

To: Chairperson of the Inquiry
From: Andrew Evans

I have just read the recent article in the "About the House" magazine, and would like to lend my support to the vital need for this issue to be solved.

I am the Chairperson of the P&C at Dungog High, and the local Scout Group Leader. I was a founding member of the Macleay Valley Workplace Learning Centre in Kempsey, and was Chair of that organisation for some five years. I have also held other P&C and School Council positions over the past ten years. I am also a parent with a 14 year old daughter, and a 12 year old son.

The clear differences in the learning processes between boys & girls, and the obvious differences in the educational outcomes, is an issue that has been growing more and more apparent for quite some years. The disenchantment and disenfranchisement of boys in the school system, is attributable to many causes, however one of the prime reasons is the reducing numbers of male teachers, and the inability of many female teachers to alter their teaching style to deal with boys.

The over emphasis on, being quiet, sitting still, and other "control" measures, leads to a lack of rapport, and disengagement by many male students, as the teaching staff seem unable to cope with male intellectual and physical learning styles. The end result of this, is the culture of underachievement, and the schoolyard pressure (we all see) not to achieve. The "first is worst" syndrome.

In reading the abovementioned article, this attitude is apparent in the work you have done with students in the south, and having been closely involved with underachieving students in Kempsey (in the CREST & other programs) at both primary and secondary level, it is obvious the school system is not coping with the problem.

Having spent years giving presentations to students on careers and working life, I also found that boys were particularly unprepared for what was going to be required of them in the "real world" and the teachers (with little or no experience in the "real world") were not able to give them any practical advice and/or guidance.

During this time I was also in a position where I was discussing with the employers in the town, what they needed from prospective employees, and particularly from school leavers. I found that not only was the school system unaware of the needs of the employers, but the majority of the teachers (never having worked outside the school system) just didn't understand what they were preparing students for. This was particularly evident in the teaching of the large numbers of male students, who were going into outdoor (labouring & trade) type positions in which none of the female staff (and few of the male staff) had ever had any experience, and who had no idea of what skills & knowledge the students were likely to need for their working life.

Unfortunately, it also seemed that the many of the teachers appointed by the system as careers advisors were women, with the subsequent result of further disadvantaging the majority of boys, who needed practical advice and information about what they would be doing for the next 40 years of their lives.

This is not the fault of the careers advisors, but the result of a system that puts little value on real (workplace) vocational education, and instead (state wide) has opted for a very second rate system where students are taught vocational courses in school (rather than in the workplace) with short, next to useless periods of "work experience", where they have little or no structured learning.

This results in students (particularly boys) having little understanding of the choices they are making in years 10, 11, & 12, and then being provided with careers advice that is often wrong or misplaced, being provided by staff that (while they mean well) know nothing of the "real world" into which these poor lads are being pushed.

The result of this for some of these students is 40 years of working misery, trapped in a career or trade they hate, while for others, more able to change, the result is years of drifting between jobs before they work out what they want, often finding out that it is then too late to do anything about it. The cost of this wasted potential to the economy (and society generally) should not be underestimated.

This doesn't need to be the case! In Victoria, Tasmania, and South Australia they have implemented a structured workplace vocational education system that provides boys (and in many cases girls) with a much better understanding of what they can do, and what is going to be required of them by prospective employers. This information is provided by employers and employer groups (free of charge) rather than teachers who in the main have never worked outside the school system, and even if they have had some limited experience, it has usually been in an office environment, not the world into which alot of our young men are destined to go.

I'm sorry if this submission has drifted slightly off the issue of the relative academic achievement of boys, but the issue of vocational education, guidance, and work readiness, is just as critical, and goes to the heart of why they are at school in the first place. Education for education sake is a wonderful concept for academics and senior government bureaucrats (and for many teachers) but for most secondary school students, their education has much more to do with what job or career it may lead them into, and what preparation is it for them for the rest of their life.

I hope my comments are of use, and if you would like me to expand, explain, or give real life examples of the issues I have raised, I would be only to happy to do so.

Yours faithfully

Andrew Evans
82 Hooke St
Dungog NSW 2420
Ph (02) 49921224