

July 3rd, 2000

Re: The Education of Boys.

I am not a Professional Educator but write this letter as a mother of two boys and in particular to the trials and tribulations encountered by my younger boy who is twelve years of age.

Our family lives in a "nice" area of Melbourne. It is not an under privileged area, we have open spaces, clean air, good quality schools in both the primary and secondary sector in both the private and state system. My younger son attends a very large state primary school. He is currently in Grade 6. He has had literacy problems all through his primary years but with lots of work at home he was never considered bad enough to attend "catch up", "remedial" or like reading classes until Grade 5. (I am under the impression that only the most neediest of children in class were offered this help by professional teachers. Parents always come into the classroom to hear children reading, but unfortunately we are not trained and only do our best to encourage children to read. I have done this service for many years having an older child in Year 10 and started volunteering my services from when this child was in his preparatory year.) My younger son's reading did improve but once the intensive reading classes finished and it was only home based help, his literacy skills regressed.

He struggles with anything more than books appropriate for a child in Grade 2 or Grade 3. He prefers large print picture books. It takes him a term to read the simpler reading text set for his Literature Projects. From what I hear from other parents he is not alone. Unfortunately it seems to be more boys who are struggling than girls.

Having testing such as LAP, or whatever it is now known as, is a waste of money if more professional teachers are not employed to assist children who are identified as struggling with their reading and comprehension. After all you might just be lucky and tick the correct box, but what's the use if you can't read the question and the answers supplied. You can't go through life using "eany, meany, miney, moe" and just hope for the best.

I fear for Nicholas when he enters secondary school next year. If he cannot read suitable texts in primary school he is going to be lost to the system once in secondary school.

It appears that boys who struggle once they reach secondary school will become disruptive, class clowns, attention seekers and/or truants. They can't see the relevance of the subjects they are doing, can't understand the work and are unable and unwilling to do the work.

Having children who struggle academically do mainstream education until Year 10 is a waste. They should be given the opportunity to do more hands on subjects, modified maths and English subjects and perhaps some life skills - e.g. how government and departments function, where to get help for particular problems, how the financial sector works, basic accounting skills etc. In essence a return to a system similar to the technical schools of old, but not opening separate schools just using the existing school with more suitable subjects.

My elder son attends a secondary school which was known as a "post Primary school".. It seems to have been a model for the amalgamation of high schools and technical

schools. All children do common subjects until Year 10, but some children struggle with the academic subjects. Perhaps a model could be looked at where children are streamed from their entry into secondary school and do subjects more appropriate to their capabilities while still attending the local secondary school.

I hope that this review into boys education comes up with more than just rhetoric and a paper that will be consigned to either "the too hard basket" or library shelf material. These children need something constructive done for them to enable them to learn to their fullest capabilities. You need to be able to read and comprehend to survive in this world, these children should be given every opportunity.

Yours faithfully,

LOUISA LEGG.