

BARKER COLLEGE

SUBMISSION FOR THE

STANDING COMMITTEE ON
ENVIRONMENT, EDUCATION AND
WORKPLACE RELATIONS

THE EDUCATION OF BOYS

JULY 2000

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PREAMBLE

About Barker:

Barker College is an independent Anglican school located in Hornsby, on Sydney's upper North Shore. The school's population comprises approximately 1900 students from Years 3 to 12. Most of this student body is boys with the school being coeducational for Years 10, 11 and 12 only. The Anglican foundation of Barker ensures that Christian principles and spiritual growth are central to the students' experiences at School.

Barker College is divided into three parts. The Junior School (Years 3 to 6 inclusive), the Middle School (Years 7 to 9 inclusive) and the Senior School (Years 10 to 12). There are approximately 350 girls in the Senior School.

The division of Barker into these three parts has important educational and administrative implications. The needs of boys in education is an important issue in all parts of the school as Barker strives to ensure that each student reaches their potential and is well prepared for all aspects of life beyond their formal secondary education as parents and citizens.

It is important to note that it is largely the social, economic and student body context of Barker that has resulted in the present strategies and approaches. Furthermore, these strategies are constantly under review in an effort to ensure that the ongoing needs of the students at Barker are addressed. We are not so bold as to say that we have it totally right, now and forever more. Continuous professional development of staff through formal conferences and courses, in addition to informal networking, are keys to this evolution.

About this submission:

This submission **will not** delve into the plethora of academic and social theory presently fuelling the lively debate on Boys' Education. No doubt there will be plenty of that from many other sources willing and more expert to do so.

The purpose of this submission is to address the areas of particular interest to the Committee, outlining a number of strategies and approaches that Barker uses to attempt to meet the needs of boys at this school.

It is expected that this submission be used amongst many to identify strategies that are widely being used with success to meet the needs of boys in formal education. Therefore, detail of how each strategy is implemented **will not be included but will be available** to the Committee, if requested, at a later date.

ADDRESSING BOYS' LITERACY

The aims of the Barker Literacy initiatives are to assist students to achieve to their maximum potential through:

- the earliest possible detection of students with 'Special Learning Needs',
- to design and implement individual Reading and Numeracy programmes that are conducted in individual sessions and in small class group settings,
- to maintain close parent liaison and involvement with each child's programme,
- to assist boys to develop and use their literacy skills to become independent learners through ample access to direct and explicit teaching in the regular classroom in regular classroom activities, and through additional in-class teacher support,
- the development of carefully structured information and study skills programmes that are integrated and cross-curricular.

All students in Years 3-9 are involved in annual norm referenced assessments in Critical Literacy and Numeracy to monitor overall cohort performance, to assist in evaluating the effectiveness of intervention programmes and to maintain a focus on 'effective explicit classroom instruction'.

Students within the **Middle School** who have been targeted as potentially 'at risk' learners are involved in individual support programmes, small group activities and smaller classes with a differentiated curriculum to assist them to access curriculum and become active learners without the fear failure. Students are also invited to access Cross-age tutoring support in Paired Reading and Numeracy.

Courses in Essay Writing, handwriting and /or expressive language are also offered to assist students to develop greater confidence and understanding. Students benefit from inclusion in smaller classes for English and Mathematics, with most classes having two teachers to assist in instruction, feedback and understanding. In addition, a wide range of resources are available, such as books on tape and support guidelines, to assist slow readers to access texts and be more able to participate in class activities.

Barker staff are working to develop an effective *Whole School* approach to literacy that is cross-curricular and integrated. This initiative is an evolving process. Implicit in this is the notion of content modification, integration of a hierarchy of information skills throughout years and different courses, and incorporation of independent learning activities within subject areas. Students and teacher engage in negotiations on feedback of common goals, expectations and individual student performances through clear and understandable rubrics.

ADDRESSING BOYS' SOCIALISATION SKILLS

1. *Christian principles* – Christian values are made explicit through Chapel services, assemblies and in dealings with boys at all times. It is these principles that are the foundation of how we expect the boys to interact with other people.
2. *Teachers as role models* – The way that teachers relate to students and each other is vital. There are very high expectations about professionalism. This includes what is considered to be appropriate conduct, language and dress in the presence of students.
3. *The subject of Drama* – This is particularly strong at Barker. A culture of success in this subject and the quality of the school's drama productions have developed this strength. It is a popular subject choice in Year 9 and significantly facilitates meaningful interaction between boys and their understanding of alternative perspectives.
4. *Group work and Independent Learning* – Staff are being encouraged to utilize pedagogy that enable interaction between students in learning. This has obvious wider socialization implications.
5. *Compulsory Sport* – It is compulsory for every boy to engage two sports a year (until Year 11). This serves to ensure that boys are physically active and that they are involved in groups of boys of their own age. We also hope that the participation in these sports encourages an enjoyment that will last beyond Barker. Such enjoyment might facilitate involvement in community sport clubs where participation and wider social interaction can be maintained. Indeed, we hope that hobbies and interests might be stimulated by this compulsion, not only in the sports that they have to do, in other sports that are inherently social.
6. *Outdoor education programme* – The boys are involved in a structured programme of outdoor education in Years 7, 8 and 9. They attend a camp for 4 days where they engage in a mix of formal lessons and outdoor recreation activities. Year 9 can attend as leaders on the Year 7 camp.
7. *Army Cadets and Duke of Edinburgh Awards* – Barker has vibrant programmes for these activities. They provide boys with many experiences outside the context of the classroom, with their peers. The skills developed in these activities are taken with them beyond Barker.
8. *Leadership Opportunities* – There are significant opportunities for boys to be involved in a number of roles. These include Year 9 Seniors (in the Middle School), Year 11 Monitors, Year 12 Prefects and an elected Student Representative Council. The nature of the role varies significantly.

STRATEGIES TO IMPROVE LEARNING

1. *Academic Culture* – An effort is made to reward boys who succeed in their studies (annual awards etc). It is important for boys to see that it is “cool” to succeed academically.
2. *Clear Expectations* – Perhaps this is an extension of an Academic Culture. Every task in every lesson will have the expectations made explicit. This is crucial for the boys to be able to identify what it is that they have to do, in terms of content, how they should go about it and the standard that is to be produced. This does not have to mean that tasks are prescriptive.
3. *Grading of classes* – Ability grouping in Mathematics, Science and English in all years. Clearly there is nothing new about this strategy but it is central to the boys experiencing success. Furthermore, it allows for clearer identification of boys with difficulties who can be withdrawn from Mathematics and English lessons to work on small groups at a ratio of about 1:6.
4. *Class sizes* – The largest size of a class in the Middle School is 25. For LOTE they are usually half this. The impact on learning here is undeniable.
5. *Homework policy* – Presently a homework policy is being formulated. This is because it is believed at Barker that homework, if used appropriately, is a key part to boys’ learning. The policy aims to put homework in the context of learning for both staff and boys with recommendations about duration and type. Once again, it is not too prescriptive but articulates expectations.
6. *Academic Probation* – This is a status that is imposed upon boys who have received a particularly poor academic report at the end of a semester. Being on Academic Probation presently means that his progress is being closely monitored, particularly in relation to his application to his work. This is not so much about grades on the report but perceived effort. Strategies to assist individual students are provided.
7. *Investigations into Teaching and Learning* – There is a Director of Teaching and Learning at Barker. It is his responsibility to work with staff and to evaluate the quality of the educational environment at Barker. Consequently, his close work with the Heads of Department, Special Needs staff, and other Executive Staff ensure that opportunities for learning are maintained and reviewed. Areas of particular interest are in the development of an Independent Learning Policy, encouraging collaborative and co-operative learning with the aim of fostering a culture of learning toward a life-long philosophy.
8. *Differentiation in assessment strategies* – A movement towards this approach is taking place across subject areas.
9. *Across age mentoring programme* – This has been operating at Barker with enormous success. There are clear spin-offs to other aspects of school through the peer support networks established.

STRATEGIES TO IMPROVE BEHAVIOUR

1. *Strong Pastoral System* – Pastoral care is central to the handling of discipline problems and the behaviour of boys. Few schools have ever found the exact formula to avoid all behavioural problems, and Barker is not such a school. Where there are young people there will be problems that need to be dealt with sensitively. A system that has a person clearly responsible for the welfare of each boy is necessary. This person must have the time and resources to allow each boy in his care the time that is necessary to deal with any matter appropriately. **This must not be underestimated in managing boys!**
2. *Many opportunities for success* – The size of Barker allows the luxury of a rich cocurricular programme. This combines with the formal curriculum to provide most boys an opportunity for some success at Barker. Establishing experiences of success is central to ensuring that boys make a connection to School and to schooling. This connection is a vital way to avoiding behavioural problems, in nearly all cases. **The more varied the success, the greater the “connectedness” of a boy.**
3. *Clear School Rules* – These are published in the School Diary (owned by every boy). The articulation of rules and expectations in this way are vital. These rules are reinforced by punitive actions, when required, or restated as appropriate. These rules are directly founded in Barker’s Christian foundation as well as reflecting State and Federal laws.
4. *Consistent Behaviour Policy* – This appears in a formal document and aims to ensure that all matters are dealt with in a consistent but sensitive manner. This means that there is a clear line of reporting and a progression in the severity of punishment for breaches of appropriate behaviour.
5. *Behavioural Probation* – Presently, this status is given to a boy who has committed either one major offence or a number of less serious offences over a period of time. Whilst on Probation it is intended that each boy be closely monitored. Boys who are proving to be a major problem in the Middle School are likely to be involved in the formulation of a contract identifying up to 5 very specific behaviours that need to change in the course of the Probation period. The boys will have considerable ownership of this contract and its contents. The period of Probation varies between a term and a year.
6. *Anti-bullying Policy* – This has been in place for a number of years. It outlines methods and strategies that victims can utilize. The penalties for bullying are clear. These can include suspension from Barker but will always involve counseling.
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