the rest of you—have you ever tried it?—get together and go over to those guys and say, 'Hey, you are making it hard for the rest of us'?

**Joshua Wadrop**—There is not much point because as soon as they find out that they are doing that, they say 'Great, we're pissing all them off.'



**CHAIR**—So that encourages them even more. That is probably a problem that a lot of schools have. So no suggestions on how to do it? You just kick them out.

**Joshua Wadrop**—I was just wondering what ways around it there are.

**Mr SIDEBOTTOM**—There are probably lots of ways around it. The interesting thing is why they are doing it. If you could find out the cause you might be able to deal with it. Just kicking them out is—

**Joshua Wadrop**—It is not because we are not interested in that class.

**Mr SIDEBOTTOM**—I agree.

**Joshua Wadrop**—But if there were a bigger range of studies offered—I have had to do legal studies because there was nothing else offered here. I find legal studies harder because I am more into the science and technology side. I had a choice between geography and legal studies. Are there any hands-on VET subjects you can enjoy more easily?

**CHAIR**—That really varies from school to school and from state to state or territory as well.

**Joshua Wadrop**—Something like that could be introduced around the schools.

**Benjamin Koller**—More practical things in science and things like that.

**CHAIR**—More practical things like science?

**Benjamin Koller**—Yes.

**CHAIR**—You have technics class and that sort of thing?

**Benjamin Koller**—It is not offered.

**CHAIR**—Not offered at senior level?

**Ms Rogan**—No, not at senior level.

**CHAIR**—I guess it is up to individual schools to work out what subjects they can run, and I suppose there is a limited amount of subjects they can offer because of the cost of running a whole stack of courses.

**Mr WILKIE**—Who is involved in the Vocational Education Training program? You are doing the VET program. Is anybody else doing it?

**Mr SIDEBOTTOM**—They do not do it in years 9 and 10; it is only year 11.

**Mr WILKIE**—Okay.

**CHAIR**—Boys, that has been very helpful. Thank you for your time.

**Proceedings suspended from 10.21 a.m. to 10.57 a.m.**

[10.57 a.m.]

**MACANDREW, Mr Ross, Assistant Principal, Palmerston High School**

**MACLEAN, Mr David, Deputy Principal, Palmerston High School**

**MACLEAN, Ms Frankie, Assistant Principal, Palmerston High School**

**MONKHOUSE, Ms Judy, Senior Teacher, Palmerston High School**

**OVERELL, Mr Craig, Senior Teacher, Palmerston High School**

**POLLOCK, Mr Aaron, Student, Palmerston High School**

**ROGAN, Ms Anne, Principal, Palmerston High School**

**SKYVINGTON, Ms Susan, Counsellor, Palmerston High School**

**WADROP, Mr Joshua, Student, Palmerston High School**

**ZEHNTNER, Ms Margaret, Teacher/Librarian, Palmerston High School**

**CHAIR**—Thank you for giving up your time to join us today. As you would be aware, this inquiry is looking into issues of boys education due to fairly widespread concerns that, right through from early primary to school-leaver level, boys have not been performing as well as girls and the disparity seems to have been increasing.

We have been taking evidence and getting opinions from people as to the reasons why that has been happening and whether there are any particular features of that that we are not aware of and, particularly, to help us develop some recommendations as to how we might address that issue. Does anyone want to open with some introductory comments? Anne, did you want to say anything in particular, or are you happy to go straight into questions?

**Ms Rogan**—I am happy to go straight into questions.

**CHAIR**—I might get the ball rolling and then hand over to the others. Briefly—as many of you who want to answer first up may do so—what is your view of the extent of the problem? Do you think it is as much of an issue as people are saying? If you think there is a problem, what do you see as the main cause or causes for what is a disparity in achievement and for what seems to be a growing disparity? Or are we being deluded by a few educational whingers who perhaps are missing the point?

**Ms Maclean**—I think it is all true, as far as I am concerned. Certainly, having taught in the Territory for a long time, I see lots of increasingly disaffected boys. I am an English teacher, and I think a big problem is trying to make our curriculum relevant. I think there are moves there in

terms of text selection; types of activities; breaking lessons up so that you have five different activities within a lesson, including physical activity if possible, which is very difficult in my subject area. I think there are lots of problems with not having enough positive male role models in English for boys. There are very few male teachers who boys can choose to respect. Certainly boys respond well to being liked and having structure and having someone with a bit of a sense of humour who takes an interest. They also want some firmness too. Is that a start?

**Mr Macandrew**—I would agree that there is a problem, and my perception is that it is an increasing problem. An aspect I would like to focus on is the style of learning that we are forced into in a lot of schools, I feel—that is, boys and girls spend a lot of time basically sitting at a desk for 50 or 60 minutes at a time, being talked to by a teacher. That is fairly passive learning. I think boys need more activities than they are getting at the moment. The traditional activity based subjects are disappearing out of the curriculum for a variety of reasons. You cannot get a text studies teacher. They are like hen's teeth to recruit. Therefore, when a text studies teacher retires and you cannot get one, it is very tempting to end up replacing them with a dance teacher or something, and so you end up with dance on the curriculum where there was text studies. A lot of that is happening across the board.

We are certainly struggling more with kids' behaviour these days. Classes are getting more difficult to manage. Again, the automatic response is to drop back into saying, 'You all sit at your desks in rows and speak only when you are spoken to,' instead of going out with them and doing an activity or an excursion and coming back and writing about it or something. There is a lot of pressure like that which is increasingly forcing schools to become places of passive learning.

**Ms Skyvington**—I am the school counsellor. I agree with what Frankie and Ross said. Certainly boys respond much better to things which are physical and which are meaningful in their lives, and so the learning style, as Ross identified, does not suit a lot of boys. With all teenagers, when something is top down, that is really what teenagers are kicking back against first. They have to become a human being, a person, an individual, and so those nice, compliant little children we had through primary school are no longer going to be that way. If they cannot find ways of expressing themselves, they tend to get angry and frustrated, and that acts out in all sorts of ways, including truancy, playing up and bullying in the classroom, or it 'acts in', with depression, which can in some cases lead to suicide. Young males are identified as the group with the highest level of successful suicide completion. Suicide certainly is increasing. Some months ago, there was an article in the *Bulletin* called, I think, 'Wild boys', which talked about this whole trend of boys' acting-out.

There also seems to be the underlying factor, way back, of the breakdown in the family system, the breakdown in the family through a divorce or, in indigenous culture, the breakdown in the whole community or society. There is a book called *Into the Wild* by an American author—whose name I cannot think of right now—who looks at these young boys who drop out of school, get angry and act out, or sometimes act in, and sometimes end up dead. He sees that some of them are so angry or so depressed about that split between their parents, the split in the family, that they could never quite understand or come to terms with or resolve it. Sure, if they can get some intervention at some stage and something meaningful that can help them to understand that and replace that and give them some sense of direction again, but it is so hard for them to find something. This is what they are struggling with—to get back on track, to get

some sense of meaning, direction and purpose and also to heal that underlying split, which they are not always aware of. A young man cannot say, 'Oh, yeah, it's back there,' but when the author dealt with them in great depth that is what he found. This is actually being looked at, in state-of-the-art research in psychology, as one possible factor in schizophrenia, too.

**Ms Rogan**—I would like to focus on boys learning to communicate. Quite often, boys do not have very good role models in their fathers. Dads should sometimes be talking to their boys about issues other than the football and talking to them about how people feel—those sorts of things are often glossed over. Fathers need to set up situations where they can actually talk to their boys, maybe not making eye contact, maybe working on a car or something, but talking about real life issues not just about whether it should be a Ford or a Holden. I think dads often talk at a superficial level, and boys then find that that is the easy way to communicate: let's talk about superficial things, let's not talk about things that involve us and what we are thinking and feeling deep inside. With feelings, for boys, it is still very much: boys don't cry, boys don't get upset, boys shouldn't do those sorts of things. As a result, reading is not considered very interesting because it is often about people's emotions. A lot of boys do not want to engage in that area, so they try to keep away from it as much as possible because they are not comfortable.

**Ms Zehntner**—I work in the library here and I see another side of boys in the school. It is interesting that far more boys than girls come into the library at recess and lunch. There are possibly several reasons for this. They may be people who do not feel comfortable with the rough and tumble of the yard outside and they are seeking some sort of refuge. I think girls are happy to sit down and talk about all sorts of things endlessly, and they are happy to do that under a tree, whereas the boys who are poor communicators are happy to sit over a game of chess or to sit around the computers—again, I guess, it is that superficial communication—and they make their friends in that way. They would totally hog the computers if we let them do that—that is safe and exciting, so they seem to like that.

I have also noticed another anomaly in that we will have a class here before lunch and there are boys who cannot sit still, who are being just totally horrible in the class—they are bouncing off the walls; you just do not want them there—but five minutes later it is lunch time and they are back in the library and they are angels. So where was all this physical activity that they seemed to need? They only seem to need it during class, but at lunch time they are happy to sit down and play a chess game or just sit and watch other people. There are a couple of things that I have not sorted out there.

**CHAIR**—Are they the same kids?

**Ms Zehntner**—Exactly the same boys, five minutes later, are behaving quite humanly, quite socially responsibly, in the library, whereas in the class they were just destroying everybody's possibility to learn.

**Mr SIDEBOTTOM**—So they do not have to exhibit here?

**Ms Zehntner**—Maybe.

**Mr SIDEBOTTOM**—It is not the exhibiting place?

**Ms Zehntner**—It could be that.

**Mr WILKIE**—Would that depend on the class, though?

**Ms Zehntner**—I do not know whether it depends on the class, or the fact that it is a class, whereas at lunchtime it is their choice to be here. The other thing that I noticed—and I keep asking myself, ‘Am I imagining this?’—is that after September 11, when you had the rise in belligerent talk by our political leaders and by America, and when you had the media really jumping on the war on terrorism bandwagon, we had a significant rise in aggression and belligerence and bullying amongst our boys. I think they are far more influenced by what goes on on television and in the greater world. This is what we see important, rich people doing and saying; therefore it must be okay. There was a rise in aggression that I thought was quite significant.

**Mr Overell**—I will start by saying that I agree with my colleagues about there being an issue with boys and education. But, in the area that I teach, which is science, I am finding that it is probably not so much the case. I think it probably comes down to the fact that in science I can get the boys out of their seats more often, I can get them engaging in practical work and maybe we can even relate it to real life situations that they are a bit more interested in. The hard part is that I cannot engage the whole class in that type of thing. If I teach science revolving around motor cars, I turn off the girls in the class. While I have the mixed class, I find it difficult to try to go down that middle line and keep both groups engaged. When I go down the middle line with those kids and try to keep both groups engaged, I find that their behaviour changes. So the very next thing you do is put the class back in rows, sit them down, get them quiet, lecture or write notes on the board and change your whole teaching style. And then the boys switch off. So it is a very fine line to tread, trying to maintain interest and keep the whole class in line.

I do find that, when it comes to senior school, the boys that go into year 11 and year 12 in the sciences really seem to come good. Our good results tend to be from the boys in the science class. I have girls who do really well in junior school, but then, once they get to senior school and have a choice of subjects, they steer away from the sciences. The boys who get through junior school and choose science at senior school are very keen. They will work at it, they will work hard, they will show genuine interest and they will achieve good results at the end. Unfortunately, that is only a minority of boys who come into our school system at year 8. A large percentage have just fallen by the wayside getting to senior school, and, if I look at their achievements and what they have learnt in their subject, versus the girls of a similar age group who have opted out of science, it is probably nowhere near as much.

**Mr SIDEBOTTOM**—That is why we are trying to find out why.

**Mr Overell**—I think it comes down to the way you present the class; in science in particular, it is the real life examples and the situations that you can engage them in and maintain their interest. It is just very much a challenge in a mixed class.

**Mr Maclean**—I think the problem does exist; it is not a figment of our imagination. We see the statistics. Certainly in the exit assessments in year 12 in every state in Australia—whether it is examination based or school work based—girls, as a group, outachieve the boys significantly. Not only are they, as a group, outperforming boys, but also at the top levels there are more girls

overrepresented in those groups and at the bottom levels of achievement boys are overrepresented.

On the data that we see coming out of education systems and in research schools, it is all there. When you add that to all the social data that we get on suicides and crime and that sort of thing, yes, boys are very much at risk. From a secondary school teacher's perspective, I see year 9 as really critical—around the 13, 14 or sometimes 15 years of age mark. That corresponds with a lot of physiological changes that are happening with boys. Some data that I have collected and done a little bit of analysis on shows that our teachers refer boys to our withdrawal room sometimes up to 10 times more often than girls in a term; it is between 2½ and 10 times more often for misdemeanours that are preventing the teaching-learning process from happening. So it is a multifaceted problem. But I believe a significant part of the root of the problem is that boys, through their behaviour, are often opting out of the learning process and that has consequences several years down the track.

The other issue, and it was mentioned earlier, is the role that fathers take in their boys' lives. It is a generalisation, but I think there are plenty of examples to illustrate it. This week I have been talking with parents of some year 11 students who are probably not doing what they should be doing, and every time I have talked to a mother. I very rarely get fathers to speak to, even with senior school students; it is almost always the mother who takes up that issue. I think that is replicated down through the years as well, and not just in dealing with issues at school but in actually spending time with their boys. It is a function of society, I guess, that we are all very busy people these days and that if you do not make the time you do not spend the time. And I do not believe it has to be quality time; it has to be time. I am not sure that I am convinced about this issue of 'five minutes of quality time'. I think it has to be time, and if you spend the time then those discussions that were talked about earlier do have a chance to happen. We saw a good illustration here this morning: once we took a bit more time with some of the boys, they opened up at a more informal level. I think that is an issue in a lot of boys' lives.

**CHAIR**—Thanks, David. Those comments have all been very helpful.

**Mr SIDEBOTTOM**—Yes, thank you very much—it has been worth the trip just to hear your very perceptive comments, and they are replicated throughout the submissions that we have received. I am interested in the gender ratio of male and female teachers here—what would it be?

**Ms Rogan**—It is fifty-fifty.

**Mr SIDEBOTTOM**—Fifty-fifty in the school?

**Ms Rogan**—Yes.

**Mr SIDEBOTTOM**—That is interesting. I do not believe it has been replicated in the schools we have been to.

**Mr Overell**—It is fifty-fifty in the school, but in certain teaching areas around the school it is very unbalanced. I believe our English faculty at the school would be very heavily female teacher dominated.

**Mr SIDEBOTTOM**—Would the humanities be mainly female?

**Ms Maclean**—Just about across the board.

**Mr Overell**—At the moment the science faculty, where I work, is seven to one—seven males.

**Mr SIDEBOTTOM**—If it reinforces the stereotypes of chosen areas of study and teaching, do you think that may have implications for boys' learning and alienation, or potential alienation, or interests? I am interested in your comments.

**Ms Maclean**—A lot of boys are surrounded by women at school and at home; and particularly in the humanities we have very few males that boys seem to respect, that they regard as being functioning male role models. I know that is a huge generalisation, but in every English faculty I have taught in, in 20 years, you might have one, maybe two, males and they are not necessarily always respected by boys. I think that provides a significant problem.

**Mr WILKIE**—Can I follow on from that point Sid made—and it would probably be good if you could answer this, Anne, because you have been here for quite a while. Would that have been a trend that has been changing over the last 20 to 30 years, or has it always been the same, that there has been a much stronger ratio of female to male teachers in the humanities?

**Ms Rogan**—It is most likely more exaggerated now, but I think it has basically been the way things have been for the last 20 to 30 years that more women teach English than teach science. That seems to be the way it always has been. Girls went more towards the humanities when they went through school and that is why, 20 years ago, we had this big push for girls to learn science and maths because they were not learning those things and were not following those careers because there were too many men teaching it.

**Mr Maclean**—I think the gender of teachers is really significant in the primary school years. In the secondary school years, it is my observation that effective female teachers can be just as successful with boys as male teachers can. As kids are growing up, they almost always see just females in a primary school. There might be one or two males—and often one of those is the janitor—in a primary school. In those early formative years, I think maybe something happens in terms of their understanding or ideas of what teaching is about, but the teachers are always women. I am not saying that is a bad thing, but if there were more men in our primary schools I do not think we would have as many problems with behaviour in our secondary schools as we do have. A comment I made earlier is that overriding all of that is the effectiveness of any teacher, whether they are male or female. That is often the crucial issue. If you have an ineffective teacher, boys are going to be the ones to exploit that weak fence, so to speak—they will push it down.

**CHAIR**—It was interesting talking to the younger boys at the end of the last session. Nearly all of them indicated that they thought the main difference between a good teacher and a bad teacher was fairness. They said, 'If they are fair, they treat us fairly.' They have a very strong sense of justice. The second issue they identified was fun. I thought that was interesting.



**Mr Macandrew**—Just adding to that point on the gender of teachers, I agree with David that it is a much bigger issue in the primary school than the high school. From my observation, it is relatively unusual here—we are close to fifty-fifty and we do tend to have a fairly male dominated science-maths faculty. I have certainly taught in schools that have had a female dominated maths and science faculty, but I have never taught in a school that has had a male dominated humanities faculty, for example. So, if you do get a school that is fifty-fifty, it would tend to be like this. I do not think anyone here would have ever been in a school where the whole English faculty was male, for example, or close to it—it just does not exist—whereas I have seen that in maths and science.

**Mr WILKIE**—Sorry, Ross, I missed what your specialty area is.

**Mr Macandrew**—I am one of the assistant principals, but I normally teach maths.

**Mr SIDEBOTTOM**—Could I explore the English aspect. I remember Frankie saying, ‘I’m the English teacher,’ almost like this is where the area is. It seems to be common with literacy, which is not an English domain; it should be across the curriculum of course. If that is an area that a lot of boys seem to be alienated from—and we are talking about emotions and so forth—is it the nature of the subject or is it the delivery of the subject or is it gender and role models or is it all of it that tends to contribute to what appears to be an area that we can look to and see this alienation? What are your impressions of that?

**Ms Maclean**—I think you are right in saying that it is all of those things, but for me I think delivery is critical. I have worked in some English faculties where we have a very good response from boys and boys are very comfortable, particularly where boys feel nurtured—I find they respond well to English teaching. So it is all of those facets, but delivery is really critical. I think an understanding and compassion but also a liking of boys is necessary because a lot of teachers find some boys confronting. If you are comfortable with robust boys, it makes a huge difference and, if you can build links with them in other aspects of life, that pays dividends too. If you know that they are good footballers and you can tap into that because you have seen them play or whatever, that gets a very good connection going.

**Mr SIDEBOTTOM**—I am sorry to hold this up, but I think literacy in boys is a really important question. When we hear comments from boys, they often say, ‘Oh, English,’ but wasn’t there a drive for literacy across the curriculum or do you think that is just rhetoric?

**Ms Maclean**—From my point of view, in the schools that I have taught in it has been rhetoric. Some people are very committed to that ideal, but more often I hear comments like, ‘This kid can’t write an essay, what are you blokes doing in English?’ I hear that far more than, ‘In maths or science I have a responsibility to teach the metalanguage of my subject.’

**Ms Monkhouse**—I have just come in at the tail end. I find that boys often feel as if they do not have a choice. When we present material we often regulate it by the confines of the availability of texts, and sometimes you cannot give them choice. I heard one of the students say, ‘We can’t choose the books that we read.’ To a certain extent that is true. I think, if we engage boys more and if we negotiate the curriculum with them, to a certain extent we would get more success so that they feel that to be engaged they have options of choice and of directions. I think that is an element that perhaps can get neglected by the availability of texts,

for example. We often forget the negotiation side of it. They feel they want input into the outcomes as well and the variety of outcomes.

**CHAIR**—Certainly a frustration expressed by a lot of the younger boys was with the type of novels that they have had to deal with in English. A couple were complaining that they were doing poetry and that poetry per se was a problem, although when I explored that further with them they said that if it were poetry about action and things happening that would be better than poetry about romance and love and stuff like that. This comes back again to what you were saying about the selection of material. But that is an interesting point: it is limited to a certain extent by your resources of course.

**Ms Maclean**—The possibilities are there. There is so much contemporary literature which is focusing on boys needs and responding to what boys want, but then it comes down to budgets and that sort of thing. There is plenty around. It is just a matter of knowing about it and being able to tap into it.

**CHAIR**—You have obviously tried that. Have you found a marked difference in attention, in engagement and in achievement even when the texts have been more suited to the boys?

**Ms Maclean**—Absolutely. I think it is all part of a package, though. The text selection is irrelevant if the delivery is pretty poor. If you have the complete package, you can go far, and the girls are not that turned off—girls will accommodate the text. You can find different gender ways in to a ‘boy text’, if you like.

**Mr WILKIE**—Has the English curriculum changed much in the time that you have been teaching? One of the boys was talking about a novel that they were having to study and I remember being inflicted with that 25 years ago. Has there been much change?

**Ms Maclean**—I think so. Over the past 20 years there have been huge changes in what we teach and how we teach in the Territory. That instance of a kid studying what you studied 25 years ago would be to do with school resources. Hopefully, they would have a different window on that text from what you did.

**Mr Joshua Wadrop**—I feel that the boys’ biggest problem with all this is that we are not really into going back into all the Shakespeare and whatnot. A lot of the texts that are available to us and offered to us in English are a lot of the older texts. I feel that if you could introduce some of the newer novels into English they might respond to it a little better and enjoy it a lot more. If they are enjoying it, then surely it would be a lot easier for them to produce the work.

**Mr SIDEBOTTOM**—Is it not also a question of what is English anyway? For some, it is the whole question of literature, language and the use of language, imagery and all that, and then the other is the functional side, which is almost the literacy side. The further up you go into education it becomes more difficult because you are also looking at the examination side and there are people who wish to study further and go into tertiary education and so forth. I can appreciate the demands.

**CHAIR**—With regard to the year 9 literacy and numeracy classes, how are the students chosen for those and how do they actually work? How effective are they proving to be?

---

**Ms Rogan**—We started about four years ago with a Commonwealth grant for literacy and numeracy. We were fortunate to get a primary school teacher to come and run those classes. The basic idea was that she organised them for Maths, Science, English and Studies of Society, and they went off and did woodwork or PE at other times. That was very successful. She increased their literacy and numeracy significantly. She had a worm farm in the classroom, so they had all these interesting decomposing bits of vegetable close at hand. It was really good. Unfortunately, we have not been able to maintain that. We have had a different teacher every year. That has been one of the problems—to find somebody who would like to build on that. Sue, the first person, went back to the primary school because she got a promotion. The next teacher we had was very successful, but she is now a lecturer at NTU.

It has therefore been a problem, which goes back to the crux of what Frankie and David were saying. If you get a very good operator, you can more or less do anything. A very good teacher can motivate the kids and provide stimulating and interesting things. It will work well. But finding the individual teacher and developing the individual's expertise as a teacher, I believe, is crucial.

**Mr Macandrew**—I agree. To add to that, any person who takes on a difficult group of kids—even if they are working with a fairly small group—finds that it is a burn-out area. There are not many people who can sustain the level of energy that is needed. You take on a group of boys and you try to get them enthused. If they have had a background of not being enthused for the last eight years of school, you can do it, but you cannot do it year after year. That is the problem. You might get someone who works well for a year or two. They might do it very well and therefore get a promotion and disappear; or they just get sick of being the pariah around the school and they get sick of everyone complaining about what their kids are doing around the yard at lunchtime. People say they are your kids and you have to almost hide from the other staff because they are the difficult group of kids that you are dealing with. I do not have a solution to that. I am not sure how you keep a person interested. Perhaps you need a group of people who share it around somehow. It is a very rare individual who can sustain that for more than a year or two.

**CHAIR**—In your earlier comments, you also referred to the problem of getting tech teachers. You said that they are as scarce as hen's teeth.

**Mr Macandrew**—They are just not being trained any more.

**CHAIR**—They are not being trained or is it that there are not enough men wanting to go into it?

**Mr Macandrew**—I do not believe there are many training. I do not know how you train as a tech studies teacher, for example. Most of them are tradesmen who have given up and therefore gone and done some teacher training. A tech studies teacher is not something that was offered at a teacher's training college.

**Mr WILKIE**—I think you are right.

**Mr Macandrew**—If a kid came to me and said, 'I want to be a tech studies teacher,' I would not know where to refer him to.

**CHAIR**—So there is no direct career path there?

**Mr Macandrew**—No.

**CHAIR**—It is almost an accidental career path through other careers.

**Mr Macandrew**—It tends to be people who are sick of what they are doing. For instance, the person might have been in a trade and have done their back in or they might get sick of something or other and decide that 12 weeks holiday a year looks good, so they decide to retrain as a teacher. They might be a fitter and turner by trade and then get the opportunity.

**Ms Rogan**—It is also the same with home ec. or cooking teachers. There are hardly any cooking teachers. It is one of the most popular subjects. We have got two home ec. teachers and we could do with three, but there is very little training for anybody to do that anymore.

**CHAIR**—Perhaps those problems began when we moved away from the dedicated CAEs or teachers colleges to more broadly based education degrees at universities.

**Ms Rogan**—I think that was about the time it changed. But we very rarely get a young person trained in those areas.

**Mr WILKIE**—My question is about the training of teachers. Obviously, part of your professional duties would be to assess students as they are coming through on teacher prac. Do you find that the universities are actually teaching them how to be teachers or are they coming out well qualified in certain areas but not really knowing how to teach the young people, how to get their attention and gain their respect? Or are you having to instil some of that when they get here?

**Ms Rogan**—I have a very strong belief that medicine has changed. If you want to do medicine now, the first thing you do is you meet patients. You do not have three years in a university and then you meet the patients in your fourth or fifth year. I believe education and teachers should do exactly the same thing. It should be an internship. They should spend significantly more of their training in school on the job rather than learning in a university. I do believe you need a combination of university for the status and the academic understandings, but you need significantly more hands-on than you get now. You need to learn how to deal with kids, how to work with them, how to find the good thing that is in every kid. You have just got to dig hard. In teaching them those sorts of things, they need to learn it on the job. They have about 10 weeks, and then they have three years at university with a degree. They have a year teacher training where they do 10 weeks prac and then they are fully-fledged teachers. I think that is not the way to go anymore.

**Mr SIDEBOTTOM**—In Tasmania, they do a Bachelor of Education and that is four years, and they are out on the job after they have been in there for about 10 months and they are supervised. Then they do internships, and whatever, for the next three or four years. So they are not just all degree and diploma students as well. I think Kim's point really is whether you see any correlation between the training institutions and the universities and the realities of what goes on in the school.

**Ms Skyvington**—I agree very much with the concept of an internship being so very important and being exposed and going in deep to the actual situation. The other area that is so important is to understand the latest knowledge about the differences between boys and girls—the psychological and the sociological. I do not know how much this comes into your own brief. In looking at societal influences, there is the role of the father or the diminished role of good male role models who can communicate with their boys, as Anne said.

In the latest psychological research, no difference has been found between male and female brains—the right and left hemispheres are the same—but the facility of moving between right- and left-brain thinking is more limited in boys. They can take photographs. Girls are able to think and feel and move between the right and left hemispheres whereas boys are more facile in being in left-brain thinking, in analytical, rational or practical applied mode. All the things we have said touch on this—how we can have education that is meaningful and that gives them all of those physical things such as computers and practical, applied things—but we also need to provide a way to talk about the emotions, a safe and practical way to safely talk about feelings.

**CHAIR**—Do you think that happens for boys just as readily with a female teacher as with a male teacher or do you think there is an argument for male teachers for boys?

**Ms Skyvington**—Judy and Frankie said that negotiation is a very important issue for all teenagers, but a top-down control model will not work. As our young friend here said, the content and its relevance is so important. But I do not know whether any female can ever fill the gap in a boy's life if there is that absence of the father or the father model—the ability to talk to a good male—and this is some of what is happening. A friend of mine is a sport teacher at Kormilda College. He spends a lot of time with the boys—out on camps, doing rock climbing—and they open up and get to talk and they respect him. But then he has to be good at being able to talk about feelings and show them that this is a safe thing to do.

**CHAIR**—What would your suggestions be as to how we might get more men into teaching?

**Mr Macandrew**—Money.

**Ms Skyvington**—There is a big problem in the primary schools. David said they should be in the primary schools. They are exiting because of the reality of child protection.

**CHAIR**—Child protection; and you both said the salary.

**Ms Skyvington**—And the salary.

**CHAIR**—They are the two issues that we are getting frequently right around the country—fear of child protection and salary issues.

**Ms Rogan**—I think also status. People think that you are nuts to be a teacher.

**Ms Skyvington**—The other irony is that there are a lot of young men in their 20s whom I am in contact with who say, 'We would love to be good role models for young boys. This is what is missing in our lives. This is why we are turning to political activism' or 'agin the government. We do not see any meaning in going into those suited jobs. We could turn around now and work

with young kids, but how do we do that because we look at the schools and it is still top down there?' So there is a lot of 'lostness' about, 'How do we make contact? How do we find the pathways to connect?'

**Mr Maclean**—It is a bit of a chicken and egg situation too. Yes, status, money and the child protection issues are all very significant, but you hear so many people say, 'I wouldn't be a teacher for quids,' because it is such a tough job these days. The social convergence that happens within schools is just mind-boggling for someone who does not work in a school. It is mind-boggling for most of us too. It is getting more complex and a greater burden each year that goes by. Schools do not create many of the problems; they are just microcosms of that wider society out there. We have all heard the stories: we used to just teach maths or English, but we have become father, we have become uncle, we have become big brother, policeman, social worker, and sometimes we are doctor or family planner. All these things teachers are called on to do in the course of their duties and that becomes a big ask for a lot of people.

**Mr SIDEBOTTOM**—Where do you learn that?

**Mr Maclean**—Yes, exactly. Where do you learn that? If you are a good classroom practitioner and you like working with kids, then maybe you will not find those sorts of things as difficult as others who do not have that interpersonal predisposition. It is a really tough job teaching adolescents. You hear time after time people wanting to heap it on teachers, but then they say in the next breath, 'I wouldn't be a teacher for quids.' We need more good teachers, we need more male teachers in primary schools, but part of the reason we do not have many is the complexity and the demands of the job. A lot of students talk to me about being teachers, including my daughter and I say, 'Oh no, don't be a teacher.' I love my job and I enjoy doing it, but I know how difficult it is and I really feel for people who are coming into teaching new now because it is far more difficult. We have had 20 or 30 years practice at getting it, and they come from a university—bang, a four or five week practicum, but then you are immersed in it dealing with all these issues. I think it is a real eye-opener and a discouragement to some people to take up teaching.

**Mr SIDEBOTTOM**—Do you think the reintroduction of studentships into teaching across all states, almost like a Commonwealth scholarship, would make a difference in the cohorts and in the people attracted to teaching?

**Mr Maclean**—If they were targeted, I think they would. Our new government has just introduced 20 of those a year. I understand they are worth about \$12,000 a year.

**CHAIR**—What do you mean by targeted?

**Mr Maclean**—They are targeted in areas such as IT, maths and science, in ESL and Aboriginal education.

**Mr WILKIE**—Are they for males?

**Mr Maclean**—No, it is not gender based yet.

**CHAIR**—Do you think it would be feasible, say, to specify that they were fifty-fifty—half for men and half for women?

**Mr Maclean**—If you are going to solve a problem, you have to acknowledge the problem and then look at practical ways of addressing it. I think you need to provide some sort of incentive to get more suitable males involved. We talked about medicine earlier. You actually get screened to get into medical degrees now; you do get tested. You have to have brains, but you have actually got to have that bedside manner, you have got to be able to deal with people. Maybe we need to start thinking about that sort of thing in teaching, for goodness sake.

**Mr SIDEBOTTOM**—Psychological testing and screening.

**Mr Maclean**—Yes, suitability. You can be the smartest person in the world, but if you cannot communicate and connect and build relationships with kids particularly and their parents and other staff then you are probably not going to be as effective as everyone would like you to be.

**CHAIR**—If a proposal were put up to introduce scholarships for teaching and it was gender based, fifty-fifty, how do you think that would be accepted within the teaching fraternity? Do you think there would be outcries of social engineering or affirmative action or reversing the gains that girls have made in the last 20 years or anything like that; or do you think it would be accepted as a worthwhile way to try and address a problem?

**Mr Macandrew**—I do not think it would make any difference. My understanding is that they cannot fill the quotas for teacher training anyway. Anyone can train to be a teacher. I sit and watch some kids go through my classrooms and when I come across them a couple of years later and they say they are training to be a teacher I am a bit surprised sometimes because I know their ability level and I think they are going to struggle with some aspects of teaching.

**CHAIR**—So you do not think there would be an incentive if it were HECS free and you had a scholarship?

**Mr Macandrew**—I do not think that would be enough to suddenly get floods of gung-ho males. It might help, but it is not going to make a huge difference. At the moment you cannot attract people to be teachers. It is not the fact that you cannot attract enough males; there are not enough suitable people being attracted as step 1. It is not as if you have got choice.

**Mr Maclean**—I think it would be a good start, though.

**Ms Maclean**—Over the last five or so years I have seen more students who are less able to go into teaching. I am quite horrified when I see kids at the shops or whatever and they say, ‘Oh, Miss, I am going to be a teacher,’ and I think, ‘Oh my God!’ So I think there is a real problem with the entrance requirements for teaching. I think all the issues we have talked about here are very true, but the community perception of teaching not being a vocation is a big problem. If you become a teacher and you want to be a good teacher, you are committing your life to being a good teacher and you are giving up a significant part of your life to other people’s kids. I do not know that we are seeing people who are capable of doing that coming into teaching.

**Ms Rogan**—I would like us to think about the idea that a lot of teachers teach from three to five years and then find other things. They even go into parliament, as Warren Snowdon did.

**CHAIR**—And two of us.

**Ms Rogan**—Lots of people become teachers and then move on to other things. I think we have to look at that time of three to five years when a lot of people decide they have done all that and then want to do something else. We do not keep people in the profession. So we need to not only encourage good people to get into the profession but also work out how we keep them in there. You have only just learnt to be a teacher after about five years, you have just started, and then you move off to something else; and we do not get the quality teachers staying in the profession.

**CHAIR**—Career paths and salary are obviously a part of that list.

**Ms Rogan**—Very much so. Look at the opportunities for an accountant and how long it takes them to get there. For teachers it is a very different thing.

**Ms Skyvington**—Certainly salary and career paths will add to the status of the profession, and raising their status by other means is also going to be necessary, but a big part of why people stay in jobs is job satisfaction. We need to address all these frustrations we are talking about and build into the teacher training how to deal with difficult students, how to motivate boys and how to be able to get boys to be in touch with their feelings and talk about them and so on, role models and all of that. If we could put all that in place, I think we would be well justified in offering 100 per cent scholarships for male teachers to be in primary schools. And there is the child protection issue as well.

**CHAIR**—Can I just quickly—we are running out of time here—change tack for a moment. We have talked about the growing disparity in achievement between boys and girls at the NTCE level. For your indigenous students, is that disparity roughly the same between indigenous boys and girls or is it greater or less than it is for non-indigenous boys and girls? Do you have any clear idea on that?

**Mr Maclean**—I cannot give any definitive statistics, but the number of indigenous students that we have getting through the NTCE to me is a more significant problem than the issue of boys and girls disparity.

**CHAIR**—Are more indigenous girls than boys getting through to that level?

**Mr Maclean**—Yes, but overall the problem of boys and girls—

**CHAIR**—That is a minor issue.

**Mr Maclean**—is far more significant, I would say, than the issue of boys and girls, just because the numbers of them getting there are so few that to start splitting into the gender groups is probably not the best thing to do at this stage.



**Mr WILKIE**—Unfortunately the English teachers have gone, but someone else may be able to answer this. Boys—from the information we have received over the last 18 months—are very good on computers compared to girls. But in English subjects, often when they have to go and do examinations, they have to write. It has been put forward that if they were able to use their computers in some of their English examinations, particularly in writing essays, they would probably perform better. Would that be your experience?

**Mr Macandrew**—As a non-English teacher, to me it does not hold true at all. It is the actual physical having to write an essay. Whether you type it out or handwrite it out, to me is not the problem. Typing it into a word processor is not that exciting a use of the computer; that is not what boys are interested in using a computer for. I think that, if they are still required to have read a book and write an essay about the book, whether they handwrite it or type it out is insignificant. It is the wider issues of English.

**CHAIR**—Would you guys agree with that?

**Joshua Wadrop**—As a student, I feel the same about that one. It is not really the computer; it is sitting down and having to write an essay. Blokes are not interested in that.

**Ms Rogan**—I think you have to take into account, though, that by and large boys' handwriting is worse than girls' and they just find the physical thing of sitting for three hours and writing very hard. I have often wandered around the exam hall and a number of boys are shaking their hands. They find just the physical manipulation of a pen for three hours very hard work.

**Ms Zehntner**—I think you do think differently when you are maybe constructing an essay or writing on to a keyboard as opposed to handwriting. If you do all your work during the year mainly on the keyboard, it is difficult I think to go back to handwriting a whole exam.

**Mr WILKIE**—That is probably the point that has been put forward: it is the assessment that becomes a bit of a problem. Judy has just come back. Judy, the question was relating to boys' use of computers in English. Often they use computers in a lot of other areas, but they may not get to use them so much in English. Then when they sit down to do an exam, in particular at the end of the year, they are not very good at writing, so they find it hard to handwrite. But if they had had access to a computer to be able to type in their essay they might actually do better in that assessment.

**Ms Monkhouse**—I agree there is that possibility. I always tell the students that novelists often use computers, and it is logical to use a computer when you write now. There used to be a debate about process and drafts and authenticity of drafts, but I think that debate is no longer as strong; people are more accepting. It becomes a question of access. What would be wonderful is if, say, the English area had a room that was allocated—upstairs, next door—for computer usage.

**Mr SIDEBOTTOM**—Or they had laptops.

**Ms Monkhouse**—Or laptops, yes. Or if teachers had laptops as well!

**Mr Wadrop**—With the use of computers, it is more a reassurance thing. As I said, we are not very keen on doing all the essays and stuff, and if we can type something and then say, ‘That is not good’, we do not have to look at it again. If we are handwriting it, and we see all these crosses all over our exam, we start getting worked up and thinking, ‘Oh no, what are we going to do now?’ When you can just delete it and start again and see it forming out in front of you and it all looks presentable—

**CHAIR**—As you said, there is just the confidence that gives you.

**Mr Wadrop**—Yes, there is the reassurance of seeing something that is neat and well-presented.

**CHAIR**—That is interesting. I am afraid our time has gone. Do we have any other burning final comments?

**Ms Monkhouse**—I have a burning final comment. I tell my students, ‘Look, the way school is structured has not changed for the last 400 years,’ because I have been to Stratford-on-Avon. Shakespeare had a desk, and there was a blackboard in front. The structure of our day has not changed. We have bells to allocate time, as you would know from the disturbances here. I wonder if there could be more inventive ways of structuring the day. I do not know exactly what the answers are, but the structure has been the same since time immemorial—since public education, used in the other sense, not the Australian sense.

**CHAIR**—That is a good point. Our lives are dominated by bells in parliament too, let me assure you.

**Mr SIDEBOTTOM**—If people think education happens in a classroom, then we have failed, because they are confusing education with schooling. If schooling is just the classroom, I do not know how far we have come.

**CHAIR**—Thank you very much. We appreciate your time and your hospitality. Thank you, and thanks, boys.

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

That the committee receive as evidence and include in its record as an exhibit for the inquiry into the education of boys the documents received from Ms Anne Rogan: Palmerston High School Prospectus, Palmerston High School Profile, Indigenous Students Attendance and Data Analysis by Gender.

That this subcommittee authorises the publication given before it at the school forum and public hearing this day, including publication of the proof transcript on the electronic database.

**Committee adjourned at 11.57 a.m.**