

24-4-07

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Committee Secretary  
Senate Employment, Workplace Relations and Education Committee  
Department of the Senate  
PO Box 6100  
Parliament House  
Canberra ACT 2600

To Whom It May Concern:

Please find enclosed the submission from Cardiff Primary School for the Inquiry into the Academic Standards of School Education. Cardiff Primary School is pleased to present their opinions and recommendations regarding the specific terms of reference.

This submission covers term of reference 1.a. It will discuss the standards of literacy in Australia, the sufficiency of school curriculum, disengagement in the classroom and the ageing population of teachers.

We would appreciate any information about the outcome of the inquiry's consideration of this submission.

Thanking you,

John Paull  
Principal  
Cardiff Primary School

# **Primary School Education Issues**

*Inquiry into the Academic Standards of School  
Education*

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24<sup>th</sup> April 2007

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## **1.0 Executive Summary**

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The Inquiry into Academic Standards of School Education raises certain questions regarding the curriculum and whether it is a sufficient document for preparing primary school aged children for high school education. It is the opinion of Cardiff Primary School that, generally, the curriculum is a sufficient document.

This submission will deal with the following terms of reference.

*1. Whether school education prepares students adequately for further education, training and employment, including:*

*a .the extent to which each stage of schooling (early primary) equips students with the required knowledge and skills to progress successfully through to the next stage.*

There are some exceptions to the validity of the curriculum as a sufficient document that prepares primary school students for further education. Literacy levels, demonstrated within Cardiff Primary School, are indicative of an average New South Wales primary school. The opinion is held that these levels can and should be improved through certain avenues, such as teacher education, external and internal support systems and a focus in the curriculum on literacy.

In regards to the curriculum, an aspect that will be discussed in further detail will be the division of time in the classroom. The opinion held is that significant time is spent on non-curricular activities such as welfare and behavioral issues as opposed to investing time into thoroughly imparting the knowledge outlined in the curriculum.

Cardiff Primary School is partnering with Cardiff High School and the University of Newcastle in pioneering a government funded program in the schools called Success for Boys. Its aim is to educate teachers and educators on how to re-engage boys in the classroom. Cardiff Primary School holds the opinion that this program will be vital in educating and re-engaging boys early in their schooling so as to provide sufficient education in preparing them for higher education and employment.

Yet another aspect to be considered in this submission is the ageing population of teachers. The average age of teachers is around forty-five years of age. Children are relating less and disengaging in the classroom due to the dated teaching methods, stemming from older pedagogy and failure to implement new pedagogy, which enables both children and teachers to gain more positive effects from the curriculum.

These points will be discussed further in this submission in relation to 1.a. of the terms of reference.

## **2.0 Introduction**

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Cardiff Public School is an average primary school in the suburbs of Lake Macquarie, New South Wales. It was first founded in 1891 and has been operational for over one hundred years as a K-6 education institution.

The current school principal, John Paull, agreed for Cardiff Primary School to prepare a submission with the assistance of an ex-pupil and current communications university student, Naomi Neven. Cardiff Primary School was approached to take part in this inquiry due to its respectable standing as an average, community-based and normal primary school. It was felt that the opinions of Mr Paull and the school would be of benefit to the inquiry due to their ability to inform the considerations, and their relevance to the term of reference.

The methodologies employed in writing this paper were of primary and secondary source analysis, such as interviews with Mr Paull, researching statistics presented from the Australian Bureau of Statistics, and accessing a wide variety of information from many key educational sources, such as the Board of Studies and many governmental departments such as the Department of Education, Science and Training.

The opinions presented throughout this submission are held by Mr Paull as the principal of Cardiff Primary School, based on relevant data, and formulated to conform to the Terms of Reference presented at the beginning of the inquiry. As stated previously, the submission will deal with term of reference 1.a.

The recommendations presented are, again, the opinion of Mr Paull as the principal of Cardiff Primary School. Mr Paull believes that the recommendations regarding the curriculum would develop a successful and sufficient educational base for students to continue their education and eventual employment, and will also allow Cardiff Primary School, as an average primary school amongst the schooling community, to flourish and produce many well-adjusted and well-educated students who will contribute to society.

Although Cardiff Primary School has not previously participated in any Senate inquiries, the nature of this inquiry is relevant for the appropriate opinion to be voiced. Cardiff Primary School is currently undertaking a joint initiative with Cardiff High School and the University of Newcastle to help educate teachers in re-engaging boys in the classroom. This aspect will be covered in the report.

Other aspects to be covered will be the sufficiency of the curriculum, national standards of literacy, division of time in the classroom and the ageing population of teachers.

### **3.0 Primary School Education Issues**

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The following five issues are presented as being of importance to be considered by the Committee as they conduct their inquiry in the standards of school education. Cardiff Primary School believes these issues are relevant and need to be addressed in a timely manner.

There are many other issues that pose a problem to children's education during their primary schooling phase. Cardiff Primary School believes that, should these points be discussed and resolved, primary school education would be more than sufficient and adequate in preparing children for further education and employment.

#### **3.1 The Sufficiency of the Curriculum**

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The current curriculum for kindergarten to year six (6) is a sufficient document for imparting the necessary knowledge to educate children and prepare them for higher education. Young children are expected to attain outcomes in learning areas such as English, Maths, Science and Technology, Human Sciences and Its Environment (HSIE), Creative Arts and optional languages.

It is the opinion of Cardiff Primary School that the curriculum and its learning areas is a sufficient document. Areas covered include developing technology in regards to computer skills, and related policies such as road education and community safety initiatives.

Although the curriculum is a sufficient document, it is not an exceptional one. There are government initiatives and programs that are run to focus on literacy, however, state-wide, literacy levels are not acceptable for further education and empowerment in the workforce. If the curriculum were to address literacy, particularly reading skills, more intensely in the classroom, it is believed that literacy levels state-wide would increase.

An integrated curriculum could be introduced as a holistic approach. Teachers feel the pressure of conforming students to many separate learning outcomes for different learning areas. A curriculum that focuses on learning as a whole could be beneficial in a student's educational view of further education and employment.

### **3.2 Improvement of National Literacy Levels**

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In 1996, the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) compared Australian literacy levels with six (6) other countries. Results were graded from level one to level five, with one being the least competent. Comparisons were made in three areas, prose, document and quantitative literacy skills with Australians aged 15-65 years. Although the majority of Australians fell into level three prose literacy skills, with 36.9%, 17% of people were found in with level one prose literacy skills, compared with Sweden's 7.5%.

The ABS also made connections between low literacy skills and employment rates in Australia. "In Australia, about 65% of those with low literacy skills participate in the labour force i.e. are employed or unemployed); for those with high skill the equivalent figure is about 85%." (ABS 1997:online)

"Of those aged 16-65 who are in the labour force, those with low literacy skills have a greater chance of being unemployed than do those who are highly skilled. In Australia, the unemployment rate for the former group (low skills) was 11.3%, more than double that of the latter - 4.6%. Among persons aged 25-65 who are employed, those with higher literacy skills generally earn more than those with lower skills...For example, in Australia, 58% of employed persons with good/very good prose skills (Level 4/5) are in the top 60% of earners. This compares with 26% of those with very poor skills (Level 1)." (ABS 1997:online).

For Australia to improve its literacy skills means a lesser percentage of people in low income positions and a more efficient workforce. To increase its literacy skills in the 15-65 age bracket, primary schools bear the responsibility of educating, focusing on and developing literacy skills to provide adequate preparation for further education and employment.

### **3.3 Division of Time in the Classroom**

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The time spent teaching in the classroom is divided up between different key learning areas mentioned above. With developing technology and changing societal values, the scope of the curriculum in contextual education is expanding. Themes like multiculturalism, language studies and social awareness are becoming increasingly important in a young students education. However, introduction of themes into the classroom deducts time ultimately from teaching of the curriculum.

Student welfare programs and focuses is another issue that detracts from valuable teaching time. Leadership development programs, empowerment and behavioral discipline issues now take roughly 50% of traditional teaching time. Whilst these programs and initiatives provide valuable developmental and educational aspects, students are receiving less time and focus spent on issues such as literacy.

The inclusion of student welfare aspects into the school day is something that must not be removed. However, with roughly half of traditional teaching time being replaced with these aspects, consequences are being reflected in Basic Skills Test results and statistical data regarding the literacy levels of the workforce. Cardiff Primary School believes that the concept of an integrated curriculum with individual subject learning outcomes relaxed and a sense of a holistic syllabus would better utilise a students learning time in the classroom. The reduction of time, yet not the removal of, student welfare programs would create more valuable time for focusing on increasing an acceptable national standard of literacy.

To clarify the thought of reducing time spent on student welfare initiatives, parents must bear some responsibility of their child's education within the family unit. Parent directed learning, with assistance in homework, set assignment work, leadership development and behavioural discipline, is seen as a valuable tool in preparing students for further education. Rather than simply decreasing time spent investing into child welfare during school hours, refocusing these responsibilities to the family unit and outside influences will create more face-to-face teaching time for areas such as literacy and numeracy to be increased.



### **3.4 Male Disengagement in the Classroom**

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For students who struggle in the classroom and disengage from learning, long-term adverse effects are apparent, particularly amongst boys. The Department of Education, Science and Training has undertaken research into boys' disengagement in the classroom. The following passage from the overview on their website is a profound statement that should be considered in relation to term of reference 1.a.

*Over the past decade there has been increasing community concern for boys' education. Too many boys lose interest in school. Boys are not achieving well enough in many areas of education, from literacy through to Year 12 results. The educational gap between boys and girls is increasing.*

*Low achievement at schools can have long-lasting effects. It is closely linked to unemployment and low levels of income. Both boys and girls need to do well at school to move easily into the workforce.*

*Disengagement of boys from school has long-term personal and social consequences. Teenage boys are more likely than teenage girls to experience alcohol and substance abuse or commit suicide. Deaths from illegal drugs also overwhelmingly involve young men.*

*All Australian children should be educated well and have the opportunity to gain appropriate skills and education for later in their lives. The challenge is to increase the engagement of boys and improve their educational attainment, without threatening the gains made by girls in recent years. (DEST 2007: online)*

In 2003, the Department of Education, Science and Training released a booklet on boys' education issues, and the steps the Government is taking to support boys in schools. Boys are increasingly attaining lower results than girls in literacy, and overall, their results have been steadily declining over the past 25 years (DEST 2003:online). Lower literacy skills equates often to employment and income issues. 'Males make up an overwhelming proportion of students experiencing disciplinary problems and school exclusion' (DEST 2003:online).

Cardiff Primary School is partnering with Cardiff High School and the University of Newcastle, in a government-funded initiative to counteract this problem in their schools. The program, Success for Boys, aims to educate teachers on how to re-engage boys in the classroom, effectively lessening the chance that their further education and employment careers will be damaged by their disengagement.

The fact that programs like Success for Boys exists demonstrates that problems have been detected with disengagement in the classroom. The task at hand now is educating the educators on how to successfully deal with this situation.

Relating this issue back to the terms of reference, 1.a. seeks to answer whether school education prepares students adequately for the next phases of learning. Boy's disengagement is a disadvantage, and lessens the extent to which their schooling equips them. Unless more programs like Success for Boys and other government initiatives are given easy and widespread access into the educational world, male students will suffer.

### **3.5 Ageing Population of Teachers**

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A point worthy to be mentioned, although as an issue, one that fails to render sufficient solutions, is the ageing population of teachers. Children are finding less enjoyment and engagement in the classroom.

The average age of primary school teachers falls in between the 35 to 44 year age range (MCEETYA 1998:online). It is becoming more common for recent education graduates, upon commencement of full-time teaching, roughly to resign in the first three years. The main reasons are widely unknown, however, the opinion formed is that perhaps not enough time is spent gaining hands-on experience whilst studying their degree.

It is the opinion of Cardiff Primary School that the ageing population of teachers is a factor in considering the introduction of new teaching pedagogy. With teacher education programs like Success for Boys, essentially a fresh approach to teaching is introduced and applied in the classroom. However, traditional and dated pedagogy is ingrained in more experienced teachers, posing as a problem and stumbling block in implementing modern pedagogy.

Whilst the curriculum is a sufficient document that requires more concentrated focus on certain aspects such as literacy, the consistency of the pedagogy processes and the conflicting opinions between younger and more experienced teaching staff can and does pose a problem in the sufficient equipping and preparing of students for further education. There does not appear to be a proper recommendation for this area, however, it is worthy to be noted as an issue.

## **4.0 Conclusion**

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The recommendations made by Cardiff Primary School are made with the understanding that the school is an average, community primary school. The current education policies, frameworks and documents that dictate a students education and educators teaching need reforming, and the school believes that the recommendations presented are a possible starting point for this to happen.

Literacy levels nationally, although having current government initiatives supporting their focus, need to be improved quickly and treated with a matter of importance. The children in the education system, and those to come, rely on literacy skills for further education and employment, which ultimately affects the nation. An increase in literacy skills will be a beneficial move for both the education system and also the economic future of this country.

The division of time in the classroom is a recommendation that could fulfill the aforementioned point. Focus on student welfare responsibilities needs to shift to the family unit, to ensure and allow sufficient time to be spent on teaching the curriculum.

Student disengagement needs to be addressed, through programs and initiatives aimed to educate teachers on re-engaging children for learning. Teacher education is critical in preventing this from occurring and allowing learning to take place in the classroom.

The ageing population of teachers is an issue that perhaps only time will cure. The introduction of new pedagogy into the education system has, can and will clash with more experienced teachers who have operated under a previous pedagogy that they do not believe poses a problem. However, to allow the consistency of new pedagogy to operate freely in educational institutions, there needs to be no hurdles in implementing this.

The submission, opinions and recommendations presented are done so in the hopes that they will affect the outcome in some aspect of this inquiry.

## **5.0 Recommendations**

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Cardiff Primary School makes the following recommendations in regards to the arguments presented in chapter 3:

- 1.0 That an integrated curriculum be introduced.
- 2.0 That a national focus needs to be placed on literacy levels.
- 3.1 That division of time between student welfare and curriculum teaching needs to be unevenly divided, with focus removed from student welfare programs and placed onto teaching the curriculum.
- 3.2 That more parent involvement is needed in students learning.
- 4.1 That University students need to spend more time on internships and practical sessions in the classroom.
- 4.2 That a national program for re-educating teachers in new pedagogy be developed.

## 6.0 References

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Australian Bureau of Statistics, 1996, 'Aspects of Literacy : Assessed Skills Levels in Australia', accessed 17-4-07  
<<http://www.abs.gov.au/AUSSTATS/abs@.nsf/productsbytitle/887AE32D628DC922CA2568A900139365?OpenDocument>>

Boys Education Research and Websites Overview, accessed 19-4-07,  
<[http://www.dest.gov.au/sectors/school\\_education/policy\\_initiatives\\_reviews/key\\_issues/boys\\_education/boys\\_education\\_research\\_and\\_websites.htm](http://www.dest.gov.au/sectors/school_education/policy_initiatives_reviews/key_issues/boys_education/boys_education_research_and_websites.htm)>

Department of Education, Science and Training, 2003, 'Educating Boys', accessed 19-4-07, <[http://www.dest.gov.au/NR/rdonlyres/E635D70E-EB9D-4168-A382-3A2D093CEB34/4589/educating\\_boys.pdf](http://www.dest.gov.au/NR/rdonlyres/E635D70E-EB9D-4168-A382-3A2D093CEB34/4589/educating_boys.pdf)>

Ministerial Council of Education, Employment, Training and Youth Affairs, 1998, 'School Teacher Demand and Supply: Primary and Secondary', accessed 17-4-07  
<<http://www.mceetya.edu.au/mceetya/default.asp?id=12048>>

## 6.1 Sources

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Board of studies k-6

<http://k6.boardofstudies.nsw.edu.au/>

Boys Education Research

[http://www.dest.gov.au/sectors/school\\_education/policy\\_initiatives\\_reviews/key\\_issues/boys\\_education/boys\\_education\\_research\\_and\\_websites.htm](http://www.dest.gov.au/sectors/school_education/policy_initiatives_reviews/key_issues/boys_education/boys_education_research_and_websites.htm)

Curriculum Support Site

<http://www.curriculumsupport.education.nsw.gov.au/>

Department of Education and Training

[www.det.nsw.edu.au](http://www.det.nsw.edu.au)

Educating Boys Booklet

[http://www.dest.gov.au/NR/rdonlyres/87C40E2A-A896-46CD-AF86-C92970334FA0/4005/educating\\_boys.pdf](http://www.dest.gov.au/NR/rdonlyres/87C40E2A-A896-46CD-AF86-C92970334FA0/4005/educating_boys.pdf)

Mandatory Outcomes in k-6 Education Discussion Paper

[http://k6.boardofstudies.nsw.edu.au/eltis/mand\\_ocomes\\_consult.pdf](http://k6.boardofstudies.nsw.edu.au/eltis/mand_ocomes_consult.pdf)

Mandatory Outcomes Consultation Report

[http://k6.boardofstudies.nsw.edu.au/eltis/report\\_k6\\_consultation.pdf](http://k6.boardofstudies.nsw.edu.au/eltis/report_k6_consultation.pdf)

Ministerial Council on Education, Employment, Training and Youth Affairs

<http://www.mceetya.edu.au/mceetya/default.asp?id=12048>

Pedagogy in Practice Conference Presentation

<http://www.newcastle.edu.au/school/education/piphomepage/QualityTeachinginNSWPublicSchools-KathrynHertslet>

Public Schools

[www.schools.nsw.edu.au](http://www.schools.nsw.edu.au)

Report of NSW Public Education Council

[https://www.det.nsw.edu.au/media/downloads/reports\\_stats/pec/report.pdf](https://www.det.nsw.edu.au/media/downloads/reports_stats/pec/report.pdf)

Time to Teach, Time to Learn

[http://k6.boardofstudies.nsw.edu.au/eltis/teach\\_learn\\_k6.pdf](http://k6.boardofstudies.nsw.edu.au/eltis/teach_learn_k6.pdf)

## **Inquiry into the Academic Standards of School Education**

[http://www.aph.gov.au/Senate/committee/eet\\_ctte/academic\\_standards/tor.htm](http://www.aph.gov.au/Senate/committee/eet_ctte/academic_standards/tor.htm)

### **Terms of Reference**

The Senate Employment, Workplace Relations and Education Committee will conduct an inquiry into the current level of academic standards of school education, with particular reference to:

1. Whether school education prepares students adequately for further education, training and employment, including, but not limited to:
  - a. the extent to which each stage of schooling (early primary; middle schooling; senior secondary) equips students with the required knowledge and skills to progress successfully through to the next stage; and
  - b. the extent to which schools provide students with the core knowledge and skills they need to participate in further education and training, and as members of the community.
2. The standards of academic achievement expected of students qualifying for the senior secondary school certificate in each state and territory.
3. How such academic standards compare between states and territories and with those of other countries.

**Submissions need to address some or all of the terms of reference.**

#### **For further information, contact:**

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