

Submission

No 92

INQUIRY INTO CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE 9-14 YEARS IN NSW

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Children and Young People in NSW in the 21st Century Ashbury Public School Presentation

Speaker One: Georgia

Introduction

Today I will be giving you a brief picture of our school – Ashbury Public School.

Ashbury Public is located in the inner west region of Sydney. It is a small school with around 330 students and 13 classrooms. The classes vary from around 20 in kindergarten to about 30 in the year 5/6 classes. Our attendance rate is higher than the average for state and region.

Ashbury has 18 staff members including a part time librarian, learning support teacher, ESL teacher and reading recovery teacher. The school has access to a school councillor one day a week and also has some teacher's aid time. They are all very experienced and committed.

Our school is also very multicultural; many of our students are exposed to languages other than English and enrich our school through their cultural diversity. We participate in many inclusive activities like Harmony Day, Reconciliation and Anzac Day.

Ashbury provides many extra curricular activities such as PSSA Sport, band, choir, dance groups, recorder, chess, debating and Tournament of the minds.

Our student achieved above state average in basic skills results last year.

The school community have a strong belief in education being a partnership and as a result there is a very active school council, P&C and SRC. Also many parents are involved in classroom programs. Our school motto is, Education Forms the Mind and each day we work as a team in striving to achieve this.

My fellow speakers will present the data we have collected and some of the conclusions we have arrived at.

Speaker Two; Rose
Work place issues

We conducted a survey on the needs of children ages 9 – 14. Our students in Years 5 and 6 were asked to respond to the survey. A total 87 kids completed this survey.

Part of the survey was to collect data on work issues and these are some of the results. 84% of the mums work. 60% of them work full-time and 40% of them work part-time. 95% of the dads work as well. 86% work full-time and 14% work part-time. 15% of the mums don't work at all. 5% of the dads don't work either.

One of the questions was, "Who cares for you when both your parents aren't there?"

The kids were given three options to choose from. They were:

- a. relatives and friends
- b. before- and after-school care
- c. look after yourself

More than one response was acceptable.

The results were that 58 kids are looked after by relatives or friends, 19 kids go to before and after school care, and 47 kids look after themselves.

Seeing as only stage three (years five and six) completed this survey, the results weren't really very surprising because as we are all around the ages of 11 and 12, we are becoming more mature and responsible. With the majority of parents working full-time, this means that there are a great many stage three children at home looking after themselves (that is, unsupervised) after school.

I also asked a couple of questions to the director of our before- and after-school care center: SPLASH. She told me that approximately 20 kids come each morning and about 85 kids (up to 100 kids) come in the afternoon.

28 kids from stage three go to SPLASH with 13 of those booked in 5 days a week, either morning or afternoon, and the other 15 of those coming two to three days a week.

From this information, I can conclude that splash, or any after school care, is really meant for the younger kids at school. I can also say that nearly half of stage 3 need to be educated about being home alone, or that there should be more low cost community activities for older kids. The results show that it may be beneficial to support families and/or friends who look after kids after school.

Speaker Two: Sam
Needs of Children 9-14

Children have many needs. As a group we decided to not think about basic needs as the majority of our school population has shelter, food, and water. We brainstormed other needs that kids might have, and from that we came up with 12 possibilities. In our survey we asked the children to tick the 6 most important needs out of those 12 for someone their age. It was important to include this section in the survey because from this we could see what children thought they needed, not what adults think they need, as a child's perspective and an adult's perspective can be very different.

Based on the survey results the need with the most votes was family and friend social time, this was followed by opportunities to extend their abilities and interests e.g. music programmes and chess classes, the third most important was having community based programmes for e.g. soccer clubs and art classes. Knowing how to handle money, having access to information technology and having a network of people to talk to were all tied in 4th place. These needs were picked over things like having an extra focus on drug and sex education, having transition programmes to high school, opportunities for learning support and access to services like medical, dental and a counsellor.

From these results we can see that the trend is that children think they need things that will help them learn more, like computers, extra curricular activities and community based programmes, and children think it is important to be surrounded by people they can trust, talk to and socialise with, like their friends and family. Also the results show that many children think it is important to learn how to handle money. Children are realising that managing their money is going to be a big part of their later lives.

One of the results we found interesting was that the need of having the latest equipment and toys like game consoles and play stations was right at the bottom of the results. Many adults would think this would be at the top. But now children are starting to realise that they can live without these things and would rather spend time with their friends and family. I think that this shows a lot of maturity, and that they do consider other things important other than the latest computer games.

At Ashbury we run a lot of programmes that are based on what children's needs are. We have a great music programme, chess class, debating team and choir and dance groups. We run transition programmes with the local high schools, we encourage kids to research with and learn how to use computers and laptops, and classes are run about sex and drug education. We also realise the importance of community and a lot of our projects involve parents and the local community.

Running programmes in schools that children say they need is a great way for making children want to learn more, and letting them learn and participate in what they think is important. With some more funding from the government, schools could afford to run many more of these great programmes further enriching students lives.

Speaker Four: Lawrence

On Resilience

The committee has also asked for some comment on the issue of resilience. Resilience means springing back from a fall. The dictionary defines resilience as being elastic or being able to recover quickly after sickness, depression, grief and other emotional upsets. This is a value which can help us cope with difficult situations that are presented in life. We believe that resilience is a must have skill and all children should have some understanding of how to develop their own resilience.

We have a number of programs at APS designed specifically for building up resilience in children.

First and foremost we have the peer support program. This is run by Year 6 students. The peer support program teaches children how to deal with social and family problems, for example; how to deal with bullying not only as a victim but also as a witness. Peer Support Program is also used to build up relations between students of different ages, kindergarten to Year 6. Resilience is a major focus of this program. We help all children, young and old (like me) learn to spring back from things that make them feel down. With these skills we hope to train our peers to sort out issues in the playground, on the sports field and even at home.

Secondly, we have Restorative Practice. This is a step by step guide to deal with conflicts big and small. Restorative Practice uses empathy to fix disagreements and disputes. Every day we put signs out in the playground to help children and teachers sort out problems. The signs have a series of questions that help with the process.

Thirdly, we have peer mediation where Year 5 students sort out minor problems in the playground. Children are more likely to cooperate because they do not feel threatened.

From time to time our school runs the Seasons for Growth Program. This is a series of workshops designed specifically for children who are experiencing loss, grief, family separation/divorce.

We believe it is necessary for every school to have programs, such as the above mentioned to promote resilience. Our school believes that giving students skill which allows them to respond positively to difficult situations is essential and need to be promoted in all schools.

Speaker Five: Edmund

Thank you.

From the information that we have presented today we can conclude that 9-14 year olds are interested in learning and opportunities that promotes this. They need a network of people who they can talk and trust and to also have social time with. They need family support in their learning. Opportunities for extra curricular activities as well as community based programs are also important. Since many are beginning to spend more time without an adult around, programs centred on independence, problem solving and decision making would assist at this stage of development. Adequate funding for schools and families is essential for meeting the needs of children 9-14.

To conclude our presentation I would like to thank this committee for inviting us here and giving us the opportunity to share our information on the needs of children 9-14.