

24 July 2000

INQUIRY INTO THE EDUCATION OF BOYS

Thank you for the opportunity to make a submission. I wish to focus on a specific aspect of the brief, namely, **strategies which schools have adopted to address the socialisation skills in the middle years of schooling.**

Summary

The Hutchins School brought about a marked and distinct change in socialisation skills of Middle School boys (ages 12 – 14) over a very short period. The consequences of this change have been that incidences of bullying, off task class time, anti-social behaviour and vandalism plummeted. In a very short time, a new culture was created. The new culture has been I believe, instrumental in fostering a positive attitude to schooling, socialisation and self-esteem. The changes have been **crucial** for the boys.

The Research

Unitas Consulting Limited, using a grant funded by the Innovations and Best Practice Project, conducted quantitative and qualitative research. The researcher was Professor Joan Abbott-Chapman (University of Tasmania). The report was completed in March 1999.

The Challenge

The challenge was to reinvent the Middle School, drawing on what we understand to be the needs of young adolescent boys and the current expectations of parents, including the need for active participation in learning, clear short term curriculum goals, frequent physical activity, a challenging physical environment which legitimises but safely structures risk-taking behaviour, due emphasis on co-operative learning and a genuine commitment to providing for different styles of learning. The focus was on three main areas: the physical fabric, the curriculum and the social fabric of the Middle School.

The “old” Middle School

- In situ since 1959; the buildings were the original small, cramped, uninviting square boxes. While they were located in a discrete area (down the “bottom” of the campus), they had reached the end of their useful life many years ago. Those classrooms that were vaguely presentable were in need of radical refurbishment and enlargement
- It followed a curriculum designed by Senior School subject heads and employed administrative and pastoral structures that emulated the Senior School
- The need to improve academics was especially noticeable; boys were spending considerable time “off task”

- Boys had a busy day with frequent period changes, typically eleven different teachers in a week teaching styles varied little between Middle and Senior Schools
- Discipline was very traditional and “tight”
- Transformation in the school culture (parent, boy and staff) was drastically needed
- Issues of bullying and harassment, the rewards and punishment system, problems with assessment and reporting, “put-downs” of some boys who were scholars (boys who had received a scholarship for academic ability) were issues of significance
- Staff were resigned to working in the inadequate Middle School facilities. Over the years, they felt defeated by the notion of change in Middle School

The “new” Middle School

All changes happened almost simultaneously including:

- Purpose built, unique classrooms
- Provision of additional classrooms for specific interest Middle School projects, eg Flight Simulator
- Purpose built, unique play areas
- Significantly altered curriculum, especially in Year 8, offering clearer goals for boys and greater choice
- Revised pastoral care arrangements – great emphasis on reducing bullying and harassment
- Increased period lengths
- Boys seeing fewer teachers for longer periods
- Strong, purposeful leadership committed to being change agents in the Middle School
- Building of a team of Middle School teachers whose commitment is to the Middle School
- Refocused, increased emphasis on academic achievement of each and every boy
- Revised administrative arrangements
- Revised reporting arrangements
- On-going monitoring and research

Notes on the physical fabric

Extensive use of glass, innovative design, purpose built play areas (passive and active), larger than “normal” classrooms, bold colours and bold entry hall all combine to make a very strong statement about the Middle School – it is strikingly different.

Notes on the curriculum

The revised curriculum has been a major factor in facilitating change. Students now typically have six teachers per week; they will be exposed to a core team of three staff who teach them for some 70% of the week and who meet to discuss joint strategies for individual students and themes for cross-curricular studies.

Curriculum Changes Summary Year 7 & Year 8

Year 7 old curriculum – all core	Year 7 new curriculum – all core
English, Maths, Science, Social Science	English, Maths, Science, SOSE
Music, Speech & Drama	Performing Arts – Music & Drama
French/Indonesian	French/Indonesian
Sport, Physical Education	Sport, Physical Education
Technology	Technology (also across the Curriculum)
Art Graphics	Art, Design & Technology
Year 8 old curriculum – all core	Year 8 new curriculum core/electives (E)
English	English – core
Mathematics	Mathematics – core
Science	Science – core Extension Science – Electrons & Eggshells (E) Extension Science – High Fliers (E)
Social Science	SOSE – core SOCE elective (choose 2 or 4) Oriental Horizons, The World Around Us, Voyages into the Unknown, Weather Watch, Castles & Knights, The Final Frontier, Dreamtime to Land Rights, Thinking Globally – Acting Locally
Physical Education	Physical Education – core
Religious Studies	Religious Studies – core
French/Indonesian	French/Indonesian (or Accelerated Reading)
Life Skills	Values Education
Sport	Sport
Art/Graphics/Craft	DESIGN & TECHNOLOGY – choice of: Mechatronics Slot Car Design Design in wood Security Systems Technical Graphics & CAD Creative Design & Printing Creative Design & Craft Creative Design & Ceramics
	GIFTED & TALENTED (E) Publish your Own Book Future Problem Solving
Speech & Drama Music	PERFORMING ARTS – choice of: Rock & Jazz Ensemble Making Drama Music & Drama Production Sound Light & Image Mask Mime Circus & Comedy
	Computer programming (E)
	Media Studies (E)
Computing	Living with the Web (Web page design)

Notes on the Social Fabric

Research has extensively documented the problems faced by too many students of Middle School age. Bullying, harassment and “put-downs” are too often part of a school culture. Academic study, especially for boys, is not seen as “cool”; sporting prowess is valued above music, drama, academics and public speaking. Sexuality assumes great importance. Boys can be quick to judge, ruthlessly cruel to condemn. They can also be loving, sensitive, caring and kind.

Excellent pastoral care, committed staff who knew their students well, peer mediation (where courses have been run to allow boys to mediate problems between other boys), counselling, the Student Tribunal (a disciplinary body run by students to decide punishments for boys who have upset the social fabric), visiting speakers, an harassment policy and big brother schemes (where older boys assist younger boys) have been strategies used to begin changing the culture. Perhaps, most importantly, working on the culture so that it is “OK” to “dob” when you are bullied, is a major focus.

There was little sense of team amongst the Middle School staff. The need was clear to change from a vertical, hierarchical approach to a year level, collegial team. This change enabled excellent focus to be maintained in promoting a positive social fabric. Much professional development has occurred, where the focus (through retreats, team meetings and staff meetings) has been on the development of a Middle School approach, a student centred approach and a year level approach. Teaching in Middle School needed to be seen as a career in itself, rather than a place to teach before being “promoted” to the Senior School.

Consultant’s Conclusion (edited)

“The key to the success of this project may be summarised as follows: clear vision, strong leadership, financial ability to undertake the project, effective consultative processes and doing all the changes at the one time.

Evidence, both qualitative and quantitative, from the evaluation survey of the impact of Middle School changes on student outcomes, suggest that improvements have been perceived in a number of areas by students, parents and teachers. Although in some areas the changes are modest, the fact that any measurably positive changes have been experienced in so short a time since the establishment of the ‘new’ Middle School seems quite remarkable. This suggests that if trends continue, even more significant improvements in key areas of students’ academic progress and appropriate social behaviour, are likely to be observed in future.

One of the factors which seems to have made changes more ‘visible’ and hence to have more impact is that all the changes - physical, organisational and curricular - were, with the strong leadership of the Headmaster, implemented at one time. This both accentuated the ‘differentness’ of the new Middle School and raised very favourable expectations, but also caused more upheaval. Overall, students, parents and teachers have reacted very favourably to the buildings and classroom environments and the expanded curricular options, and indeed to a range of academic and organisational arrangements. This represents a real success for the School.

In assessing the nature and extent of changes taking place, focus has been on the ‘domains’ of buildings and classroom environment; academic, curriculum and student progress; the social fabric and appropriate social behaviour; and Middle School structure and organisation as a whole.

Since there seems to be common agreement between students, parents and teachers that the 'new' Middle School is more enjoyable for students and enhances their sense of self esteem, this provides fertile ground in which very positive students' attitudes and behaviour may grow. The fact that 'students' behaviour to each other' and 'students' behaviour towards teachers' are reported as showing some measurable improvement over only one semester confirms this assertion, and is a very real achievement.

It would be difficult to conclude other than that the project is making a significant impact on learning outcomes." (Professor Abbot Chapman).

Conclusion – two years on

We have changed a culture. We have minimized poor socialisation skills that manifested in extensive bullying, poor social interaction, and considerable time "off task". We have created a climate conducive to the education of boys. I invite you to view the facility and see it "in action".

Thank you again for the opportunity to make a submission.

Yours sincerely

W D Toppin
HEADMASTER