

Why **some boys** are having difficulty learning to read

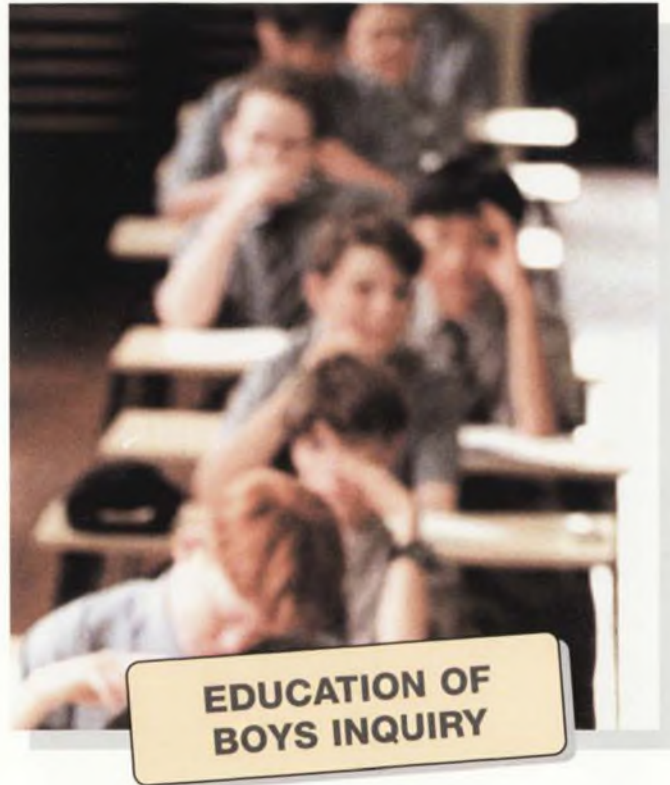


Photo: Pip Blackwood, NewsPix

Boys form the clear majority of children having difficulty learning to read. That's what the House of Representatives Education Committee has been told in evidence to its national inquiry into the education of boys. The House Education Committee has heard that generally boys are less prepared developmentally to commence school than girls, and are more likely to experience learning difficulties and have specific learning disabilities.

According to the National Acoustic Laboratory there is credible scientific evidence which shows that, at the commencement of school, boys' auditory processing is on average less efficient than girls. It's enough of a problem to affect their understanding and response to teachers' instructions.

Early intervention is critical.

The House Education Committee has also heard that early intervention for children with literacy difficulties is critical. While intervention which comes after the first two or three years of schooling is helpful, it is unlikely to be sufficient for many of these children to catch up to their peers.

More than 170 submissions have been received by the inquiry and the Committee has already held several public hearings in cities across Australia. School visits and further hearings are planned for March and April.

Some submissions and witnesses have focused on the particular needs of older boys, pointing out that changing social, economic and employment patterns are dictating the types of skills that

boys will need to succeed in their personal and working lives. The Education Committee has been told that attitudes to literacy and learning among older boys are affected by a range of complex issues, including peer group pressure, parental education levels and their images of masculinity.

Many witnesses to the inquiry have commented on the lack of positive male role models for many boys and the impact this has on their attitudes to education and their behaviour generally. But while there is much anecdotal evidence on this issue, little research has been undertaken.

One point is being made time and again to the Education Committee, whether the issue is early literacy or boys' disengagement in high school. Quality teachers, quality teaching and quality programs make a positive difference to a student's performance, irrespective of the gender of the teacher or the gender and socio-economic background of the student.

For more information (including access to inquiry submissions and transcripts of evidence)

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