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House of Representatives
Standing Committee on Employment, Education and Workplace Relations

Inquiry Submission: The Education of Boys

1. It is important to separate the literacy issue from the education of boys issue.

- Boys and girls can learn to read and write in their first year of school.
- 100% literacy is attainable. According to the United Nations, Iceland and Kerala, an impoverished Indian state, have achieved 100% literacy.
- Every child learns to read and write in their first year of school in Cuba according to a recent article in the Canberra Times.

2. High literacy results have been obtained by boys and girls in the Kindergarten Foundation Literacy Program at Latham Primary, ACT.

- In 2000 most children in the Foundation Literacy Program, boys and girls, were reading and writing meaningful text after 5 months in Kindergarten.
- Most kindergarteners in the Foundation Literacy Program learned to read and write at an advanced level by the end of the year.
- Some of the highest achievers in Foundation Literacy are boys.
- Many children are reading at a level several years in advance of their peers. (Tested on a word recognition test.)
- Favourite books include Roald Dahl's "Enormous Crocodile" and Gillian Rubenstein's "Queen of the Universe."
- The Foundation Literacy Program, along with another literacy program conducted at the school, jointly won the 2000 National Literacy Week Award for the ACT.

- The program has been operating for two years, this year as a controlled study.
- Latham Primary is an average suburban government school.
- Further information about Foundation Literacy was provided in an earlier confidential submission to the Parliamentary Inquiry.

3. Prevention is better than cure.

- It is best to begin literacy education in the pre-school years.
- Foundation Literacy is based on a private program for parents to teach their own 3 to 5 year olds to read.
- Boys who become early fluent readers tend to be able to deal with current primary and secondary curricula.

4. What can be done?

- As the Foundation Literacy Program shows promise, a larger scale, adequately-funded, longitudinal study might be conducted.
- Research has shown that large and/or composite early childhood classes educationally disadvantage young children.
- Research has shown that "20 children is plenty" in Kindergarten.
- The cost-saving of eliminating the need for expensive Reading Recovery would soon subsidise smaller classes.
- There should be greater system support for children at risk – particularly children with major behavioural disorders. Early intervention for behaviour management is essential.

Children with behaviour disorders severely limit the amount of learning that takes place in a classroom, particularly if there is more than one difficult child in a large class.

- There should be zero-tolerance of violence in schools. Five year olds should not be afraid to come to school.
- If the Foundation Literacy Program was continued in later grades, and children continued to learn at the same accelerated pace, education would be revolutionised.

- Kindergarten is the year that makes or breaks a child's attitude to education. Therefore, ideally, Kindergarten teachers should be highly-qualified and experienced specialist teachers.
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