

**REPORT BY THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES  
STANDING COMMITTEE ON EDUCATION AND  
TRAINING:**

***'Boys: Getting it right'***

**THE GOVERNMENT RESPONSE TO THE REPORT**

**MINISTER FOR EDUCATION, SCIENCE AND TRAINING**

# Boys' Education: Building on Successful Practice

## PREAMBLE

The Government welcomes the opportunity to respond to the report of the House of Representatives Standing Committee on Education and Training: *Boys: Getting it right*. The Committee has consulted widely with jurisdictions and with the Australian community with a stake and interest in this very important area of public policy.

Recommendations are made relating to the interests of the Commonwealth and States and Territories, government and non-government education authorities, teacher education faculties and their students, schools and their communities, parents and our boys and girls themselves.

Key features include:

- a review by the Ministerial Council on Education, Employment, Training and Youth Affairs (MCEETYA) of *Gender Equity: A Framework for Australian Schools*, with joint and distinctive education strategies for boys and girls;
- an increased focus on the teaching of literacy and numeracy with a particular emphasis on:
  - pre-service and in-service teacher development; and
  - structured and intensive phonics programmes;
- public information campaigns directed at raising awareness on early childhood learning;
- an increased focus on the engagement, motivation and behaviour management of students, with particular focus on:
  - the middle years of schooling;
  - pre-service and in-service teacher development; and
  - the most vulnerable and disengaged students;
- encouraging more men into teaching through scholarships;
- increased pay for experienced teachers;
- smaller class sizes for Kindergarten to Year 3; and
- further research into a range of these matters.

It is clear that the educational needs of boys must be addressed. The Government reaffirms its commitment to *The Adelaide Declaration on the National Goals for Schooling in the Twenty-First Century*, the first of which is that schooling should develop fully the talents and capacities of all students. The Government shares this commitment with all education authorities, and recognises that it sets the context for addressing the educational needs of boys.

The Government is generally in support of 15 of the Committee's 24 recommendations, and supports the underlying intent of a number of others. There are also some particular areas of disagreement.

In responding to the recommendations, the Government's approach is cognisant of the many traditional and innovative programmes that have been implemented in Australia and elsewhere that seek to improve the educational outcomes of boys.

The Government's strategy is to build upon successful practice in boys' education by:

- launching early specific initiatives in boys' education to identify, encourage and disseminate successful practice;
- building on existing Commonwealth programmes which target areas of the Committee's concern, including the existing research programme in education; and
- where recommendations concern the responsibilities of other jurisdictions or stakeholders, establishing a process of dialogue and consultation on cooperative strategies to consider and as appropriate address the recommendations.

### **Building early initiatives**

The centrepiece of the Government's early specific initiatives is the *Boys' Education Lighthouse Schools Programme* announced by the Minister on 27 November 2002.

This is a programme within the larger Commonwealth Quality Teacher Programme (CQTP). It provides up to \$3.8m over two years to enhance teaching and learning in boys' education in Australian schools by identifying best practice and disseminating information and professional development to teachers on the teaching and learning of boys. The programme aims to establish self-sustaining 'best practice' clusters of schools by providing seed funding to projects in the clusters that will not only make a difference in their own right, but which will also spread best practice in boys' education.

The programme commenced early in 2003 with the Minister writing to all schools providing information on the programme and seeking applications for Stage One. Curriculum Corporation has been selected to provide management services to the Department of Education, Science and Training and participating schools during this stage.

Stage One runs through 2003. It aims to examine and identify what works in teaching and learning in boys' education in Australian schools. On 30 April 2003 the Minister announced the 226 primary and secondary schools across Australia to receive grants of up to \$5,000 each to enable them to develop and document their boys' education best practices. Schools and clusters were selected for funding on application, and are representative of all education sectors and States and Territories, including rural and remote areas.

Each school and cluster will document successful practices, with descriptive and quantitative evidence of what difference it makes. This will be published and will inform selection criteria for Stage Two.

Schools need not already have a specific boys' programme in place and may use funds provided to work towards that goal.

Stage Two will run through 2004. It aims to establish approximately 30 clusters of schools. Each cluster will have a designated lighthouse school to act as champion and demonstration school. These lighthouse schools, not necessarily from Stage One schools, will act as 'beacons' to provide, facilitate, coordinate and support teacher professional development of the whole cluster.

Funding of up to \$60,000 will be provided to the lighthouse school to implement a teacher professional development programme for the whole cluster.

Each cluster will be required to evaluate its programmes in boys' education and its teacher professional development activities under the *Boys' Lighthouse Programme*.

Follow up evaluation of successful and less successful practice will provide a basis for further national dissemination of good practice in boys' education.

The Minister has sought the cooperation and support of the State and Territory Ministers of Education with the *Boys' Lighthouse Programme*.

The Government has also commenced a number of other key initiatives.

At the Minister's initiative, research projects at a value of up to \$0.5m over two years under the CQTP are under development in areas around pedagogy, curriculum, testing and assessment. This research will help identify what information is available and what more needs to be uncovered about the way we are teaching boys and the ways they are learning, and what constitutes good practice. This research will draw upon recently completed research in boys' education released by the Minister. It will feed into and develop on the experience of schools under the *Boys' Lighthouse Programme*.

### **Building on existing programmes**

Central to the Inquiry are issues surrounding quality teaching and developing the skills of teachers and teaching practice through professional development. This is already an area of strategic focus for the Government, through the Commonwealth Quality Teacher Programme (CQTP). The CQTP is intended to update and improve teachers' skills and understanding in the priority areas of literacy, numeracy, mathematics, science, information technology and vocational education in schools, and to enhance the status of teaching. Funding for the CQTP is \$159.2 million, including \$82.4 million announced in the 2002-03 Budget to extend the programme until June 2005. For 2001 and the first half of 2002 there was about 100,000 participants in CQTP activities.

Language skills, literacy and numeracy, particularly for students with learning difficulties or other forms of disadvantage, form another important theme of the Inquiry. This has long been an area of strategic attention by the Government, in support of the States and Territories and non-government schools.

The focus on literacy and numeracy for all students is a crucial element within the nationally agreed goals for schooling which emphasise the vital responsibility of schools to develop fully the talents and capacities of all students and to ensure that students attain appropriate standards of knowledge, skills and understanding in the agreed key learning areas, including mathematics and English. The National Literacy and Numeracy Plan, agreed to by Education Ministers in 1997, provides a coherent framework for working towards the achievement of the national literacy and numeracy goal, through a coordinated approach by the Commonwealth, States and Territories to improving students' literacy and numeracy outcomes. An important basis of the Plan is the belief that all students can make progress and can achieve in literacy and numeracy. Teacher professional development is also a crucial element of the Plan, acknowledging the critical influence that teachers' beliefs, knowledge and understanding and skills have on students' literacy and numeracy development.

*The States Grant (Primary and Secondary Education Assistance) Act 2000* provides Commonwealth funding to the States and Territories of \$22 billion for the 2001 to 2004 quadrennium. This funding is for the education of all Australian school students in government and non-government sectors. The legislation provides direct financial assistance to assist schools and education providers achieve the National Goals for Schooling in the Twenty-First Century in government and non-government schools, which include goals in the area of literacy and numeracy.

A major focus of the legislation is strengthened accountability arrangements. For the first time, the Commonwealth has required that all education authorities must, as a condition of funding from 2001, make a commitment to the National Goals for Schooling in the Twenty-First Century. Education authorities must also commit to achieving certain performance measures incorporated in the legislation. The States Grant legislation also introduced the Strategic Assistance for Improving Student Outcomes (SAISO) programme which provides education authorities with greater flexibility to make decisions on which schools and students have the greatest need for additional assistance and to direct funds accordingly.

The SAISO programme will provide approximately \$1.4 billion over the four years 2001-2004 to improve the literacy and numeracy skills of educationally disadvantaged students and to assist students with disabilities. Complementing SAISO, the Commonwealth expends about \$8 million per annum under the Grants for National Literacy and Numeracy Strategies and Projects Programme to support the implementation of the National Literacy and Numeracy Plan. This Programme aims to identify, research and implement strategic national initiatives and developments in literacy and numeracy, including distinctive issues associated with early and middle years of schooling such as those identified in *Boys: Getting it right*.

A range of other important initiatives administered by the Commonwealth are relevant to the recommendations of *Boys: Getting it right*:

- Discovering Democracy and the National School Drug Education Strategy, both within the Quality Outcomes Programme, focus on specific issues with a strong relationship to the issues of disengagement and lack of motivation that are of concern to the Committee in *Boys: Getting it right*.
- National Literacy and Numeracy Week is a Commonwealth Government initiative, run collaboratively with the State and Territory Governments. The Week highlights the importance of all Australian students developing effective literacy and numeracy skills. It is also a time of celebration, acknowledging and showcasing the outstanding and innovative work schools and their communities are undertaking to improve students' literacy and numeracy skills. A highlight of the Week is the National Literacy and Numeracy Week Awards to schools that acknowledge outstanding achievements. The Commonwealth provides \$200,000 to fund these awards.
- The Country Areas Programme contributes to the enhancement of the learning outcomes for students in geographically isolated areas so that their learning outcomes match those of other students.
- The Languages priority area helps schools and school communities to improve the learning outcomes of students who are learning languages other than English.
- The Enterprise and Career Education Programme (formerly the Enterprise Education Programme) focuses primarily on enterprise education and transition systems including vocational and career education for young people, with particular emphasis on Years 5 to 10, inclusive.
- In collaboration with the State and Territory Governments the Commonwealth has established [myfuture.edu.au](http://myfuture.edu.au) a single comprehensive and effective Internet based career exploration service. The new system is designed to enable users to make better-informed decisions about their career aspirations, including choices about jobs and any further education or training they may require.
- The Partnership Outreach Education Model (POEM) pilots target young people who have become disconnected from mainstream education (and quite possibly their families and communities) and engage them in community learning environments. The pilots provide governments, schools, youth related service providers, business, communities and young people and their families with an opportunity to share knowledge as they test

a partnership approach to the delivery of education, life skills and employability skills for those young people (aged 13 – 19).

- The Career and Transition (CAT) pilots test innovative ways of improving the quality of career information and advice to all young people aged 13 to 19 years, including students and those who have left school. The pilots have been designed to enhance, complement and build upon existing career and transition services in local communities. The aim is to bring these services together in a coordinated way and develop new strategies in order to deliver timely, accurate and relevant information to young people.
- Both CAT and POEM pilots are the subject of ongoing evaluation through a National Coordination and Evaluation Project that runs parallel to the pilots and provides progressive updates pending final reporting in February 2004.
- The Commonwealth has commissioned a national Values Education Study to enable schools to strengthen what they are already doing in the values education area and to disseminate best practice examples. It will also develop a set of principles and a framework for improved values education in Australian schools. As part of the study, 71 schools around the country have been chosen to receive grants of up to \$7,000 for innovative values education projects.

*The National Agenda for Early Childhood*, a whole of government initiative for which a consultation paper was launched by the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs, Larry Anthony, on 20<sup>th</sup> February 2003, will focus on three key areas: early child and maternal health, early learning and care; and supporting child friendly communities. Further areas of focus for the early learning and care component include promoting access for all children to quality early learning experiences, especially in the year before formal school entry; successful transition to school for all children, education and family support; earlier identification of children at risk of developmental or behavioural problems and promoting awareness among parents of opportunities for early learning experiences for their children.

On the evidence, boys are over-represented in many of the target groups for these programmes and projects. To that extent, the programmes and projects are already helping meet the particular needs of boys.

Nevertheless, the Government recognises the need to ensure that the systematic issues around boys in school and their educational performance are fully addressed in all Commonwealth funded educational programmes. To this end, the Government is where appropriate building consideration of the needs of boys specifically into the criteria for the development, operation and evaluation of the educational programmes and projects the Commonwealth funds. In so doing, the Government will maintain its policy of holding grantees responsible in terms of outcomes achieved and reporting of student performance, rather than in terms of direct conditions on the use of funds.

In addition, the Government is exploring specific options for:

- initiatives under the National Agenda for Early Childhood to address the needs of boys and girls before they start school and in the early years of school, and to assist parents, carers and others with information in this regard;
- initiatives under the National Literacy and Numeracy Strategies and Projects Programme in relation to boys and middle years of schooling;
- support through the National Quality Schools Framework (NQS) for teachers, schools, clusters of schools and school communities wishing to engage in school improvement around boys' education.

The development of these options will depend in part on the directions of development of the Commonwealth programmes involved, and will be informed by the emerging outcomes of the *Boys' Lighthouse Programme* and of research. The Department of Education, Science and Training has been undertaking an active programme of research into boys' education in recent years. Recently released research is accessible on the DEST website at <http://www.dest.gov.au/schools/boyseducation/>.

### **Building on Cooperative Strategies**

Many of the recommendations are directed to matters which are the responsibility of State and Territory education authorities, and government and non-government schools. Others are the responsibility of teacher education institutions. In these cases, the Government will take the Committee's recommendations up with the appropriate bodies to encourage an ongoing dialogue.

The Minister has written to the State and Territory Ministers of Education seeking their support for a review through MCEETYA of the peak national planning document for gender equity in schools, *Gender Equity: A Framework for Australian Schools*. The 1997 framework, which was built on the 1993 *National Action Plan for the Education of Girls*, sets out the way schools address gender equity issues, and does not specifically identify issues pertaining to boys. It is clear that the framework needs to be reviewed so that boys and girls are able to find and achieve their own potential in an educational context which takes into account their differences.

The Minister and the Department will take up all the relevant recommendations of *Boys: Getting it right* with MCEETYA for review and advice through its task forces of officials. It is expected that most recommendations can be considered appropriately within MCEETYA's ongoing programme of development.

The Minister has written to the Deans of the faculties of education around Australia, drawing their attention to the recommendations of the *Boys: Getting it right* report, seeking information on the gender balance in applications for and enrolments in teacher education, and seeking their views on what might be done about the imbalance.

The Minister and the Department will pursue the Committee's recommendations relevant to teacher education through ongoing processes of dialogue and consultation, including profile discussions with universities.

### **No Mandate for Specific Educational and Management Practices**

As a final general point, it is a matter of policy and philosophy that the Government will not mandate specific practices in teaching or practices in the management and administration of education. The Commonwealth aims to lead, encourage and support the providers of education. Ultimately decisions on practice are best made by the practitioners.

As a result, despite the demonstrated value of structured and intensive phonics programmes within the repertoire of practices in the teaching of literacy, the Government does not support the explicit recommendations of the Committee in this regard. It will however refer the recommendations of *Boys: Getting it right* to MCEETYA.

Similarly, the Commonwealth does not support recommendations on such matters as teacher pay or class sizes. To do so would be inconsistent with the Commonwealth's philosophy, and in any case inappropriate since those matters are the responsibility of the State and Territory government and non-government education authorities and the schools.

For the same reasons of philosophy, the Government will not place some of the conditions on Commonwealth education funding that the Committee recommends. The Commonwealth has moved away from such conditions towards outcome-oriented accountability arrangements which establish a national planning framework and systematic forms of reporting under the plans, and then set agreed educational targets for Commonwealth programmes with measurable outcomes.

To enhance accountability for the effective use of funds, the Commonwealth has strengthened its reporting requirements. The *States Grants (Primary and Secondary Education Assistance) Act 2000* contains accountability measures to monitor the progress of student outcomes. Further, as a condition of funding the Commonwealth requires all school authorities:

- to commit to the national goals for schooling including that:
  - students should have attained the skills of numeracy and English literacy: such that every student should be numerate, able to read, write, spell and communicate at an appropriate level; and
  - the learning outcomes of educationally disadvantaged students improve and, over time, match those of other students;
- to provide an annual literacy and numeracy plan against the national goals and national plan; and
- to report the percentage of students attaining the national Year 3, Year 5 and Year 7 literacy and numeracy benchmarks.

The Commonwealth continues to work with the States and Territories through MCEETYA to improve reporting on literacy and numeracy, as well as other indicators of student achievement. The Minister is taking the issue of the performance of students in literacy and numeracy up with the States and Territories through MCEETYA, as part of a general response to the recommendations.



## RESPONSES TO INDIVIDUAL RECOMMENDATIONS

### Recommendation 1

*The Committee recommends that the Minister for Education, Science and Training act to have MCEETYA revise and recast Gender Equity: A Framework for Australian Schools into a new policy framework which is consistent with The Adelaide Declaration on the National Goals for Schooling in the Twenty-First Century and reflects the positive values expressed in that document:*

- *the framework should provide an overarching policy structure for joint and distinctive boys' and girls' education strategies which—*
  - *address boys' and girls' social and educational needs in positive terms;*
  - *allow for school and community input to address local circumstances;*
- *the achievement of the goals and values expressed in the framework and the boys' and girls' education strategies should be evaluated against a range of social, employment and educational indicators; and*
  - *these indicators should be used by MCEETYA to inform changes in policy and practice to ensure the social and educational needs of boys and girls are being met.*

The Government accepts this recommendation. On 17 January 2003, the Minister wrote to the State and Territory Ministers of Education, to advise them of his intention to seek a review of *Gender Equity: A Framework for Australian Schools*. The Acting Secretary of DEST took the matter to AESOC on 21 February 2003. The matter has now been referred to the MCEETYA Taskforce of Targeted Initiatives of National Significance, which will report to MCEETYA.

### Recommendation 2

*The Committee recommends that the major focus of pre-service and in-service teacher education should be on equipping teachers to meet the needs of all boys and girls. This must include raising teachers' awareness of the differences and commonalities in the learning styles of boys and girls and the teachers' influence on student outcomes and helping them develop balanced, effective and practical teaching strategies.*

*The Committee also recommends that the Commonwealth, State and Territory governments jointly fund additional professional development for practising teachers for this purpose, particularly targeting strategies that work with boys.*

The Government accepts this recommendation.

The first part is consistent with Goal 1 of the National Goals for Schooling, which says '*Schooling should develop fully the talents and capacities of all students*'.

In relation to the second part, the Minister announced on 30 April 2003 funding of \$3.8m for the *Boys' Lighthouse Programme* to establish best practice and professional development in boys'

education under the CQTP. Commonwealth programmes in education, including the \$159.2m CQTP more generally and the \$1.4b SAISO programme, also support professional development for teachers.

As part of a general response to the recommendations, the Minister is taking this issue up further with the States and Territories through MCEETYA, and with Deans and faculties of Education through ongoing liaison and consultation.

### **Recommendation 3**

*The Committee recommends that the Commonwealth fund further research into the impact of different assessment methods on the measured relative attainments of boys and girls.*

The Government accepts this recommendation.

On 27 November 2002, the Minister announced that he would be allocating \$500,000 for research in areas around pedagogy, curriculum, testing and assessment. This research will help identify what information is available, what more needs to be uncovered about the way we are teaching boys, the ways they are learning and what constitutes good practice.

The recommendation is consistent with the existing research programme of the Department. Considerable material has already been published, including two reports released on 27 November 2002.

- The Murdoch University, University of Queensland project, *Addressing the Educational Needs of Boys- Strategies for Schools and Teachers*, investigated different factors affecting the education of boys.
- The *Boys, Literacy and Schooling* project, undertaken by the Curriculum Corporation, James Cook University and Griffith University, focused on current practices in teaching educationally disadvantaged or underachieving boys and their literacy development.

### **Recommendation 4**

*The Committee recommends that as part of a strategy to raise community and parental awareness of the effect certain parenting styles may have on learning and behaviour and the correlation between behavioural problems and learning difficulties; the relevant Ministers should:*

- *review the available Australian qualitative and quantitative research on behaviour and learning;*
- *develop information for inclusion in a package for new parents on the effect of particular parenting styles on children's behaviour and learning; and*
- *develop an information package or packages, for General Practitioners, child-care workers, pre-school teachers and others in contact with parents of pre-schoolers, which includes a guide to services to help parents whose children have behaviour and attention problems.*

The Government accepts this recommendation.

The recommendation is consistent with the objectives of the National Agenda for Early Childhood. The programmes and approach under this agenda are at present under development, and a framework for public consultation was released by the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs, Larry Anthony, on 20 February 2003. Options to meet the recommendation will be developed within that framework.

Authorities at the Commonwealth and State and Territory levels will be consulted and involved as appropriate.

A Departmental project, which will inform elements of the recommendation, is already underway. This is the *Parent-School Partnerships* project with the Australian Parents Council (APC) and the Australian Council of State School Organisations (ACSSO), which is examining the impacts of parent-school partnerships on both student performance and social functioning (eg. behaviour). The second phase of this project is expected to commence in the second quarter of 2003.

### **Recommendation 5**

*The Committee recommends that:*

- a) *all State and Territory health authorities ensure that kindergarten children are fully tested for hearing and sight problems; and*
- b) *the Commonwealth and State and Territory governments jointly fund the implementation of the strategies used in the Victorian study on auditory processing in primary schools throughout Australia. Implementation should include:*
  - *professional development for all primary school teachers to raise awareness about the normal development of auditory processing in children;*
  - *the provision of the relevant auditory screening tests and training to equip teachers to administer preliminary tests with referral to specialised support where needed; and*
  - *professional development for teachers in practical classroom management and teaching strategies to address the needs of children with auditory processing difficulties.*

It is not appropriate for the Commonwealth to comment on recommendation 5a. Under the Australian Health Care Agreements, service delivery for community child health screening and surveillance are a State and Territory government responsibility.

The Commonwealth does provide support in two areas:

- the programme *Australian Hearing* does not provide services for primary or secondary hearing screening, but assists in the provision of ongoing audiological management and amplification to hearing impaired children under 21 years of age; and
- specific ear and eye programs for Indigenous people are supported through the Office for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health.

The Government does not support recommendation 5b. The Commonwealth believes that screening is best provided in family focused centres that are multi-dimensional and community based. As noted above, the State and Territory governments are responsible for screening.

The case for screening of school age children is inconclusive. The National Health and Medical Research Council NHMRC report *Child Health Screening and Surveillance: A Critical Review of the Evidence 2002* did not find conclusive evidence in favour of hearing disability testing for

school level children. In addition, Victoria is undertaking further studies beyond that referred to in the recommendation. The study *Hearing in Schools*, taking place in 2003-4 will investigate the prevalence and impact of slight and mild hearing loss among Victorian primary school children. This study will provide more information on the links between hearing difficulties and problems with language skills and learning.

Nevertheless, the government recognises the importance of adequate hearing and sight abilities in the classroom. As part of a general response to the recommendations, the Minister is taking this issue up with the States and Territories through MCEETYA.

### **Recommendation 6**

*The Committee recommends that:*

- a) *the Commonwealth, in conjunction with the State and Territory governments, coordinate a public information program comprised of the following elements:*
- *information for all new parents on the importance of developing early language skills and the games and strategies which parents and child carers can use to develop these skills, with follow-up at key stages in their pre-school years;*
  - *basic information on the way that adults traditionally have interacted with boys and girls stressing the importance to parents of developing pre-literacy and pre-numeracy skills in both boys and girls while recognising their differences; and*
  - *a periodic, low intensity, media campaign to raise and maintain community awareness about the need to talk and play with babies and young children in ways that develop their pre-literacy and numeracy skills.*
- b) *the Commonwealth, with the State and Territory governments, work with pre-schools and childcare centres to ensure that there is adequate awareness of, and attention to, pre-literacy and pre-numeracy skill development in boys as well as girls.*

The Government accepts this recommendation.

Like recommendation 4, this recommendation is consistent with the objectives of the National Agenda for Early Childhood. The programmes and approach under this agenda are at present under development, a draft framework for public consultation has been released. Options to meet the recommendation will be developed within that framework. Authorities at the Commonwealth and State and Territory levels will be consulted and involved as appropriate.

### **Recommendation 7**

*The Committee recommends that Commonwealth-funded literacy programs should be required to adopt an integrated approach which includes a strong element of explicit, intensive, systematic phonics instruction.*

*When programs such as Reading Recovery are used they should be augmented by explicit, intensive phonics instruction as part of regular classroom teaching.*

The Government supports the general intention of this recommendation, that schools should adopt integrated approaches for literacy instruction as part of regular classroom teaching.

The Commonwealth recognises that explicit phonics instruction is an important part of the repertoire of literacy programmes. However, responsibility for curriculum and teaching methods lies with the government and non-government education authorities and schools.

Rather than recommending specific approaches to teaching, the Commonwealth seeks to improve performance in teaching and learning by requiring accountability for programmes it funds in terms of demonstrable improvement in outcomes.

As part of a general response to the recommendations, the Minister is taking the matter of the extent of use of structured and intensive phonics instruction within schools to MCEETYA, with the recommendation that it be given favourable and serious consideration.

### **Recommendations 8**

*The Committee recommends that Commonwealth, State and Territory education authorities ensure that teacher education places much greater emphasis on the pedagogy of teaching literacy and numeracy. Further, pre-service training in teaching literacy should involve an integrated approach which includes explicit, intensive, structured phonics as an essential element in early and remedial literacy instruction.*

The Government supports the general intention of this recommendation, with the caveats that the Commonwealth does not mandate any specific form of literacy instruction, and that pre-service training is the responsibility of the teacher education bodies.

Existing Commonwealth programmes, including SAISO, the CQTP and the National Literacy and Numeracy Strategies and Projects Programme, have provision to support and train teachers in pedagogy, including literacy and numeracy. The effectiveness of Commonwealth funding to States and Territories under these programmes is assessed by consistent national benchmarking, including for literacy and numeracy.

Under the National Literacy and Numeracy Strategies and Projects Programme, the Commonwealth is assisting development in this area through research. The Investigate the Preparation of Teachers to Teach Literacy and Numeracy in Primary and Secondary Schools project will provide information on effective practice in the pre-service preparation of teachers to teach literacy and numeracy to all students in the early and middle years of schooling (up to Years 9 and 10), particularly to educationally disadvantaged students.

As part of a general response to the recommendations, the Minister is taking up the issue of the training of teachers in the pedagogy of literacy and numeracy with the States and Territories through MCEETYA. He is also taking the matter up further with the Deans and faculties of Education through ongoing liaison and consultation.

## Recommendation 9

*The Committee recommends that Commonwealth, State and Territory funding for teachers' professional development be increased on a dollar for dollar basis and that it be directed towards a greater focus on literacy and on early diagnosis and intervention to assist children at risk. This should involve developing skills in intensive phonics instruction as part of an integrated approach to teaching literacy.*

The Government supports the general intention behind this recommendation, insofar as it recognises that professional development for teachers in literacy is important, but does not support the specific policy proposals.

The Commonwealth provides extensive assistance for professional development, including literacy, but it would be inadvisable to tie funding increases, or funding priorities, by the Commonwealth, State and Territories to such specific arrangements.

Literacy is a Quality Teacher Programme priority area with the second highest teacher participation, after numeracy. Literacy is also one of the areas that can be funded under the CQTP *Boys' Lighthouse Programme*. Further, SAISO provides significant additional assistance to education authorities to support improved literacy strategies.

The specific requirement to include intensive phonic instruction is also not supported. As the delivery of school education, including curriculum and specific literacy instructional programmes, is a State and Territory responsibility, the Commonwealth does not believe in an approach which attempts to mandate a specific practice in teaching. Rather, the Commonwealth seeks to improve performance in teaching and learning by requiring accountability for programmes it funds in terms of demonstrable improvement in learning outcomes.

The Commonwealth Government also seeks to improve quality in schooling and enhance educational outcomes for all students by providing support for research in relation to nationally significant educational issues.

Through the *Effective Teaching and Learning Practices Leading to Improved Literacy Outcomes in the Early Years of Schooling* project the Commonwealth is supporting research which will provide in-depth information on the ways in which foundation literacy skills are taught in Australian schools in the early years and how these approaches and strategies impact on student outcomes. A video demonstrating effective literacy teaching practices will also be produced.

The Commonwealth seeks to improve literacy and numeracy outcomes by supporting, encouraging and improving national benchmarking and performance reporting and measurement under the aegis of MCEETYA. Accountability for Commonwealth funded programmes in school education is underpinned by:

- the National Goals for Schooling;
- the broader framework of the National Literacy and Numeracy Plan that requires schools to assess all students and provide appropriate intervention strategies for all students who are at risk; and
- nationally agreed literacy standards and the requirement to report on outcomes.

The Commonwealth believes that a focus on outcomes and performance reporting, supported by targeted programmes such as those above, is the best way to encourage all educational authorities and schools to address those factors that increase performance, including professional development.

However, Commonwealth funding for the professional development of teachers is determined in relation to other priorities. Further, State and Territory funding, whether government or non-government, is a matter for those education authorities and the Commonwealth does not mandate any specific form of literacy instruction.

As part of a general response to the recommendations, the Minister is taking up the issue of the training of teachers in the pedagogy of literacy and numeracy with the States and Territories through MCEETYA. As reported against recommendation 7, in recognition that assessment by classroom teachers is linked to teacher knowledge about effective literacy strategies, the Minister is also taking up the matter about the extent of use of structured and intensive phonics instruction within schools to MCEETYA.

### **Recommendation 10**

*The Committee recommends that the Commonwealth in conjunction with the States and Territories, ensure funding for the provision of a Literacy Coordinator and an early intervention intensive literacy teacher in every Australian primary school, the proportion of a full-time equivalent load depending on the size of the school and the measured level of literacy need.*

The Government supports the general intention of this recommendation, that schools should have the necessary support in implementing literacy programmes effectively, but does not support the specific policy proposal.

This policy proposal contained in this recommendation is not supported as the responsibility for specific support mechanisms for literacy in schools lie with State and Territory education authorities. Current Commonwealth funding arrangements provide State and Territory education authorities and schools with the flexibility to provide this kind of support to meet the differing needs of their student populations.

The Government believes that arrangements must suit the needs of each jurisdiction, authority and school. It would be inappropriate for the Commonwealth to mandate a particular approach. This is a matter for State and Territory government and non-government education authorities and schools.

The Commonwealth invests heavily in support for literacy and numeracy teaching in schools, with \$736m spent from 1997-2000 on literacy and numeracy needs, and \$1.4b planned under SAISO from 2001-04 on literacy and numeracy outcomes and on assisting students with disabilities. The appointment of literacy coordinators is one of the eligible forms of assistance for which SAISO funds can be used.

Many systems have already implemented a coordinator at either the cluster or school level. Learning support teachers appointed by jurisdictions in several States give specific support in developing and implementing specific programs and strategies for individuals and groups.

As part of a general response to the recommendations, the Minister is taking the issue of coordination and specialist support for literacy and numeracy teaching up with the States and Territories through MCEETYA.

## Recommendation 11

*The Committee recommends that the Commonwealth ensure that existing funding under the Literacy and Numeracy program to support students in the middle years is used effectively by the States and Territories to provide intensive literacy support programs for disadvantaged students whose need for them is identified by the Literacy Benchmark Tests.*

The Government accepts this recommendation.

Commonwealth funding for literacy and numeracy learning in the middle years of schooling is provided under SAISO and the *National Literacy and Numeracy Strategies and Projects Programme*.

The Government has already committed \$5 million for specific projects under the *National Literacy and Numeracy Strategies and Projects Programme*, to support improved literacy and numeracy outcomes in the middle years of schooling, particularly for educationally disadvantaged students. The first stage of this funding was allocated to support a initial middle year's of schooling research project by the University of Queensland, which was completed in April. The second stage of this funding has been set aside to assist State and Territory education authorities in addressing the needs of students in the middle years of schooling who are not meeting benchmark standards.

To enhance accountability for the effective use of funds, the Commonwealth has strengthened its reporting requirements. The *States Grants (Primary and Secondary Education Assistance) Act 2000* contains accountability measures to monitor the progress of student outcomes. Further, as a condition of funding the Commonwealth requires all school authorities:

- to commit to the national goals for schooling including that:
  - students should have attained the skills of numeracy and English literacy: such that every student should be numerate, able to read, write, spell and communicate at an appropriate level; and
  - the learning outcomes of educationally disadvantaged students improve and, over time, match those of other students;
- to provide an annual literacy and numeracy plan against the national goals and national plan; and
- to report the percentage of students attaining the national Year 3, Year 5 and Year 7 literacy and numeracy benchmarks.

The Commonwealth continues to work with the States and Territories through MCEETYA to improve reporting on literacy and numeracy, as well as other indicators of student achievement. The Minister is taking up the issue of the performance of students in literacy and numeracy with the States and Territories through MCEETYA, as part of a general response to the recommendations.



## **Recommendation 12**

*The Committee recommends that teacher pre-service and professional development programs assist teachers with practical strategies to develop secondary students' operational literacy and communication skills across all areas of the curriculum.*

The Government supports the general intention of this recommendation. It recognises that primary responsibility for teacher education lies with the universities, and that primary responsibility for teacher professional development lies with the State and Territory government and non-government education authorities and the schools.

The Minister has written to the Deans of Education as the start of a consultation process with the Deans to seek their ongoing advice and cooperation in implementing the recommendations of *Boys: Getting it right*.

The *Boys' Lighthouse Programme*, and the Quality Teacher Programme of which it is a part, are likely to assist in meeting this recommendation by providing better practical strategies for teachers to use in developing student's operational literacy and communications skills. The CQTP supports teacher professional development on literacy but does not mandate any particular approach.

As part of a general response to the recommendations, the Minister is taking this issue up further with the States and Territories through MCEETYA.

## **Recommendation 13**

*The Committee recommends that the State and Territory governments reduce class sizes in Years K to 3 to not more than 20 students by 2005. The Committee recommends that the Commonwealth support this by assisting to meet the additional capital cost of reduced class sizes (in proportion to its current share of capital funding).*

The first part of this recommendation is a matter for the States and Territories. The Government does not support the second part.

Class sizes are the responsibility of the government and non-government education authorities and schools.

The Commonwealth does provide supplementary capital funding for school infrastructure, whether new, upgrading or refurbishing, through the Capital Grants Programme. However, it does not select capital projects, but approves them based on recommendations from State and Territory governments, and for non-government schools, the Block Grant Authorities.

The likely benefits of smaller class sizes in the early years of schooling, compared to other means of improving outcomes, are still open to debate.

- The Tennessee Project STAR (Student Teacher Achievement Ratio) research study is one of the most well known, and is quoted favourably in *Boys: Getting It Right*. It provides qualified evidence that substantially smaller class sizes can have positive effects for all students, and particularly for disadvantaged students.

- Research such as that by Darling-Hammond in 2000 found that the quality of teacher education and teaching appear to be more strongly related to student achievement than class sizes, overall spending levels or teacher salaries.

In these circumstances, the relative benefits of investing in quality teaching compared to reduction in class size are a matter for judgement by the responsible authorities, State and Territory Governments and Non Government School Authorities.

#### **Recommendation 14**

*The Committee recommends that the Commonwealth government fund research to evaluate different approaches and strategies to maximise the engagement and motivation of boys and girls in the middle years of school.*

The Government accepts this recommendation.

The Commonwealth has already committed \$5 million under the National Literacy and Numeracy Strategies and Projects Programme for specific projects to support improved literacy and numeracy outcomes of educationally disadvantaged students in the middle years of schooling.

- The first stage of this funding, a research project by the University of Queensland, was finalised in April 2003. The report is titled *Beyond the Middle: A Report about Literacy and Numeracy Development of Target Group Students in the Middle Years of Schooling*.
- Other emerging priority areas for the second stage of funding include teacher professional development, whole school literacy and numeracy planning, capitalising on assessment and reporting, and teacher education.

The *Boys' Lighthouse Programme* will draw together experience in a wide range of issues, which may include engagement and motivation and middle years of schooling. This material will be drawn together in best practice dissemination, and is likely to identify areas for further work.

Existing research and initiatives are also relevant.

- In 2001 the Commonwealth also released *Declining rates of achievement and retention: the perceptions of adolescent males* by Professor Faith Trent and Malcolm Slade of Flinders University. The research collected the views of 1800 South Australian boys in Years 9 to 11. It dealt extensively with issues of engagement and motivation for boys and concluded that quality teaching practices are central to better engaging boys.
- Under the National Literacy and Numeracy Strategies and Projects Programme, the Government has also supported the development of an online resource to assist teachers of students in the middle years of schooling to meet the literacy needs of less able readers in their classes. This was a joint project between the Australian Literacy Educators' Association (ALEA) and the Australian Association for the Teaching of English (AATE).
- In 2001 the Commonwealth also released the *Boys, Literacy and Schooling: Expanding the Repertoires of Practice* report, which makes a number of suggestions for change at the school and classroom level to help boys engage and achieve in literacy.

### **Recommendation 15**

*The Committee recommends that the Commonwealth fund comparative research into the influence that different school structures, curricula, assessment systems, the availability of alternatives to senior school (such as TAFE), behaviour management and other factors have on the apparent retention rates and attitudes to school of boys and girls.*

The Government accepts this recommendation.

The Commonwealth has already undertaken a significant body of recent research on these issues.

- *Declining rates of achievement and retention: the perceptions of adolescent males* by Professor Faith Trent and Malcolm Slade of Flinders University.
- *Factors Influencing the Educational Performance of Males and Females in School and their Initial Destinations after Leaving School* by Professor Jane Kenway, Language and Literacy Centre, University of South Australia, and Dr Cherry Collins and Dr Julie McLeod, Deakin Centre for Education and Change, Deakin University.
- *Addressing the Educational Needs of Boys – Strategies for Schools and Teachers* by Murdoch University and University of Queensland.

On 27 November 2002, the Minister for Education, Science and Training announced that he would be allocating \$500,000 for research in areas around pedagogy, curriculum, testing and assessment. This research will help identify what information is available, what more needs to be uncovered about the way we are teaching boys, the ways they are learning and what constitutes best practice.

The Department is raising with the OECD Education Chief Executives the education of boys as a key education policy area over the next 3 to 5 years. There may be opportunities to undertake cooperative research programs to compare and contrast different national systems and their outcomes.

Options for further research will emerge from the Department's ongoing research program, as well as the initiatives the Minister has announced, and will be considered in that context.

### **Recommendation 16**

*The Committee recommends that Commonwealth Government fund the assessment of existing programs being run by the States and Territories and community organisations to assist the most vulnerable and disengaged students with a view to the States and Territories expanding successful programs.*

The Government accepts this recommendation. It recognises that decisions on the expansion of programmes are ultimately a matter for education authorities and schools.

The Values Education Study and the *Boys' Lighthouse Programme* provide frameworks for the assessment of programmes, including those to assist the most vulnerable and disengaged students, and the promotion of successful programmes. Both enable schools to develop or strengthen their own programmes, and to disseminate successful practice, including through

teacher professional development. Both will result in the consolidation and dissemination of best practice guides.

MCEETYA in July 2002 supported the Values Education Study, and:

- acknowledged that education is as much about building character as it is about equipping students with specific skills;
- noted that values-based education can strengthen students' self-esteem, optimism and commitment to personal fulfilment; and help students exercise ethical judgement and social responsibility; and
- recognised that parents expect schools to help students understand and develop personal and social responsibilities.

As part of a general response to the recommendations, the Minister is taking this issue up further with the States and Territories through MCEETYA.

### **Recommendation 17**

*The Committee recommends that the Minister for Education, Science and Training encourage university teacher education faculties to place greater emphasis on the development of behaviour management and interpersonal skills, particularly those that will support teachers to establish effective relationships with boys.*

*The Committee further recommends that more professional development be provided for this purpose for practising teachers.*

The Government accepts this recommendation.

The Minister for Education Science and Training has written to the Deans of Education as the start of a consultation process with them to seek their ongoing advice and cooperation in implementing the recommendations of *Boys: Getting it right*.

A considerable amount of action is already under way in this area.

Two processes under the aegis of MCEETYA deal with behaviour management.

- The national safe school framework will deal with the role of schools in promoting a harmonious learning environment and will be underpinned by principles and related strategies, including the training of school staff in matters such as student behaviour management. The framework was recently put to Ministers for their endorsement.
- MCEETYA has asked its Student Learning and Support Services Taskforce to provide Ministers with advice on programs that exhibit best practice in addressing student behaviour issues.

A DEST suite of multi-media resources – *REDI - Resilience Education and Drug Information* – is under development with a focus on preventing and reducing harm from drug use by building more resilient young people and by helping schools to build a whole of school approach to tackling drug issues. The resources aim to increase teacher confidence and competence in delivering school drug education, and include a professional development component. The materials are expected to be distributed free to schools in mid 2003.

The REDI teacher professional development materials could form the basis of a resource package for tertiary educators.

The *Boys' Lighthouse Programme* is strongly oriented towards professional development of teachers in developing effective educational relationships with boys. This is likely to include behaviour management strategies.

As part of a general response to the recommendations, the Minister is taking this issue up further with the States and Territories through MCEETYA.

#### **Recommendation 18**

*The Committee recommends that State and Territory Governments urgently address the remuneration of teachers with the payment of substantial additional allowances for skilled and experienced teachers as an inducement for them to remain in teaching and to attract new teachers by offering more attractive career paths.*

It is not appropriate for the Commonwealth to comment, as teacher remuneration is wholly a matter for the States and Territories, and for non-government education authorities and schools.

#### **Recommendation 19**

*The Committee recommends that the Commonwealth government and university teacher education faculties work together to develop admission processes for teacher education courses that evaluate relevant personal attributes in addition to academic achievement.*

The Government accepts the intention of this recommendation with the caveat that the Commonwealth does not determine admission processes for university entry. This is the responsibility of the individual institutions.

Education authorities as direct employers of teachers have a strong vested interest in effective admission processes for teacher education. The work plan for the MCEETYA Teacher Quality and Educational Leadership Taskforce includes the development, in consultation with Deans of Education, of criteria to guide the selection of trainee teachers who are both suited and committed to teaching. This work is scheduled for 2003-04.

The Minister has written to the *Review of Teaching and Teacher Education* to bring the findings of the Inquiry to their attention. The Review is examining teaching and teacher education in the fields of science, technology and mathematics focussing, inter alia, on workforce needs and the skills teachers need to build a culture of continuous innovation in Australian schools in the longer term.

As part of a general response to the recommendations, the Minister is taking this issue up further with the States and Territories through MCEETYA, and with Deans and faculties of Education through ongoing liaison and consultation.

## Recommendation 20

*The Committee recommends that the Commonwealth provide a substantial number of HECS-free scholarships for equal numbers of males and females to undertake teacher training. These would be based on merit and take into account other admission criteria developed in line with Recommendation 19.*

*The scholarships would operate as a rebate of the HECS liability while the recipients were employed by a recognised teaching authority.*

The Government does not accept this recommendation. It believes that other means of achieving the objective of this recommendation should be explored.

The objective of the report's recommendation is based on the reasoning that more male teachers are needed because of the importance of providing good role models to boys. *Boys: Getting it right* also argued that women and men can be equally good teachers of both boys and girls, and that the quality of a teacher is more important than his or her gender.

The Government is sympathetic to this line of reasoning. However, it rejects the proposed HECS (Higher Education Contribution Scheme) free scholarship mechanism, because:

- it is likely to have little impact on the gender balance among teachers in schools, because such scholarships would inevitably be limited in number and many would probably go to students (whether male or female) already committed to teaching;
- the evidence suggests that HECS is not a major determinant in student choices; and
- such scholarships would set an undesirable precedent, as the same principle could be applied to many University courses which have unequal gender representation.

The Minister has written to the Deans of Education for information on the issue of gender balance amongst teacher students, and seeking their views on what might be done about it. The Minister is receiving replies from the Deans now, as universities finalise their enrolment data.

The Commonwealth notes that some State and Territory Governments offer scholarships as a means of meeting demand in certain areas of teaching and other options for providing incentives to enter teacher training could be explored.

As part of a general response to the recommendations, the Minister is taking this issue up further with the States and Territories through MCEETYA, and with Deans and faculties of Education through ongoing liaison and consultation.

Any decisions on these issues will be determined in the context of the *Review of Teaching and Teacher Education* currently being undertaken. The Government has identified teaching as a national priority and has included measures in the Higher Education reform package *Our Universities: Backing Australia's Future*, to ensure that tuition fees for teaching are capped at current HECS contribution rates.

## **Recommendation 21**

*The Committee recommends that education authorities use their websites and in-service workshops to promote successful strategies being used by schools to involve fathers and other men from the community as positive male role models.*

The Government accepts this recommendation.

A number of Commonwealth initiatives bear on this recommendation.

The Commonwealth has launched a dedicated boys' education web page that contains all current Department of Education, Science and Training (DEST) boys' education initiatives and past Departmental research in the field, as well as links to other relevant sites. The site is accessible from the web site of DEST at [www.dest.gov.au](http://www.dest.gov.au).

- The web site includes a link to the Family Action Centre (FAC) of the University of Newcastle. FAC manages the *Engaging Fathers Project*, which encourages fathers to become more involved with their children's education.
- The web site also includes a link to information on the 2003 conference ran by FAC, *Boys to Fine Men: School and Community Partnerships*. The Commonwealth was the major sponsor of this conference.

A web site has been established by Curriculum Corporation to promote and manage applications, communications and activities under the *Boys' Lighthouse Programme*. The site address is <http://www.boyslighthouse.edu.au/>.

In the longer term the National Quality Schooling Framework (NQSF) could be a vehicle for providing advice to teachers, schools and school communities wishing to engage in school improvement around boys' education. The NQSF is being introduced to schools from Term One 2003.

As part of a general response to the recommendations, the Minister is taking this issue up further with the States and Territories through MCEETYA, and non-government educational authorities.

## **Recommendation 22**

*The Committee recommends that the Commonwealth review all aspects of published national education data to ensure its adequacy to comprehensively inform Commonwealth and State and Territory education policy.*

*The Committee further recommends that in the event that the States and Territories do not provide the necessary data, the Commonwealth consider making the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) responsible for its collection and compilation.*

The Government accepts this recommendation. Such review is on-going.

The Commonwealth, States and Territories are working co-operatively under the auspices of MCEETYA towards consistency and overall improvement in the measurement of student outcomes and data collection. While each jurisdiction employs its own assessment practices,

the Performance Measurement and Reporting Taskforce (PMRT) of MCEETYA oversees a comprehensive programme to review current data on school education.

Ministers have identified a number of priority areas of schooling for the development of nationally consistent Key Performance Measures of student outcomes. These priority areas include literacy, numeracy, participation and attainment, Vocational Education and Training in schools, science, Information, Communication and Technology, civics and citizenship and enterprise education. This work is being carried out by the PMRT and the ABS actively participates in the work of the Taskforce.

All jurisdictions work collaboratively with the ABS on data collections.

### **Recommendation 23**

*The Committee recommends that MCEETYA continue to work towards achieving greater consistency in their policy frameworks and greater uniformity in assessment processes so that results, including gender differences, are more readily comparable between States and Territories.*

For its part, the Government accepts this recommendation. Such work is an on-going MCEETYA activity, including the review of *Gender Equity: A Framework for Australian Schools* (see recommendation 1).

While each jurisdiction employs its own assessment processes, the Commonwealth is actively working with States and Territories through MCEETYA to ensure nationally consistent measures of outcomes in the identified priority areas (see recommendation 22).

- The Commonwealth, States and Territories have developed an equating procedure that enables direct comparison from existing State and Territory assessments of literacy and numeracy outcomes at Years 3, 5 and 7.
- In other priority areas of the curriculum identified by Ministers (science, ICT and civics), work is underway to develop national sample assessments, that is, common assessments at specified year levels (generally years 6 and 10) that will be undertaken by samples of students.

The Measurement Framework for nationally consistent Key Performance Measures approved by MCEETYA in 2002 provides for the development, trialling and implementation of national assessments in the priority areas over the period 2003-05.

### **Recommendation 24**

*Where Commonwealth funding is provided in response to other recommendations in this report, the Committee recommends that the Commonwealth Government ensure that the outcomes are monitored and that appropriate conditions are attached to Commonwealth funding to ensure that the States and Territories do not undermine the Commonwealth's contribution by reducing their own financial commitment.*

The Government accepts this recommendation.



The Commonwealth already attaches conditions to funding, however the Commonwealth seeks to improve the outcomes of Australian schooling within a framework of national collaboration that emphasises performance, progress and reporting towards the National Goals for Schooling.

The *States Grants (Primary and Secondary Education Assistance) Act 2000* contains accountability measures to monitor the progress of student outcomes. Accountability arrangements for literacy and numeracy funding are outlined under recommendation 11. Similar performance and outcomes related requirements are a condition of all Commonwealth education funding.

Systematic assessment and reporting on student performance against benchmarks provides the framework of accountability for expenditure on Australia's education systems. In parallel with the legislative requirements, the Commonwealth, States, Territories and non-government sectors have co-operated closely in developing national Key Performance Measures (KPMs) through MCEETYA. The Measurement Framework for nationally consistent KPMs approved by MCEETYA in 2002 provides for the development, trialling and implementation of national assessments in the priority areas over the period 2003-5.

The Commonwealth seeks to ensure that other funding partners, the States and Territories and non-government authorities, maintain their overall financial share and adequately resource Australian schools.