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The Education of Boys

Submission by Brother Barry Lamb

I willingly contribute my thoughts and suggestions to the Committee of Enquiry into the “social, cultural and educational factors affecting the education of boys in Australian schools.”

I would like to draw the attention of the Committee to the **size** of schools in Australia, particularly the very large secondary schools in the large cities. I wish to suggest that large secondary schools, because of their size, inhibit natural and healthy social and cultural developments, and educational developments, too.

So my suggestion to the Committee is to restructure schools (particularly secondary schools) so that schools are small.

(Yes, I am aware that this suggestion is probably not politically correct and flies in the face of economic rationalism, but I believe it to be based on considerations of good education.)

My observation of large secondary schools is that they are often characterised by a school culture which includes

- showing off in front of peers
- “getting away with” little school work and poor behaviour unless “made to”
- boys affecting to adopt crude opinions and attitudes
- conformity to “peer pressure” and “being one of the crowd”
- fear of appearing different or thinking independently
- lack of sense of ownership of the school as often manifested in litter sometimes vandalism
- greater likelihood of bullying and alienation

Much more possible in small secondary schools are

- sense of ownership of the school
- feeling of welcome and being known as an individual
- more natural relationships with teachers and fellow students
- greater ease of “being yourself”
- more willingness to pay attention to lessons and do well in studies

I therefore believe that the solution to many of the “problems” related to “the education of boys” lies in educating them in small schools. For with the advantage of small schools listed above I believe there is a much greater chance of natural social

development occurring as well as pleasant and positive cultural developments, and that scholastic achievement will be better nurtured also.

I honestly believe that no matter what great programs may be introduced for the better education of boys that little will be achieved if 600, 700, or 800 adolescents are all brought together each day in a school in the hope of developing the socialisation skills or improving boys' learning and behaviour.

(In what I have said I am taking for granted that the teachers will be thoughtful and dedicated and wise. But I believe that with the best teachers in the world it is still a continuous battle to diminish the unhelpful negative effects of a pervasive school culture when the population of the school is large.)

So, in brief, my suggestion, which I would like most strenuously to put to the Committee, is – **small schools**.

Yours sincerely,

(Br.) Barry Lamb 26th June, 2000.