

# What boys are saying

The House of Representatives Education Committee's inquiry into boys' education has been generating headlines wherever it has met.

The inquiry has heard from a range of academics, school principals, teachers and groups who work with boys. As part of its investigation the Committee has also been talking to boys themselves. So far informal school forums have been held in Melbourne, Brisbane, Sydney, Adelaide and Perth. The inquiry will soon begin visiting rural and regional areas.

The following excerpts, taken from those forums, reveal some of the things that boys have been saying about the big debates raging around them.

## On co-education

Do boys learn better in same-sex classes? Or is co-education the way to go? It is an issue which has caused much discussion and provoked differing views – including among boys – at the inquiry.

### MELBOURNE OCTOBER 2000

Ashley—I like it better all boys . . . because the boys used to always try and show off in front of the girls and just not concentrate on the work, but here there is no-one to show off in front of.

Dean—[If it's all boys] it is easier to do speeches.

Kirk—If you do them in front of girls they may laugh at you or not understand what you are saying whereas if you are doing them in front of your classmates—

Dean—They understand, kind of.

### SYDNEY FEBRUARY 2001

Aaron—[Boys] try to impress girls and show off, but that could push your marks up. And it would be more fun having them around.

Jerry—I am sure that, if more schools became co-ed, the boys at that school could learn off the girls and could learn how to act around them when they are older.

Erfan—When [we have visits from the girls school] there are two separate groups: girls on one side and boys on the other side. The main thing happening is that boys are more quiet than girls. That is an unusual thing in our school— boys are never quiet. But when girls are in there all the boys' mouths are shut and the girls keep talking. When the teachers come into the class they think it is amazing that the boys are quiet and the girls are talking.

### ADELAIDE FEBRUARY 2001

Tom—[Boys only] was trialled last year in English . . . and the co-ed class was more controlled. The single-sex class was rowdier. I was in the class and I think it did help because we did compete against each other a bit, which meant that the grades went up by a fair bit.

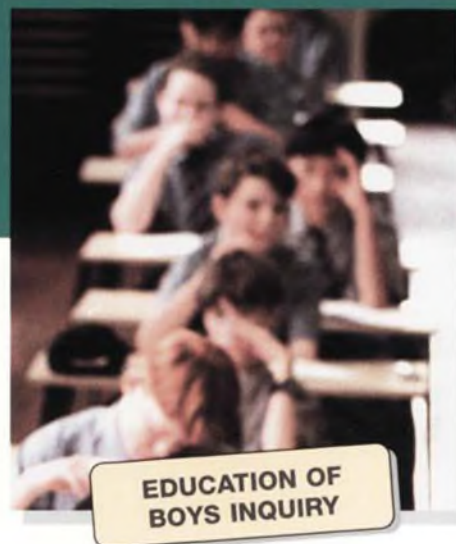


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## On reading

The inquiry has been presented with evidence which suggests that boys are falling behind girls in literacy standards. What do boys think about reading, and what can help?

### MELBOURNE OCTOBER 2000

Question—Some people tell us that reading is a bit of a sissy thing to do. What do you think?

Brayden—It depends what you read.

Question—So having the freedom to choose your own books and the type of books you are reading, that is a big help?

Seth—Yes.

Question—What sorts of books did you start reading?

Trent—Action books.

The Committee has been asking boys what sort of books they are reading by choice (not as texts). The answers include: *American Psycho*, *The Shining*, *Fight Club*, *The Client*, *The Pelican Brief*, *Lazarus* and *The Hurricane*.

## On what makes a good teacher

The quality of teachers and teaching practice is another area which is receiving a great deal of attention. So, what makes a good teacher?

### SYDNEY FEBRUARY 2001

Sikeli—I think teachers are afraid to be harsh on their students. You often find that, at the start of the year when students go to a class and have a strict teacher, that strict teacher is often called things behind their back. I think teachers like to be popular like everyone else. Some people are afraid that, if they are strict on students, that will backfire on them because the students will not like them, will truant their classes or will not take them seriously.

Stan—The thing I like and think makes a good teacher is one who is not there just to teach the children but who takes the time after classes to talk to them and not only listen to their problems about school work but takes a few minutes for other problems they have within the school or in other subjects. I think teachers that take the time out to talk to the students have more humour and can deal with more different types of students. That is what makes a good teacher.

**Full transcripts of what boys have been telling the inquiry are available at the House Education Committee's web site at: [www.aph.gov.au/house/committee/eewr](http://www.aph.gov.au/house/committee/eewr)**