

CORRECTED VERSION

EDUCATION AND TRAINING COMMITTEE

Inquiry into the education of gifted and talented students

Maribyrnong — 29 August 2011

Members

Mr P. Crisp
Mr N. Elasmarr
Ms E. Miller

Mr D. Southwick
Ms G. Tierney

Chair: Mr D. Southwick
Deputy Chair: Ms G. Tierney

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Witnesses

Akim, Soccer, year 9 student,
Monique, Basketball, year 7 student,
Jack, Basketball/AFL, year 7 student,
Libby, Netball/hockey, year 7 student,
Sarah, Hockey, year 12 student,
Kieran, Cricket, year 10 student,
Sophie, Soccer, year 12 student,
Liam, Soccer, year 11 student,
Rebecca, Lacrosse, year 10 student,
Hannah, Volleyball, year 11 student, and
Nabi, Soccer, year 9 student, Maribyrnong College.

The CHAIR — We will get started and firstly welcome to this committee hearing. I know it seems very official but it's part of a parliamentary inquiry and just to give you a little bit of background, we form the education and training committee which is a parliamentary committee and we're looking at the needs of gifted and talented kids throughout Victoria and programs to support you in your efforts. So looking at schools such as yourselves, and other schools as well, in terms of what programs they offer to allow you to excel in your areas of expertise.

Today what we're doing is we're recording everything via Hansard and it is the same sort of process as what you would see in parliament in that you have the same, what we call, parliamentary privilege. So everything you say in this room, you've got that privilege to be able to say that just as a member of parliament does — but that privilege does not extend to outside the hearing. So you can say whatever you like in this room and you will be protected under that parliamentary privilege. You will not be identified as a full name in Hansard as well. We will just be identifying first names only. When we ask you — we will ask a series of questions, not everybody has to contribute each time so just one or two maybe for each question and if you could just at each time just give us your first name. So, "Hi. Sophie" then go off in giving an answer.

We will ask a number of questions now. I will kick it off with the first question. Firstly, how did you find out about the Sports Academy at Maribyrnong College?

JACK — Friends. My mate's friends and his brothers used to come here but he is gone now. They go to college in America a few of them, and I've been recommended. It was recommended to me.

The CHAIR — Do you live nearby?

JACK — No, I live at Keilor.

LIBBY — I live in this area in Maribyrnong and I just heard about the development school at Maribyrnong and I was really excited to come here because I was really interested in a sporting career and my academic career so it was really good for me to come here because it is nice and close but also because of the developing school.

The CHAIR — Particularly for people that don't live so close.

NABI — I live in Broadmeadows and I was having a kick on a soccer field and one of the coaches here at the school saw me and said, "You might as well come down and trial." Then that's how I sort of got in. It was a bit of luck and it turned out well.

AKIM — I found out about Maribyrnong through Nabi. My first year of playing soccer when I came to Australia — Nabi's dad and my dad worked together and my dad was asking for a good school — asking Nabi's dad for a good school for me, because I was more on the sporting side, and Nabi had at the time got a trial to come to Maribyrnong and his dad was saying it would be a good idea if I trialled out too and then I came down. It was one of the best things that's happened to me.

The CHAIR — Just on that and maybe for others, how did you go through that trial process? What did you have to do and if you could just maybe take us through that process?

SOPHIE — I actually found out about school through the internet because I'm from Shepparton but the process I had was I came down a few times, had meetings with Maureen and Gayle, and they just ran through what the school was about. We walked around and found out — got to actually view the school, see it in action and that, then I had a trial, met the coaches and did all that and then after that just found out.

HANNAH — I'd had pretty much the same experience but I was at [REDACTED] and moved here from there. I had a lot of training sessions first so the school could see how I played and if I was at that kind of level that they like us to be at and then we had lots of meetings. We met with Maureen and she talked about how the school would work and if it would suit us as athletes.

SARAH — We also had to have an academic standard to meet as well. As well as having trials for your sport you also had to have your reports and be up to the academic standard to be able to come here.

Ms MILLER — How many hours would you spend a day training in your respective sports?

LIBBY — It differs for each year level for the school and so year 8s might have five or six periods a week or four periods a week of ADP, which is where we come together as a whole ADP group and we work on socialisation and all the stuff to make us an athlete. So it might differ from all age groups.

Ms MILLER — Do you find it hard to juggle the school work and the physical training component?

LIBBY — It is sometimes a challenge but I guess we have a very good support group here and it is a really good privilege that we have to do sport and education as well. We couldn't do it without the teachers and all the help. So it is a really good team environment and we all help each other.

Ms MILLER — Anyone else want to make a comment?

NABI — During the ADP classes if we are behind on any work the staff also help by giving us time to come upstairs and catch up on our homework. So we are basically never left behind. For our year 9s we have got, I think, eight periods a week and the eight periods you could use just two or three to just catch up on work. It is just too good.

Mr ELASMAR — It is good to see so many names, different years, different competition and sports. Can you tell me please how has the Sports Academy benefited your development and performance in your sport?

SARAH — I play hockey. So I came here — I started training and then as I grew older I was making different state teams and they helped me plan and manage, to use the gym to get ready for a tournament, to get a lot fitter. They made programs for me to do running and helped me manage my outside — some of my state teams with club and with school training and manage all that together so I could do the best of my ability at each tournament that I play in.

KIERAN — I'm a cricketer and I've had a pretty tough run with injury. I've found that the last two years I've been injured for — I haven't played in 15 months so I'm still working on a comeback but found that the rehabilitation staff here have been really good. For the last five or six weeks we've had a TLC mentoring with [REDACTED] — I think that is her last name — that taught us about the values we will need to make it to become elite, which I found has helped in all areas not just with my sport and recovery.

The CHAIR — What do you think is the biggest challenge about being a student at Maribyrnong College?

LIBBY — We have challenges but take them as opportunities to excel and learn about being an athlete and living life to the fullest and also being a student at a school. So I think we take them as opportunities to learn from experiences.

KIERAN — I reckon we have a lot of kids in here that have played for Australia and I reckon there's a lot of not so much pressure but we have high expectations of ourselves so that's — we take that as obviously a challenge. Because we're athletes we always strive to meet these challenges. So I think that being surrounded by these people that have achieved so highly, they bring other people up along with them and make them achieve as well.

The CHAIR — How do you go — obviously you are in your own program but also in terms of relating to the kids in the broader Maribyrnong school, do many of you have friendships outside of the...

NABI — A lot.

HANNAH — If you look around during recess and lunch everyone mixes really well because when we have our, let's say, year 9s have their ADP classes, they have their other subjects, but at recess and lunch we are all in the same uniform and all one school. We are not like two separate schools like the sporty kids and just academic kids. We come together well and I guess we do other sport classes together so we can all mix and not be separate.

The CHAIR — What about in terms of the sacrifices that, say, you and your families have had to make to attend the school? Would someone like to talk about any specific...

SOPHIE — I moved down from Shepparton at the beginning of last year. So I pretty much — my mum sort of came down to live here in Melbourne so that I could attend this school. So I came down because I saw this as a good opportunity and my parents wanted to give me the best opportunity possible because I was going to play soccer. That is a big sacrifice that myself, I had to choose in pretty much just dropping everything and coming and starting something new. My parents, I am very thankful to them for doing that.

The CHAIR — Anyone else? No? Do you feel there is a lot of pressure to achieve highly or to fulfil your potential and how do you cope with that pressure?

NABI — I don't think there's pressure on the people because of how friendly our staff and other people in the school are towards each other, just athletes towards each other. If me and Akim work together we are pushing each other to do our personal best. We don't worry about what other people can do. If someone else can do better than us it is good on them. We try to do our personal best. That is probably the same as a lot of people in the sports program. That lifts a lot of pressure off your shoulders having just someone there and having staff doing that as well, just focusing on your personal best and your — the highest you can get in your sport and also life.

The CHAIR — What about parental pressure, any of you feel pressure from families to achieve?

SARAH — Yeah, definitely.

KIERAN — I've found I've had stages where I have probably felt parental pressure but nothing serious. But since — with all the values we are taught here and all the values we have been brought up with — I have been here since year 7. The values that we are taught here and the morals that we need to get to the top level, it sort of encourages us to take more responsibility for ourselves rather than worry about pressure from everyone else. Anything that we achieve or don't achieve pretty much comes down to us I reckon.

The CHAIR — Sarah?

SARAH — Yeah. In previous years we had time management with the ADP management but this year, as I am in year 12, we don't have that anymore. We have all our full subjects. I have done state teams this year and juggling that with year 12 has been quite hard and with outside training and other training and parents are just like, "Do your homework", I usually have to come home from training at 10 o'clock at night and do my homework and have to go to training the next morning at 6. Having your mum in your ear all the time, "Homework, homework, homework", and then training and coming to school and being awake at school, there has been a lot of pressure.

HANNAH — We have school psychologists and sports psychologists to help us deal with it for on court and off court. I have seen Tara a few times and she just helps with the stress and how to manage when you are on court and you do have your parents on the sidelines and when you are at home and they are putting you under pressure to always be ready. It helps and the school helps you deal with that.

The CHAIR — What about career options outside of the sporting areas that you're playing in? Have you thought about other things that you may want to be doing and how do you think the school has prepared you for those other career options?

NABI — In year 9 — we just had it recently — we have the Magic Interpersonal Future — I don't know what it stands for — MIPS. Something about managing and that helps you — we had it just a couple of weeks ago and our course counselling. So for your next year subjects, the extensions we want to do, whether we want to do VCE subjects. The good thing about our school is they focus on that as much as they focus on the sporting side of it. So it is just not like we will focus on how we will make an Australian team or state team. There is what you will do in VCE, what will you do as a back up if sport is your first priority. What will you do when you go to Uni? Something you enjoy in life but will also be successful with and make a living out of it if you can't do it in a sporting...

REBECCA — My sport, Lacrosse, you can't make a living out of it because you don't get paid to play it. I still choose to play it because it is my passion but, yeah, the school has helped me so much because of MIPS because they are so supportive and keep on helping you, like, guide you through what you want to do and stuff.

JACK — We have side programs for years 7, 8 and 9 sometimes where we do extra maths and English sometimes. So if you can do better — yeah.

Mr ELASMAR — So do you think you would have pursued sport at such a high level if you hadn't been accepted into the Sports Academy?

LIBBY — I think that you would — I think this school gives you more opportunities to excel at your sport. If you were at another school I don't think you would get so much support and team environment to help you, guide you through this stage of getting to an elite level as an athlete and having that balance between academic as well. So I think this school gives you more opportunities to go higher both academically and in sport as well.

KIERAN — As I said earlier, the values we are brought up with here I don't think you get anywhere else. So in terms of getting to the top level, these are the values that you will have with you for the rest of your life. So if you miss out on that then it is obviously going to make it harder for you to push yourself that extra bit that will get you over the line.

Mr ELASMAR — If you weren't accepted what other options would you have? What was available to you? What would you have done?

HANNAH — I don't think there would have been as much as I did have here because I know this school took me into other pathways. So I guess I would have been behind other athletes for volleyball that would have been — because I know some of the boys that went here and some of the girls who participated, they went further when I was still just sitting behind trying to make the state teams. So the school brings you to a place where they give you more opportunities, where other places don't really give you that.

Mr ELASMAR — So you think training would not have been accommodated in another school?

HANNAH — Yeah.

SOPHIE — Another thing on that also, if we didn't get the opportunity to come to this school we may not have made the state or Aussie teams that some of the students here have made. It is the fact that Maribyrnong allows us to have a balance of our school work and our sporting. So at other schools they may not have been so understanding with the sporting so our academic might have dropped behind where as here we get extra time to do those things.

MONIQUE — We have tech training that the coaches help with our skills and achieve higher levels and we always have people to support us, like other athletes and stuff.

LIAM — I think it's all down to the facilities we have, like the gym downstairs. I've been to a few gyms and that gym totally beats any other gym I've ever been to. Also the resources, like the coaches. Some of the coaches have been to the Olympics and stuff. They're easy to access. You can go to them and you

don't feel like you are wasting their time. They are really approachable and they can tell you about their experiences, which help you.

Ms MILLER — The committee's been told that students of the sports academy have individualised learning plans. How do students contribute to the development of their learning plans and what are the benefits of having an individualised learning plan?

KIERAN — I reckon a lot of the development staff in both academics and sport recognise that not everyone is the same so we will not all end up in the same field whether it be sport or jobs in the future. By having — by finding out more about yourself, like what the boys said earlier about the MIPS program, it helps you decide for yourself what you want rather than everyone else forcing on you what they want you to do. It is a big bonus when it comes to the long run.

Ms MILLER — Any other comments?

The CHAIR — Just on your previous schools, were your previous schools aware of your sporting abilities and if so how supportive were they? What did they do to encourage you and did your previous schools have any specific resources to support the sporting abilities that you had?

SARAH — I went to [REDACTED], they do have a football program now but when I went there, there was nothing really sporty there. To make a state team no one would really know — no one out there knows hockey anyway. I wasn't recognised. I came here, if I made a state team it was on the website and pamphlets everywhere. Everyone knows about it. At the old school they didn't have facilities — like training in the morning before school or do gym at school. The facilities here are incredible.

LIAM — I previously went to [REDACTED] and got the opportunity to go there because I was offered a soccer scholarship and there wasn't any real facilities to use, it was all really about the academic side there. They were very demanding of that.

AKIM — Like Liam and Hannah I was offered at the end of last year to go on a soccer scholarship to go to [REDACTED] and being a private school it's not more on the sporting side. With me I find it hard without the support to balance out my academic studies and my sporting studies because I do a lot of hours of training and at [REDACTED] there wasn't the staff that I could go to and say, "I'm having trouble with this, could you help me out?" Or, "How do I work around my training to fit in a couple of hours homework?" There was nothing like that. It was all about being independent. Whereas with here it is kind of different in the way that the teachers are lenient, they don't make it too hard for you so you just give up. They test you, they will give you a few...

The CHAIR — Support.

AKIM — What I mean by they test you, they won't give in and, say, 100%, "I will help you with this." They will see how much you want it...

KIERAN — How much you are willing to work for it.

AKIM — How much you are willing to work for it. They will not just singularly hand it over to you. So that is a huge difference.

Mr ELASMAR — You did very well.

Ms MILLER — That is good because that way you are actually — you might think you can only get to a certain point but that teacher can, knowing you better, actually see you can be stretched that little further and take you to the 80% point and you have to make that extra 20%.

AKIM — Exactly. Thank you.

The CHAIR — Thank you very much for your contribution. This is very important that we could have the input from you. That will go a long way in helping us to get a report that will hopefully benefit others to get the same sort of opportunities that you have. We would like to also wish you all the best in your future endeavours in the sports that you play and the careers that you choose to pursue at the end of school. Thank you very much for appearing before the committee.

Witnesses withdrew.