

**SUBMISSION TO
THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES STANDING COMMITTEE
ON EMPLOYMENT, EDUCATION AND WORKPLACE RELATIONS**

INQUIRY INTO THE EDUCATION OF BOYS

1.0 The Christian Brothers Schools within Xavier Province of Queensland and Northern Territory

For over 125 years, the Christian Brothers have been providing education to boys within their Queensland – Northern Territory Province. The Brothers' currently own and operate the following schools:

- St Laurence's College
- St Patrick's College
- St Joseph's Nudgee College
- St Joseph's College, Gregory Terrace
- St Edmund's College
- St James Practical Education
- St Joseph's Nudgee Junior College
- Ignatius Park College
- St Brendan's College
- Centre Education Programme

It needs to be further recognised that St Brendan's College, Yeppoon is a boarding school within a regional / rural context. St Joseph's Nudgee College is a large city boarding school of which one-third of the school population is in residence.

As well, the Brothers are responsible for some alternative education programmes specifically for boys within our indigenous populations.

These programmes are centred within Cherbourg / Murgon (Queensland) and in Wadeye (Port Keats), Northern Territory.

2.0 Edmund Rice Education Services

Edmund Rice Education Services oversees each of the Christian Brothers' owned and operated Colleges. Currently the student population is close to 7,600. We have two co-educational schools within which the boys outnumber the girls quite significantly.

This submission is made on behalf of all our schools. The Standing Committee may also receive some individual submissions from members of our school network, eg. St Brendan's College, Yeppoon. St Joseph's College Gregory Terrace has made their submission through the Association of Heads of Independent Schools of Australia. Both of the aforementioned Colleges have also contributed to this submission.

3.0 First Term of Reference for Standing Committee: The social, cultural and educational factors affecting the education of boys in Australian Schools, particularly in relation to their literacy needs and socialisation skills in the early and middle years of schooling.

In the first instance, with regard to students who are boarders, staff have made the following comment which is pertinent to the inquiry:

“These students spend a lot of their time together and so the peer relationship, the student to teacher, coach, tutor or supervisor, is a primary source for adolescent socialisation behaviour development. The students and College are also part of the wider community and the effects of alternative values espoused by the powerful advertising market, magazines, papers and electronic media influence the development of their morals and values. The changing nature of family, father absence and divorce may well affect boy socialisation adversely.”

The comment about “father absence” is particularly pertinent within our educational programmes for those unable to be educated in mainstream schooling (eg Centre Education Programme.) Nevertheless it is highly relevant within each of our schools.

One staff member within leadership in our school system had this to say:

“I am interested in contributing to an inquiry if it is prepared to investigate the demise of fatherhood through poverty and alienation for a critically growing sub-section of Australian society and its subsequent effects on a disturbingly large cohort of boys in schools today.”

“The Centre Education Programme (secondary) and our Ed Shed (primary) school in a Caravan Park at Eight Mile Plains and the Kardu Kigay Centre at Wadeye, would all be able to give evidence on the effect of the absence of fathers and other strong male models on this growing group of boys. In the Centre’s case this evidence would be more anecdotal than statistical.”

Staff would like the inquiry to grapple with the issue of boys growing up in an environment where fathers are absent, and also of those who grow up “underfathered” (a term recently coined) and how this factor impinges on boys’ education.

3.1 Other emergent social behavioural issues:

While recognising the huge number of social, cultural and educational factors affecting the education of boys in Australian schools, our school members would like the inquiry to investigate, among other factors, such emergent social behavioural issues as the following:

- Healthy self-esteem vs lack of pride / shame in stealing, racism, sexism, bullying, vandalism.
- “Dominant pack / group” behaviour vs personal integrity.
- Competition taken to win at all costs, especially where sporting / physical prowess is perceived as all important.
- Moral relativism vs lack of moral responsibility sometimes taken to extremes where immoral behaviours seem acceptable.
- The difficulty for boys who are culturally and arts-orientated; the stigma attached to those boys perceived as different.
- The perception that is becoming more dominant that boys prefer the internet for research, rather than books. Reading is not regarded as interactive.
- Use of alcohol, drugs, etc at much younger ages within the student body.
- The lack of opportunity for spiritual development and reflection in a culture of constant activity. Boys need a deep sense of spirituality and connectedness to the whole world / universe.

Culturally too schools and boys are faced with a strongly male view of the world. Traditions of “old boy” mateship are prevalent. There is a strong sense to conform to peer group pressures and individual differences are not readily accepted. The psychology of learning as boys experience

learning, needs to be at the forefront of our educational endeavours. Some boys have little concern if they fail subjects and hide behind their "It's cool to be a fool" attitude, communicated quickly throughout their peer groups.

4.0 Second Term of Reference for Standing Committee: The strategies, which schools have adopted to help address these factors, those strategies which have been successful and have scope for their broader implementation or increased effectiveness.

Christian Brothers' schools have employed a number of strategies to help address factors mentioned above. Among these are pastoral care systems within the schools, opportunities for positive peer relationships, flexible access to a large variety of curriculum opportunities, dealing with harassment issues through Personal Development programmes at various Year Levels, opportunities for reflection and spiritual development through both prayer experiences and outreach to other persons, and innovative, excellent learning / teaching practices which improve outcomes for boys within the educative process, especially during schooling.

5.0 Members of our school communities are pleased that this parliamentary inquiry is taking place and are willing to discuss this submission with Committee members should this be necessary. Edmund Rice is the founder of the Christian Brothers and Edmund Rice Education has core values which are articulated and practised to the best of our ability within each of our schools namely

- respect for the dignity of the person
- the nurturing of right relationships
- a clear commitment to the poor and marginalised
- excellence in learning and teaching
- curriculum activities that respond to the diverse needs of students, and
- partnership with families

Our schools believe that as learning communities, each needs to be open to continual renewal of performance. The reforms that this Parliamentary Inquiry foreshadows will be welcomed.

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