



A Commonwealth
Government Initiative



EDUCATING*boys*

issues and information

MESSAGE from the Minister

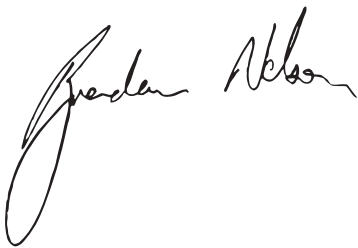
In Australia, as in many other countries, evidence shows that while some boys are performing well, many others are not performing well on a range of educational achievement measures and on a range of broader social indicators.

Not only is the performance of boys overall poor, relative to that of girls, but some evidence shows that the 'gap' between boys' and girls' performance has increased over time. In addition, in some measurable instances, the performance of boys, as a group, appears to have declined over time.

Much has been achieved in the past twenty-five years in providing greater access and equity in education for girls, and we must ensure that girls' educational experiences and outcomes continue to receive necessary and appropriate attention. However, the evidence in this booklet highlights the urgent need for action to also address the educational needs of boys in our schools.

The Commonwealth Government is committed to supporting schools in their efforts to address the educational needs of boys. To this end, the Commonwealth has introduced a number of initiatives.

It is with great pleasure that I present this information booklet on boys education issues and steps the Commonwealth is taking to support boys in schools.



The Hon. Dr Brendan Nelson MP
Minister for Education, Science and Training
April 2003



WHY Boys' Education?

Educational and Social Indicators

The evidence that the educational needs of boys require attention is clear across a range of indicators.

Literacy Scores

Boys underperform on key literacy measures.

- In 2000, 3.4% fewer Year 3 boys and 4.4% fewer Year 5 boys achieved the national reading benchmarks than girls.
- 15.3% of Australian boys lack the literacy skills to benefit sufficiently from their education opportunities, compared with just 8.7% of girls.
- 69% of 15-year-old girls scored at or above the OECD mean in reading literacy tests, compared with 55.4% of males.

While girls' performance in literacy results has remained relatively stable over the past 25 years, overall, boys' results have fallen to a significant degree.

- Between 1975 and 1995 the proportion of 14-year-old male students who demonstrated mastery on reading tests declined from 70% to 66%, while the corresponding proportion of female students changed little, from 73% to 74%. From 1975 to 1998, the mean score for male students in reading comprehension decreased significantly, from 50.2 to 49.0. The results of female students did not change significantly during the same period (rising from 51.1 in 1975 to 51.3 in 1998).

See tables at Annex A for details on literacy outcomes.



Year 12 Scores

Girls are achieving higher average marks in the majority of subjects at Year 12, and the 'gap' between boys' and girls' total marks has widened.

- † In NSW, the difference between boys' and girls' average Tertiary Entrance Score rose from 0.6 marks in 1981 to 19.4 marks in 1996.¹
- † In most States, boys and girls are fairly evenly represented among the top one or two percent of students in Year 12 overall results, but the majority of mid-level to upper performers are girls, while boys dominate the bottom performers. For example, in the 2000 Queensland Overall Position university entrance scores boys represented 51% of the very highest group of performers; 41% of the top half of performers; 49% of the bottom half; and 62% of the very lowest group.²
- † In its inquiry into the education of boys, the House of Representatives Standing Committee on Education and Training reported that: for subjects studied by more than 100 students, aggregate results show that in the 1999 NSW Higher School Certificate (Year 12), the average mark achieved by girls exceeded boys' average in 36 out of 40 subjects by up to 11%;³ and
- † In Queensland in 1998 there was a greater proportion of girls in the top performance bands in 36 out of 45 year 12 subjects. In South Australia in the same year, girls made up the majority in the top performance bands in 27 out of 34 year 12 subjects.⁴

School Engagement and Enjoyment

Boys are less engaged with their school and enjoy school less than girls.

- † While male students are more likely to participate in extracurricular sports activities, female students are likely to participate to a greater extent in extracurricular activities than male students and in doing so increase their level of attachment to the school.⁵
- † Boys report less positive experiences of schooling than girls in terms of 'enjoyment of school, perceived curriculum usefulness and teacher responsiveness'.⁶



School Retention

For the past 25 years more girls than boys have completed schooling.

- In 2002, the apparent Year 12 school retention rate was just 69.8% for males, compared with 80.7% for females (See graph 1 at Annex A).

Higher Education

More girls than boys go on to study at higher education institutions.

- Males made up just 43.1% of domestic higher education students in Australia in 2002, compared with 45.9% in 1992.⁷

Behavioural and Social Outcomes

Males make up an overwhelming proportion of students experiencing disciplinary problems and school exclusion.

- Teenage boys are more likely than teenage girls to be unemployed, be involved in a car crash, have problems with the law, experience alcohol and substance abuse or commit suicide.⁸
- *'By fifteen years of age boys are three times more likely than girls to die from all causes combined - but especially from accidents, violence and suicide.'*⁹
- In some schools boys account for eight out of every ten suspensions and exclusions.¹⁰

International Data

The relative poor performance of boys is not unique to Australia.

- International data show that, in every participating country, boys are doing significantly worse than girls in reading literacy.¹¹
- Across the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD), boys are generally more likely to be disaffected with school and more likely to truant.¹²

The House of Representatives Inquiry Into the Education of Boys

In October 2002 the Federal Government's House of Representatives Standing Committee on Education and Training presented to Parliament the findings of its Inquiry into the education of boys in the report *Boys: Getting it right*. In short, the Committee:

- Found that there is justification for many concerns expressed about boys' education.
- Found that these concerns are not being adequately addressed within the current policy framework.
- Recognised that many schools and individual teachers are already achieving excellent outcomes for both girls and boys.
- Believed that efforts to raise the educational achievement of boys can be undertaken without threatening gains made by girls in recent decades.

Boys: Getting it right can be found at

<www.aph.gov.au/house/committee/edt/eofb/index.htm>



WHAT is the Commonwealth Government Doing for Boys?

While the Commonwealth Government does not have direct responsibility for the day-to-day running of schools, it does work cooperatively with State and Territory Government and non-government school authorities to support the development of all young Australians to achieve learning outcomes consistent with their potential. The Ministerial Council on Education, Employment, Training and Youth Affairs (MCEETYA) facilitates this relationship.

Supporting Quality Teachers

Research shows that the quality of the teacher is a key determinant in students' educational outcomes. Under its initiative, *Teachers for the 21st Century* the Commonwealth's \$159 million Quality Teacher Programme (QTP) aims to update and improve teachers' skills and understanding in priority areas and enhance the status of teaching.

Boys' Education Lighthouse Schools Programme

The Commonwealth has committed up to \$3.5 million from the QTP to the Boys' Education Lighthouse Schools Programme to identify and showcase successful practices in the education of boys. Under stage one of this programme, primary and secondary schools from across Australia have been awarded grants of up to \$5,000 to document their successful practices in the education of boys. The results of these projects will be disseminated nationally in December 2003.

Stage Two will commence in 2004. Approximately 30 'cluster' school zones will be established across Australia to support best practice in boys' education. Each cluster will contain a lighthouse school to champion, demonstrate and disseminate best practices in boys' education to schools around them. Funding of up to \$60,000 will be provided to the lighthouse school to develop, facilitate and implement a professional development programme for teachers in a cluster of surrounding schools.

The overarching objective of the programme is to disseminate information and strategies that will contribute toward an effective pool of quality teachers. Details can be found at <www.boyslighthouse.edu.au>.

Funded Research

The Commonwealth is initiating research into significant areas of education relevant to boys, including pedagogy, curriculum, assessment and students' perceptions of teaching as a career. These projects, with funding of up to \$500,000 over the period 2003–04, build on a solid base of research the Government has undertaken in recent years investigating educational issues relevant to boys (see Annex B).

Review of the Gender Equity Policy Document

Through MCEETYA the Commonwealth Government is seeking a review of the existing national gender equity policy framework *Gender Equity: A framework for Australian Schools*, so that it reflects the current issues relating to the impact of gender on learning for all Australian students.

Conference Sponsorship

The Commonwealth Government sponsored the Third Biennial Teaching Boys Conference entitled 'Boys to Fine Men: School and Community Partnerships'. The conference was held on 27–29 March 2003 and convened by the Family Action Centre of the University of Newcastle.

Details of these and other Commonwealth Government initiatives on boys' education can be found via the Department of Education, Science and Training website at <www.dest.gov.au>.

Supporting Students' Literacy and Numeracy Skills

Improving literacy and numeracy outcomes for all students is a focus for policy makers and practitioners.

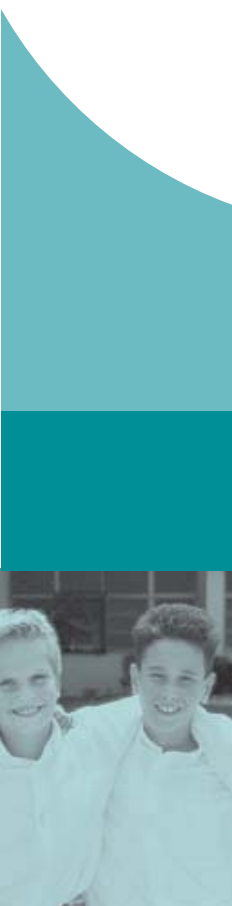
- The Strategic Assistance for Improving Student Outcomes (SAISO) Programme aims to help education authorities and schools to improve the learning outcomes of educationally disadvantaged students, particularly in literacy and numeracy. The Commonwealth is contributing some \$1.4 billion nationally over the 2001–04 quadrennium to the programme, including approximately \$345 million nationally in 2003.

- The Commonwealth expends about \$8 million annually under the Grants for National Literacy and Numeracy Strategies and Projects Programme on strategic research and initiatives to support the implementation of the National Literacy and Numeracy Plan. Initiatives and research funded under the programme include effective literacy and numeracy teaching practices in the early and middle years of schooling, and effective teaching and learning practices for students with learning difficulties.

Other Relevant Commonwealth Initiatives

A range of other important initiatives administered by the Commonwealth are relevant to boys' education:

- In collaboration with the State and Territory Governments the Commonwealth has established myfuture.edu.au a single comprehensive and effective Internet based career exploration service. The new system is designed to enable users to make better-informed decisions about their career aspirations, including choices about jobs and any further education or training they may require.
- The Partnership Outreach Education Model pilots target young people who have become disconnected from mainstream education (and quite possibly their families and communities) and engage them in community learning environments. The pilots will provide governments, schools, youth related service providers, business, communities and young people and their families with an opportunity to share knowledge as they test a partnership approach to the delivery of education, life skills and employability skills training for those young people aged 13 – 19.
- The Commonwealth has commissioned a national Values Education Study to enable schools to strengthen what they are already doing in the values education area and to disseminate best practice examples. It will also develop a set of principles and a framework for improved values education in Australian schools. As part of the study, 71 schools around the country have been chosen to receive grants of up to \$7,000 for innovative values education projects.
- The National Agenda for Early Childhood, a whole of government initiative for which a consultation paper was launched by the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs, Larry Anthony, on



20 February 2003, will focus on three key areas: early child and maternal health, early learning and care; and supporting child friendly communities. Further areas of focus for the early learning and care component include promoting access for all children to quality early learning experiences; successful transition to school for all children, education and family support; earlier identification of children at risk of developmental or behavioural problems and promoting awareness among parents of opportunities for early learning experiences for their children.

- 1 The Enterprise and Career Education Programme focuses primarily on enterprise education and transition systems including vocational and career education for young people, with particular emphasis on Years 5 to 10, inclusive.
- 1 The *Discovering Democracy Programme* and the *National School Drug Education Strategy*, both within the Quality Outcomes Programme, focus on specific issues with a strong relationship to the issues of disengagement and lack of motivation.



The Current Situation in Australia

The majority of teachers in both primary and secondary school are female, and the proportion of male teachers is declining.

- Between 1992 and 2002, the proportion of male school teachers (in full-time equivalent measure) in Australia declined from 25.8% to 20.9% in primary schools and from 49.4% to 44.9% in secondary schools.¹³
- The age profile on gender representation suggests that the male share of teaching will continue to shrink, with female representation being highest among teachers below the age of 30.¹⁴
- Females also make up the bulk of students enrolled in teacher pre-service education courses in Australia. In 2002, females were 77% of the 53,908 domestic students enrolled in initial teacher education courses.¹⁵
- Across the nation, there are only 4,247 males who are training to be primary teachers, which is 18.8% of the total number of teachers in primary training – less than one in five.¹⁶
- Just 3.3% of the 7,128 students enrolled in early childhood Teacher Education courses are male, while in secondary school Teacher Education courses, males make up just 5,255 – or 39.2% – of the total enrolments (See Table 8 at Annex A).
- While Australia's teaching workforce is predominantly female, males are disproportionately represented among school administrators and school leaders.¹⁷ Moreover, while the number of female teachers in Australia continues to rise, this is not the case in science and mathematics.¹⁸

WHY Male Teachers Matter

The recent House of Representatives Inquiry into the education of boys recognised that women and men can be equally good teachers of both boys and girls and agreed that the quality of the teacher is more important than the gender of the teacher.

However, the House of Representatives Committee determined that more male teachers are needed because male teachers as role models matter.

The Committee noted that it is desirable to 'have a balance of men and women teaching and in positions of authority in schools', and that 'the role modelling and teaching by males whose relationship and commitment to boys is genuine is the most important factor.'

In its interim report, *Attracting and Retaining Teachers of Science, Technology and Mathematics*, the Committee for the Review of Teaching and Teacher Education noted that 'it is desirable from the perspective of a diverse society that the numbers of male teachers increase in coming years, particularly in primary school'.

Several commentators note that boys need positive male role models to help convey a sense of male identity. Mr Richard Fletcher (University of Newcastle) and Dr Peter West (University of Western Sydney) both argue strongly for the need for more male teachers. Dr West has argued that primary schooling is a largely 'feminised' environment, and emphasises the need for quality male teachers:

*'We don't need ANY male teacher getting boys to be masculine in an unthinking way. We need men guiding boys toward a caring, thoughtful masculinity.'*¹⁹

Steven Biddulph believes that: 'the six-to-fourteen age range is the period when boys most hunger for male encouragement and example', and that primary schools need more male teachers with two qualities – a mixture of warmth and sternness, and undefensiveness.²⁰





COMMONWEALTH Action on Teacher Gender Profile

The gender profile of teachers is of increasing concern to parents, schools and Departments of Education, and the Commonwealth Government is keen to discover what is deterring male school leavers from enrolling in teacher preparation courses.

Generally, the low status of teachers in the community, poor salaries, limited career opportunities and child protection issues are seen as some of the main reasons discouraging males from entering teaching as a career.²¹

What Is the Commonwealth Doing?

In December 2002, the Commonwealth Minister wrote to the Deans of Education for information on the issue of the gender profile of student teachers, seeking their views on what might be done about a gender imbalance. The Minister is receiving replies from the Deans now, as universities finalise their enrolment data.

The Commonwealth is also instigating a study to investigate the attitudes and beliefs of Year 11 and 12 male and female students to teaching as a profession. The outcomes are expected to be available in late 2003 and will inform the development of effective strategies to increase the number of males enrolling in teacher preparation courses.



ANNEX A

Table 1: Percentage of Australian 14 year-old Students Achieving Mastery in Reading Comprehension, 1975–1995

	1975	1980	1989	1995
Male	70%	72%	70%	66%
Female	73%	73%	75%	74%

Source: Marks, G.N & Ainley, J (1997), Reading Comprehension and Numeracy among Junior Secondary School Students in Australia, ACER

Table 2: Scaled Scores on Reading Comprehension Tests by Australian 14 year-old students, 1975 – 1998

	Mean		Median	
	Male	Female	Male	Female
ASSP 1975	50.2	51.1	51.9	51.9
ASSP 1980	50.0	51.1	52.4	52.4
YIT 1989	50.1	50.9	51.0	51.0
LSAY 1995	48.8	50.7	48.6	51.1
LSAY 1998	49.0	51.3	48.1	50.7

Source: Rothman, S (2002) Achievement in Literacy and Numeracy by Australian 14 year-olds, 1975–1998, ACER.

- ¹ 1975 - Australian Studies in School Performance (ASSP).
- ¹ 1980 - Australian Studies of Student Performance (ASSP).
- ¹ 1989 - Youth In Transition study (YIT).
- ¹ 1995 & 1998 - Longitudinal Surveys of Australian Youth (LSAY).

Table 3: Proportion of Australian Students* Achieving the Benchmark, Reading and Numeracy, Year 3 and Year 5, 2000

	Year 3 Reading	Year 3 Numeracy	Year 5 Reading	Year 5 Numeracy
All Students	92.5% ± 2.2	92.7% ± 2.0	87.4% ± 2.1	89.6% ± 1.7
Males	90.9% ± 2.7	92.7% ± 2.1	85.2% ± 2.3	89.4% ± 1.7
Females	94.3% ± 1.8	92.8% ± 2.1	89.6% ± 1.9	89.8% ± 1.8

Source: MCEETYA (Tables 3.5, 3.6, 3.7 and 3.8 School education chapter, 2003 Report on Government Services)

*The average age of students and the years of schooling vary slightly between States.

Table 4: Proportion of Year 3 Australian Students* who Achieved the Reading Benchmark, 2000 (%)

	NSW	VIC	QLD	WA	SA	TAS	ACT	NT	AUST
All Students	93.1	93.0	92.6	95.8	86.8	91.2	95.1	65.3	92.5
Males	91.5	91.1	90.8	95.2	84.4	88.7	94.0	62.2	90.9
Females	94.8	95.1	94.4	96.5	89.3	93.6	96.2	68.6	94.3

Source: MCEETYA (Table 3.5 School education chapter, 2003 Report on Government Services)

*The average age of students and the years of schooling vary slightly between States.

Table 5: Proportion of Year 5 Australian Students* who Achieved the Reading Benchmark, 2000 (%)

	NSW	VIC	QLD	WA	SA	TAS	ACT	NT	AUST
All Students	89.1	92.1	78.5	93.6	84.4	81.4	94.0	71.2	87.4
Males	87.1	90.6	75.1	92.4	82.2	78.7	93.0	69.3	85.2
Females	91.2	93.7	81.7	94.9	86.7	84.3	98.7	73.1	89.6

Source: MCEETYA (Table 3.6 School education chapter, 2003 Report on Government Services)

*The average age of students and the years of schooling vary slightly between States.

Table 6: Proportion of 15-year-old Australian Secondary Students Achieving at or above the OECD Mean for Reading Literacy, 2000 (%)

	NSW	VIC	QLD	WA	SA	TAS	ACT	NT	AUST
All Students	66.5	55.2	59.6	63.4	64.8	60.2	71.4	51.0	61.8
Males	60.8	50.3	50.4	57.7	58.2	52.6	66.6	43.8	55.4
Females	72.5	61.7	69.3	70.1	70.8	68.6	76.5	59.0	69.0

Source: PISA 2000 (Table 3A.24 School education attachment, 2003 Report on Government Services).

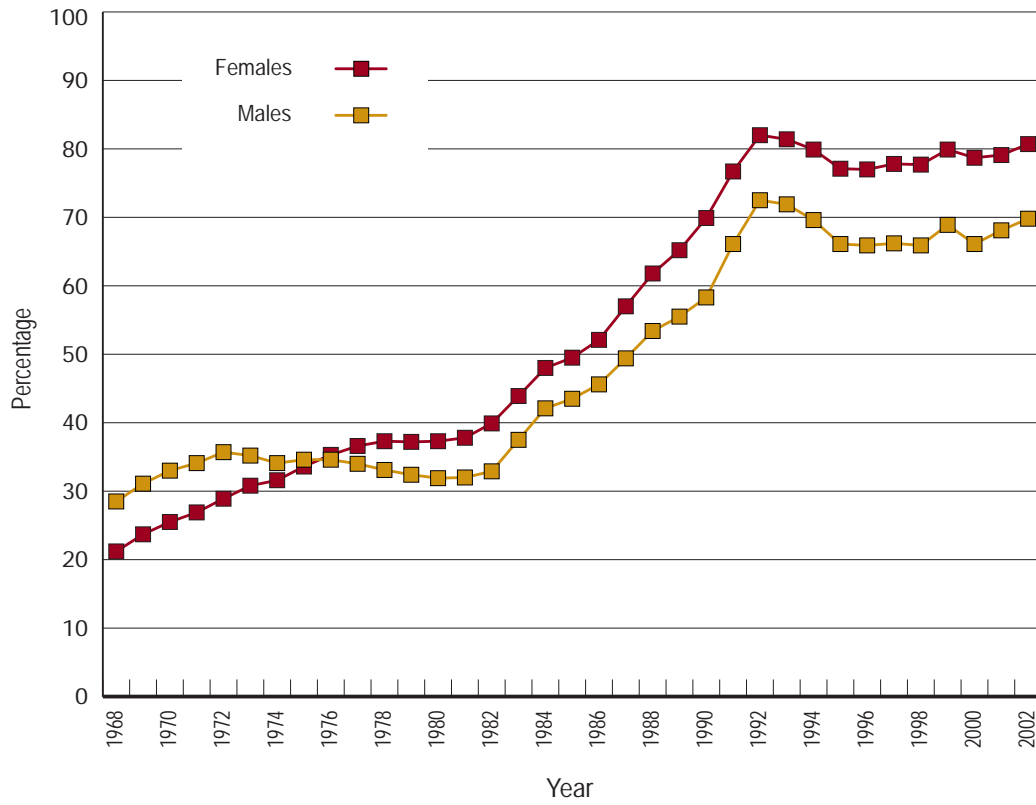
Assessment conducted for the Program for International Student Assessment (PISA). PISA 2000 involved sample assessment of approximately 2.3 per cent of 15 year old Australian secondary school students. For further information on PISA see <www.pisa.oecd.org/>.



School Retention

For the past 25 years more girls than boys have completed schooling.

Graph 1: Apparent School Retention Rates, All Schools 1968–2002



**Table 7: Apparent School Retention Rates,
All Australian Schools 1968–2002 (%)**

Year	Males	Females	Total	Year	Males	Females	Total
1968	28.5	21.2	25.0	1986	45.6	52.1	48.7
1969	31.1	23.7	27.5	1987	49.4	57.0	53.1
1970	33.0	25.5	29.3	1988	53.4	61.8	57.6
1971	34.1	26.9	30.6	1989	55.5	65.2	60.3
1972	35.7	28.9	32.4	1990	58.3	69.9	64.0
1973	35.2	30.8	33.1	1991	66.1	76.7	71.3
1974	34.1	31.6	32.9	1992	72.5	82.0	77.1
1975	34.6	33.6	34.1	1993	71.9	81.4	76.6
1976	34.6	35.3	34.9	1994	69.6	79.9	74.6
1977	34.0	36.6	35.3	1995	66.1	77.1	72.2
1978	33.1	37.3	35.1	1996	65.9	77.0	71.3
1979	32.4	37.2	34.7	1997	66.2	77.8	71.8
1980	31.9	37.3	34.5	1998	65.9	77.7	71.6
1981	32.0	37.8	34.8	1999	68.9	79.9	72.3
1982	32.9	39.9	36.3	2000	66.1	78.7	72.3
1983	37.5	43.9	40.6	2001	68.1	79.1	73.4
1984	42.1	48.0	45.0	2002	69.8	80.7	75.1
1985	43.5	49.5	46.4				

Source: ABS, Schools Australia Report 2002. Apparent retention rate estimates the percentage of full-time students that continue from the first year of high-school to the final year of high school. The figures are not adjusted for migration, student movements between education jurisdictions or students repeating year levels.

**Table 8: Domestic Student Enrolments in Teacher Education
Courses Providing Initial Teacher Training (2002)**

	Teacher Education Early Childhood	Teacher Education Primary	Teacher Education Secondary
Male	236	4,247	5,255
Female	6,892	18,388	8,167
Total	7,128	22,635	13,422

Source: DEST Higher Education Student Data Collection, unpublished

ANNEX B

Recent Commonwealth Research

Two major reports were released by the Commonwealth Department of Education, Science and Training in 2002 on boys' education:

- *Addressing the Educational Needs of Boys, Strategies for Schools and Teachers* – Professor Bob Lingard, Dr Wayne Martino, Dr Martin Mills and Dr Mark Bahr (University of Queensland and Murdoch University); and
- *Boys, Literacy and Schooling: Expanding the Repertoires of Practice* – Associate Professor Nola Alloway, Professor Peter Freebody, Professor Pam Gilbert and Mr Sandy Muspratt (Griffith University, James Cook University and Curriculum Corporation).

The key findings of both reports are:

- there are problems for some boys in terms of their engagement and literacy achievement in schooling;
- teaching and improved, high quality pedagogy is a key determinant in the educational experiences of both boys and girls;
- there is no universal solution to improving boys' outcomes; and
- in addressing a boys and literacy agenda, schools should cater for a range of learning styles in assessment and curriculum.

Addressing the Educational Needs of Boys, Strategies for Schools and Teachers argued that the quality of a teacher is more important than his/her gender. However, it did find that students sometimes find it useful to have teachers of the same sex with whom to discuss personal matters.



ENDNOTES

1. MacCann, 1995, and Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS)
2. Cumpston, Smith (2003)
3. House of Representatives Standing Committee on Education and Training's Inquiry into the Education of Boys – *Boys: Getting it Right*
4. Ibid
5. Several sources, including Fullarton, 2002
6. Several sources, as quoted in Rowe, 2002
7. Using comparative figures, DEST Higher Education Statistics Collections
8. Several sources, including ABS Statistics, Fletcher, 2002 and Buckingham, 2000
9. Biddulph (1997) *Raising Boys*, Finch Publishing, Sydney
10. Several sources, including *Boys: Getting it right*
11. Programme for International Student Assessment data, 2000
12. OECD Data
13. ABS Schools Australia, 2002
14. Several sources, including *Teachers in Australian Schools - A Report from the 1999 National Survey (September 2000)*
15. DEST Higher Education Student Data Collection, unpublished
16. Ibid
17. Several sources, including O'Doherty (1994)
18. *Review Committee – Commonwealth Review of Teaching and Teacher Education, Attracting and Retaining Teachers of Science, Technology and Mathematics (2002)*
19. West (2002) *What IS the Matter With Boys?*, Choice Books, Marrickville
20. Biddulph op. cit.
21. Several sources, including *Boys: Getting it Right*