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Mrs Kay Elson  
Chair  
Parliamentary Committee of Inquiry into Boys' Education  
Employment Education and Workplace Relations Committee  
Suite R1-116  
Parliament House  
CANBERRA ACT 2600

July 4 2001

Attention: Mr James Rees  
Inquiry Secretary

16 JUL 2001

Dear Mrs Elson

The Sydney Leadership Alumni Program wishes to record its support for your investigation into the lowered education achievements of boys, and the urgency with which suitable solutions should be implemented.

The Sydney Leadership Alumni Program is an initiative of the Benevolent Society of NSW. Sydney Leadership is a pioneering venture, which aims to create a growing group of business, community and government leaders, who have a common philosophy, approach and commitment to addressing Australia's outstanding social issues.

The project aims to generate real and sustainable community business partnerships and a network of leaders with a common commitment to confront social problems. Sydney Leadership is best described as an experiential learning program run over 12 months. During the year participants gain an insider's view of issues such as crime and justice, economic development, health, IT, reconciliation, education and youth affairs. The Alumni Program extends this and becomes a springboard for new approaches to resolving some of the complex issues we face in Australia's largest city.

Sydney Leadership Alumni Members acknowledge the increased education and career achievements of girls and women over the past 3 decades, and in no way are these comments prejudicial to continuing improvements for girls and women.

Recently the Alumni devoted half a day to examining the issues causing and consequential to the lowered educational achievements of boys, and the associated factors including school disruption, delinquency and less than optimum life opportunities.

Expertise from within the group and from authoritative sources focussed on the possible developmental origins of differences between boys and girls, and school and social factors that may hinder boys achieving their potential.

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Clearly the individual factors that reduce skill and knowledge acquisition also reduce boys' self-actualisation, motivation and contribute to a downward spiral of under-achievement. The life long impact includes reduced employability, life skills and ability to meet challenges over a lifetime.

The school environment is reduced in quality and effectiveness when students are not achieving and losing motivation to try to learn. Disruption affects all students and teachers. Indeed, the disrupted learning environment compounds the learning difficulties that boys are struggling to overcome.

Teachers are challenged to achieve the learning outcomes of their students when the students are unable or unwilling to learn. Teacher satisfaction is another loss when boys cannot learn due to ability, readiness or the environment. The loss of experienced teachers from the education system is well-documented, compounding the ability to improve the education environment. The impact of teachers on education outcomes was measured by A.C.E.R. as more than half of the variation between schools.

Not wishing nor able to duplicate the extensive research of the Committee, the Sydney Leadership Alumni considered some of the proven interventions that could be adopted by the education enterprise, and which could be a suitable project for consideration by Alumni Members..

### **Individual Boys**

For each boy demonstrating learning difficulties, an ideal would be an early intervention program including individual assessment and a customised learning program including methods and learning objectives suitable to the boy's strengths. This is high-cost, but the long term savings on remediation or failure would justify the expense.

One way of looking at the problem is to assess the polarisation of boys' personality to the male side so that we get exaggerations of masculinity and rejection of anything seen as feminine. This is particularly relevant to the status of arts education in English speaking countries where it is rarely accepted as serious in its own right.

This has led arts educators to try to justify it in instrumental rather than intrinsic terms. For example, a lot of research has gone into the effects of music instruction on brain growth, etc. This can lead to some interesting results **See Appendix A.**



The Alumni participants generally upheld the view that Arts participation is vital to a balanced education. **See Appendix B.**

### Teachers

Teachers can develop new classroom skills that include teaching/learning models that suit learning styles for boys, such as reduced emphasis on auditory comprehension (A.C.E.R., Flinders University). Certainly training in conflict resolution and group dynamics could reduce the classroom disruption that adds a secondary factor to boys reduced learning achievements. Ideally there would be a long-term recruitment campaign to attract and retain more male teachers to be role models, especially in early education where currently 80% of teachers are female.

### Curriculum

As an example of innovative education, Detroit Public Schools instituted a "Living Skills" curriculum in 1978 to address the life skills that boys needed to acquire, and increased school retention as the students were motivated to learn "useful stuff" such as banking, applying for jobs, personal health and how to organise rental accommodation.

### Whole of School

An outstanding example of innovation that improved the learning environment for boys and teachers is the 1988 Canterbury Boys High School students and teachers development of a code of behaviour and student self-management. Many more initiatives are likely to be summarised in the report of the committee.

An article, "That's not the way we do things round here." written by Ann McIntyre (an Alumni member) when she was Principal of Hurstville South Public School in Sydney, is particularly relevant. **See Appendix C**

The Alumni continues its interest in this vital issue and would consider any request for further involvement given the range of skills and experience by this cross-sectional group of leaders.

Yours sincerely

Thomas Andrew Baxter  
Director, Sydney Leadership  
For and on behalf of the Organising Committee  
Alumni Day – Education of Boys



## Champions of Change.

## Appendix A

### **Observations by Richard Letts, Music Council of Australia and member of the Sydney Leadership Alumni.**

There is one very large study from the United States, published last year: longitudinal study of 25,000 secondary school students. The title is 'Champions of Change' and it can be found on the web. It basically shows a correlation: if students have a high involvement in a continuing arts education, they do better, MUCH better, in a range on non-arts measures than those who have a low involvement. Some differences are highly significant statistically ( $<.001$ ).

Cutting to the chase: for example, taking the composite test scores of those in Year 8, the percentage of students with a high level of continuing arts education who scored above the median was 36% higher than the percentage of those who had a low level of arts education.

Furthermore, the longer the high level involvement in the arts continued, the greater the difference in the percentage of students scoring above the median, so that by Year 12, the difference was 46%.

Furthermore, the scores for low SES students, separated out, showed a similar result – i.e. this is not a phenomenon reserved for the already attuned middle class. The high arts low SES students in Year 8 had a comparative advantage off 26.5%, climbing to 32% in Year 12.

Taking a more specific comparison, the effects of involvement in a band or orchestra, the probability that high SES students with a high involvement in playing in band or orchestra would score at the highest level in maths was 140% higher than for the average student, and 26% higher than for high SES students with no music. The probability that low SES students with a high involvement in band/orchestra would score at the highest level in maths was 65% higher than for the average student, and 100% higher than for low SES students with no musical involvement.

The positive effect for low SES students was, in the latter sense, even greater.

There were scores related to "promoting community", which the authors suggest could relate to empathy and general attachment to larger values of school and society. There were significant differences for kids taking theatre/drama in scores on empathy – e.g. whether it was OK to make a racist remark – where again the arts



students were ahead (it's not OK). Perhaps it could be described as greater integration or wholeness in personality.

(The probability of high involvement in the arts is much greater for high SES than low SES (e.g. high SES parents pay)... Given the outcomes shown here, it becomes even more important that high involvement in the arts is offered to low SES students through the schools or some other government supported mechanism.)

Unfortunately, the study does not show results by gender.

One could speculate, however, that in Australia, involvement in the arts would not be approved by male teenagers desperate to show their masculinity. Perhaps the involvement would need to begin before puberty in order to catch the problem before the boys are overwhelmed by the stereotypes.

If boys are involved in the arts, then perhaps the polarisation of personality is ameliorated, and in any case academic performance could improve and with it, self-esteem. Maybe that, too, would heal the person.

A final point. It would seem that we have in our society a sort of literal mindedness that sees the solution to problems only through head-on confrontation. That is further encouraged these days by requirements for accountability. You want kids to read, teach 'em readin' and give yourself a score. You want to stop the black kid suiciding in gaol, take the rope away. We might give a bit of lip service to the big picture, but we act very narrowly.

The authors of the arts studies in 'Champions of Change' speculate as to cause. But that's by the way if we can't get our heads around the idea that activity over in that corner can have a highly significant effect in this corner, even though there might be more than a couple of links in the causal chain.

**February 2001**



## **Appendix B**

### **The Value of Arts in Education - Croc Eisteddfod Festivals**

**Some observations from Peter Sjoquist, Producer, Indigenous Festivals Australia Ltd. (Member Sydney Leadership Alumni)**

'Champions of Change' is a great document and we have been distributing the executive summary to all the schools in the Rock Eisteddfod Challenge to help the teachers and principals promote the value of the arts in education.

We have several all male schools who participate and have a great time as well as the boys from co-educational schools participating in the event (25% of the number of students)

1. I am firmly of the belief that Arts participation is vital to a balanced education.
2. I believe that the education systems around the country do not provide enough opportunities for students to experience the many different performing and visual arts forms so students can find an activity which they like.
3. Many public servants in various government departments do not understand the benefits which result from participation in the various art forms. Of course, some do. For instance, the Rock Eisteddfod Challenge is sponsored by Health Departments to show students that they can have a good time and enjoy themselves without the support of tobacco, alcohol and other drugs. Juvenile Justice Departments are finding that arts participation can help offenders adjust. Family and Community Services Departments are finding that Arts participation can improve family relationships. Employment Departments are finding that students can learn various skills by being involved in productions – skills which relate to specific industries or industry in general, e.g. budgeting, event planning, public relations, etc. Other Departments can and do use the arts to deliver messages about the environment, immigration, industry, science, etc. However, there is not enough lateral thinking in government departments about the benefits of the Arts to the community in general.
4. Many, many teachers are frustrated with the outcomes demanded of them by the outdated education "system". For instance, teachers get no time off or recognition for the many hours they spend



in working with the students to produce numbers for the Rock Eisteddfod Challenge. The "system" doesn't acknowledge what they do as being educational whereas the more traditional forms of the arts – dance, music, drama, textiles and design, visual arts, get segmented into silos and, therefore, teacher hours are applied. Put all the arts together to "fly" in one big production with many participants and the "system" can't find a pigeon hole for it. More pigeons – less holes!!

Shifting to a more arts-based/driven approach to education is not easy. However, there is some light at the end of the tunnel.

The Croc Eisteddfod Festivals – now known as the Croc Festivals – have found a way to improve educational outcomes for indigenous students in rural and remote areas of the nation. The research just released (February 01) about the Weipa experience over the last three years has shown that participants in the festival attend school more often and more regularly, the communities are more involved in what the students are doing and the health awareness messages are being remembered by the students.

The website – [www.crocfestivals.org.au](http://www.crocfestivals.org.au) was published on February 28, 2001 and shows how the festivals improve education, health and employment outcomes. The website shows the lesson plans for teachers and how they relate to the festival experience. The lesson plans have been developed by several teachers at Moree East Public School with funding from DETYA. The research section is very encouraging from both the teacher questionnaires and the Australian Curriculum Studies Association sections. Further detailed Action Research will follow a couple of schools over several years to test the theory that the Croc Festivals are having a positive impact in the learning outcomes of students. Very exciting. As an aside, the majority of the funding for the festivals is coming from many Commonwealth Departments with the Minister coming to the Weipa event last year despite having to attend question time in the middle of his trip! Education of children is jealously guarded by the States despite several attempts to get a standardised syllabus around the country by both Labor and Conservative Governments in Canberra.

The Rock Eisteddfod Challenge is currently being researched by a PhD student in the School of Public Health at Sydney University to determine what benefits accrue to students who participate. The data produced to date is very encouraging and the report will be available at the end of the year.

We are also pursuing the development of lesson materials for the Rock Eisteddfod but this is a little more complicated because of the silo nature of teaching in secondary schools.



February 2001

**"That's not the way we do things round here."**

**Appendix C**

**A report by Ann McIntyre, former principal of Hurstville South Public School in Sydney for 7 years and member of the Sydney Leadership Alumni, published in 'The Boys in Schools Bulletin'**

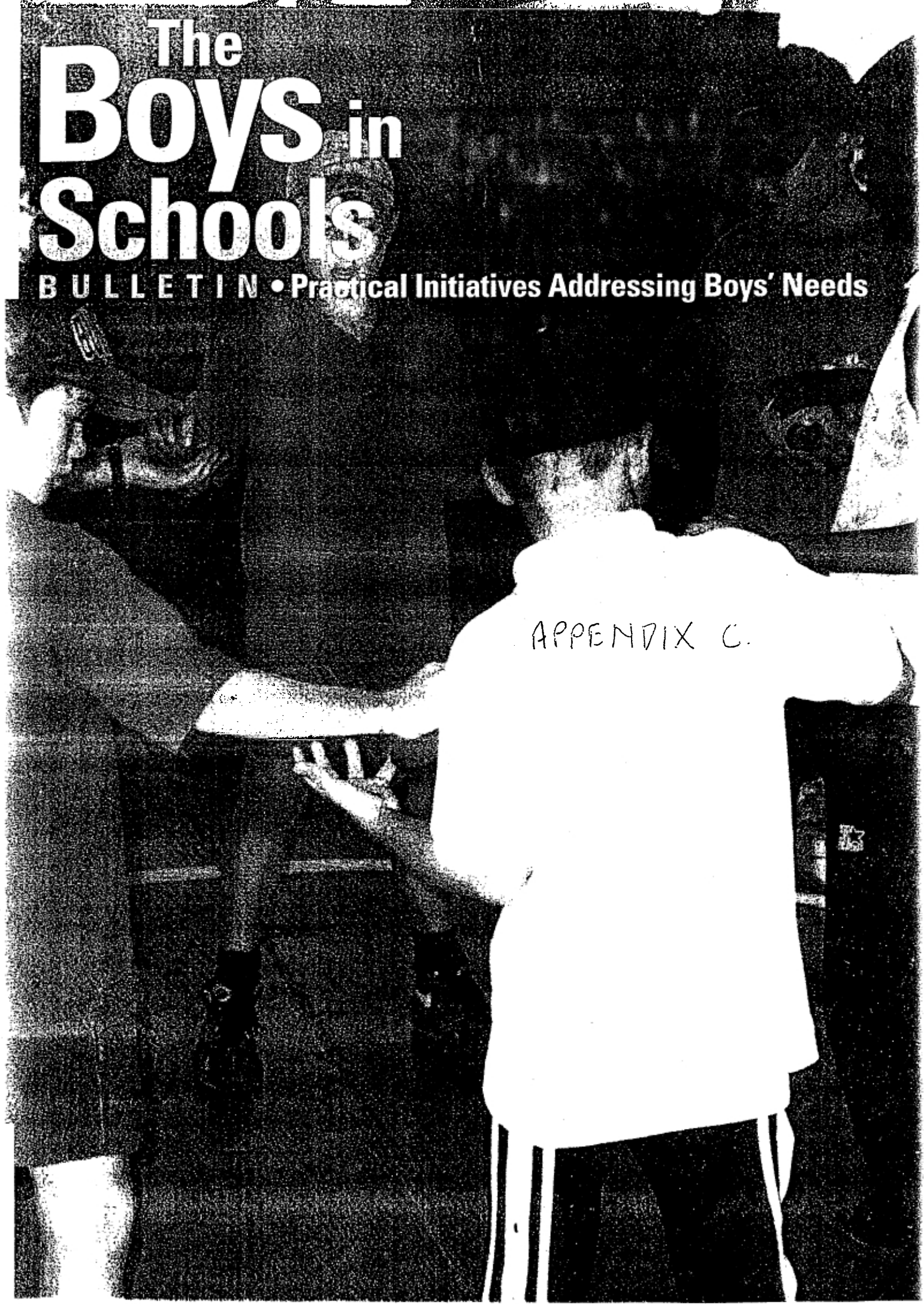
**This is attached.**



# The Boys in Schools

BULLETIN • Practical Initiatives Addressing Boys' Needs

APPENDIX C.



# “That’s not the way we do things round here.”

Rollo Browne talks to Ann McIntyre about what maintains the inclusive culture at Hurstville South Public School in Sydney. It’s normal for boys to be involved.



*Planning begins on the playground redesign.  
Year 5 & 6 boys on Student Council*

Our school is in the southern suburbs of Sydney. There are 360 students from a wide range of socio-economic backgrounds, 64% are NESB from 26 different cultural groups. The school has developed a culture where all students have a role to play. There is no sense of ‘one-upmanship’ or aggression in the playground. The boys are heavily involved in school activities and that’s seen as normal.

## What makes it work?

We have a very active student leadership program. There’s a Student Council which involves a boy and a girl from each class. They bring information and concerns from their class. They’ve done some amazing things. They changed the school uniform, created a school emblem, they met and are corresponding with the local State Member of Parliament about changing traffic conditions outside the school. (a dangerous suburban through road). One project was researching good leadership. The Student Council executive (4 boys and 4 girls) interviewed the Mayor of Kogarah Council in his Chambers about the way he goes about collaborative leadership.

The Student Council took early 2 years to embed. The kids are actively involved in setting the ground rules and we all operate under the idea that the key role of the leader is to serve others. We use the story of servant leadership a lot. I use it in important assemblies. I describe myself as a learner and that that any leadership role is to serve other people. The students tell it to each other, remind each other on the playground that their role is to look after each other.

The Student Council meets on Tuesdays after lunch in school time. We don’t believe in meeting in lunchtime which excludes those who like to use free time to run around especially boys. It’s in class because we consider it a valid learning experience.

This year the Student Council raised over \$1000 for the Cancer Council. A friend of theirs in Year 6 died in January. The students initiated it. They made a plan at the beginning of the year under three headings: Making School a Safe and Happy place; Learning Things; and Helping Others. They raise money by things like pet competitions, discos, selling daffodils on Daffodil Day and so on.

The Student Council is seen by the students as being really important. The boys are highly involved and now they are fantastic models for others. Previously there was more encouragement needed from teachers but now the expectation is that they are involved.

Here’s their list of criteria for selection as a student leader (both as class rep and student council executive):

- Committed to the welfare of other students
- Think creatively and have good ideas
- Able to organise things
- Keep other informed
- Be reliable, on time and get things done
- Be confident in expressing opinions
- Be responsible and set good example for others

*Two Year 6 boys playing nearby came over, stood near him and said, "That's not the way we do things around here. The older ones look after the younger ones in this place". The boy returned the ball without fuss...*

### **Redesigning the Playground**

We are a bit unusual in that the students have 2 votes on the School Council (as do 2 teachers and 2 parents). A boy and a girl join Council meetings and their presence makes a huge difference. It's been great, the meetings are very open and collaborative. The decision making is very transparent and Council has supported a number of Student Council initiatives.

A great example is the redesign of our playground. It used to be pure asphalt with a cricket net in the corner. Now we have new playground equipment, a volleyball court, a handball court and a multipurpose court (netball, basketball and tennis). The students interviewed companies that built playgrounds and supplied equipment. One issue was the 'soft fall' surface where companies were offering sand and pine bark. But that was the last thing they wanted because "you don't know what's in pine bark or sand". "Cats like to poo in sand." "There could be syringes too." They settled on supergrass on a layer of rubber.

On the Student Council, the older children play an important role. The Kinder & Year 1 kids bring up things and the older ones listen intently. For example the younger students wanted an area where they could crawl with trucks and toys as the asphalt was hard on knees. Now we have 8 x 5 m<sup>2</sup> area of supergrass. There's also a passive playground area for quieter activities.

As part of the redesign, the students did a full survey of how the playground was used, who used which areas and for what (boys, girls, mixed), whether it was active or quiet. The process of sorting out playground usage was interesting. The students council sat around a map and looked at it. The boys said, "Well if we play in the court, can't you skip over there?" The girls said, "But it's on a slope." "So?" "Well have you ever tried skipping on a slope? The next playtime they went out and had a look. We already had a class roster for use of the playground equipment, now we have a roster for the basketball court (flat area) as well. Half of the time for the girls, half for boys.

### **The Waratah**

We used to have a school uniform the same as every school around here, light blue and dark blue with a shield as the key symbol for the school. The Student Council wanted something that stood out and after discussion chose the waratah. We later found out that the aboriginal meaning is 'something beautiful that stands out from afar'. The other significant thing is that the organic symbol has now become a metaphor for our school. Instead of a metallic instrument of war (shield) we have a flower that actually is a circular collection of many small flowers on one stem. The older flowers on the outside protect the smaller flowers growing up from within. Around the outer flowers are large red leaves that hold the whole flower together. We use this story to capture what it means to be at our school. The older ones are there to protect the younger ones. The students tell it to each other.

Recently a boy joined our Year 4 class. He was active, pushy and somewhat aggressive in the playground. This lunchtime, he pinched the ball from some Year 2 boys playing handball. Two Year 6 boys playing nearby came over, stood near him and said, "That's not the way we do things around here. The older ones look after the younger ones in this place". The boy returned the ball without fuss.

### **Everyone Knows Someone Older**

This idea is also picked up in our peer support system. Every student in Year 6 has a peer support group of one student from each year (1 leader, 6 students). The groups are mixed boys and girls and we try and balance the personalities. I feel it has a huge effect on the students as they all know someone older. The program has been developing over the last 5 years.

The session runs for 30 minutes on Tuesday afternoons. Three groups run in each classroom and the teacher can assist in groups where the leaders need help. The teachers also jot down notes about what they saw and give them to the students at the end of each session. Evaluation is done by the students in the once a week debrief for the leaders. This is done in groups of

20. At the end of term students have a stack of notes giving them positive reinforcement and suggestions for what else they might do. Training Year 6 is done in Term 1 each year. They run the groups in the following 2 terms on such things as ways to solve problems, deal with peer group etc. The program itself is adapted from the Peer Support Foundation materials.

### More Involvement Means Less Misbehaviour

Our data on misbehaviour, violence and assault in the school has shown a dramatic decline. It now feels like a happy and safe school. There are far fewer fights, in fact violence is very unusual.

The programs we have provide ways the children can be socially active, involved in creative problem solving, taking action rather than just surviving. There's little sign of boredom, disengagement or of peer groups retreating into gangs that resist involvement. In that sense, their social needs for power (feeling worthwhile, having an influence) are getting met within the school. The Year 6's in particular take leadership roles all the time. They are organising this year's farewell at the moment, including the catering, the dance program, invitations, decorations and so on. Boys are good role models, they display good social skills and maturity.

One other thing we do is the clubs program where every adult in the school presents something they are really good at. In that we all really act like mentors creating a positive experience about things we ourselves enjoy. The 22 of us (3 males) offer things like pottery, creative writing, stencilling, gardening and publishing. Kids select a leisure type activity for the term as we emphasise making a decision and sticking to it. The whole school is involved in groups of 12 - 15. Interestingly we're not getting a gender bias in activity selection. For example in my creative writing group, 75% are boys.

### What happens at high school?

Local high schools are developing student councils but after the huge amount of decision making in Primary, students frequently go into Year 7 where there are few roles for them as they are perceived to be Juniors. I talked recently to 3 ex-students from our school, now in Year 11 who said, "Year 7 students can't do very much". I asked, "Well, what were you doing in Year 6, then?" They looked at each other, "Oh, we did a lot, didn't we?"

This is a real challenge for schools but high schools in particular. How do we take the students' huge amount of energy and enthusiasm for life and channel it into engaging worthwhile activities? We need to ensure that our students have not only the skills to survive but the creativity, care and commitment to make the world an even better place for us all.

Ann McIntyre has been principal of Hurstville South for 7 years - the Kindergarten kids are now in Year 6. She can be contacted on (02) 9580 2695.

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