

## STUDENT PERCEPTIONS OF AN INNER CITY SECONDARY SCHOOL

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### Abstract

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The "Teaching for Effective Learning in Senior Schooling" (TELSS) project is a three year collaborative study conducted by the Queensland University of Technology and an urban state high school. The project was funded by the Australian Research Council and has as its aim, to review and renew teaching and learning in the Senior school whilst determining how the needs of students can best be served given the changing nature of Australian society.

A number of studies are being conducted within the school. The purpose of the paper is to report the key issues which emerged when the school's student population was surveyed. The focus of

the questionnaire was to canvass opinion on a broad range of concerns which affected their experience of schooling and to analyse these data to provide insight into student perceptions of effective teaching and learning. The questionnaire is the first phase of a two-part survey which addresses the following issues: demographics, home environment, ethnicity, employment, teacher effectiveness, vocational education, subject choice, study habits and discipline.

The data suggest a number of conclusions which have implications for effective teaching and learning in the Senior school. These include autonomy in learning, vocational relevance, career counselling, responsiveness to diverse learning styles and a

multiplicity of teaching strategies.

## STUDENT PERCEPTIONS OF AN INNER CITY SECONDARY SCHOOL

### INTRODUCTION

This Technical report describes the responses given by students to a questionnaire distributed in an inner city state secondary school (which for this report is called Hillsdale). The questionnaire was a component of a longer term collaborative research project between Hillsdale and QUT titled Teaching for Effective Learning in Senior Schooling (TELSS).

#### The TELSS project

At the time of the questionnaire, the aims of TELSS were twofold. Firstly, TELSS aimed to develop a senior school curriculum framework for Hillsdale taking into account Government reports, links with industry and the need to increase student autonomy, organisational flexibility and staff professional development and

to implement this in years 11 and 12. Secondly, TELSS aimed to study this change in order to develop strategies for change, contribute to research knowledge and develop, publish and disseminate materials that could be used by other secondary schools for similar renewal.

The focus of the TELSS project was teaching and learning in years 11 and 12 and their relation to autonomy, flexibility and future vocations. The TELSS project was built upon a Senior Schooling Framework that had been developed by Hillsdale. The framework integrated the particular context of Hillsdale with national and state priorities and focused on the four areas of curriculum, flexible organisation, accreditation and learning responsibility. Curriculum covered essential learning's and key competencies, increased subject choice, options in links with TAFE and industry, modularised delivery and development of alternative learning environments; while flexible organisation included consideration of the use of an extended day, block times and independent study time. Accreditation covered counselling, use of profiles and written records of achievement; while learning responsibility focused on students being responsibility for their own learning, independent study skills programs, self assessment and staff professional development.

The plan was for TELSS to document the knowledge and beliefs of the teachers, students and parents and to identify forces that support and inhibit curriculum change. By bringing together, University researchers and Hillsdale teachers and administrators, TELSS was to provide Hillsdale with expertise in curriculum,

management, research and evaluation. It was hoped that the presence of the University staff would enable the input of a wider range of ideas, including, significantly, ideas from a research perspective - that they would provide an extra human resource for the difficult task of putting the framework into practice and would assist with the extra load required to utilise research principles in the development and evaluation of the change process.

Hence, the intention was for TELSS to be collaborative, with QUT staff acting as co-researchers with Hillsdale staff. The reason for this collaborative approach was to enable the project to operate as an action research program in which Hillsdale staff upgrade present teaching and administrative programs for Year 11 and 12 students. The action research methodology enables the practice of the profession being studied to be changed and the practitioners to be informed and empowered (Kemmis, 1987). The intention was that, by following this methodology, TELSS would enable Hillsdale to gain a more effective program of teaching and an empowered teaching staff. This would have two consequences. Firstly, the empowered teaching staff should enable improvements in teaching and learning to continue. Secondly, the direct

improvement in practice should make the project significant in terms of educational research, the practice of QUT and Australia's economic well-being. As well as improving teaching, it was hoped that the collaboration should provide a worthwhile learning experience for the researchers from the University and enable project initiatives to be documented and explanatory theoretical models to be proposed. It was felt that, without the collaboration, the school would be unlikely to interact with sufficient ideas to expand its practices from its present traditions and to adequately document any change processes. At a more detailed level, it was anticipated that TELSS would be in harmony with the Mission of the School and improve the quality and responsiveness of Hillsdale's teaching and learning, increase success and access and strengthen partnerships between teachers, students and parents. The plan was that new teaching and learning programs would be developed, trialed and evaluated, and teachers given professional development programs, to improve quality; while student needs and aspirations, staff abilities and strengths, and the effect of curricula on students, would be accurately determined to improve responsiveness. In addition, needs and aspirations of students, the requirements of curricula, and the abilities and strengths of staff, would be accurately matched to staff activities to increase access; while the development of a wider range of opportunities from these initiatives would expand access. TELSS intended to extend and develop linkages with industry and the community in order to strengthen partnerships. The questionnaire on which this paper reports was part of the program to determine students' needs and aspirations.

#### School initiatives and curriculum frameworks

In late 1985, the Queensland State Education Department initiated a senior schooling conference process which led to the release of the document *The corporate view for senior schooling in Queensland: A policy document* in mid-1989. The Department then established a collaborative and consultative development process for devising a senior schooling curriculum framework that would take into account Queensland priorities and directions in national and international reports and statements on senior

#### secondary schooling.

The Queensland Department of Education's process to develop curriculum frameworks was elaborated in a draft document *Focus on the learner* (Department of Education, Queensland, 1991) and released to schools to act as a basis for reform in years 11 and 12. One of the major bases of the framework was the identification of Essential Learnings, "... features of human

knowledge and the process of learning that permeate the set of learning experiences of every learner in senior schooling." (page 8). These Essential Learnings were described in terms of knowledge components and approaches to learning. The knowledge components were contextual, information processing, communication and affective. Contextual covered the relation of learning to the present and future needs of each learner, reflecting an awareness of social justice; while information processing focused on how learners access and use information, including creative thinking, critical thinking and problem solving. Communication looked at confidence and effectiveness in forms of human expression such as literacy, oracy, numeracy, technology and visual expression; and affective covered holistic personal development and appreciation of the world, incorporating concern for social justice, ethics and individual difference. The approaches to learning associated with Essential Learning's consisted of negotiation and independent learning in partnership with adults, experience-based learning, personal responsibility for lifelong learning and the integral nature of assessment and learning.

At the same time as the Queensland Government was preparing the essential learning's material, the federal Government, through the Review Committee of the Australian Education Council (AEC), published a report Review of young people's participation in education and training (Finn Review Committee, 1991). As a result of this report, the AEC and the Ministers responsible for Vocational Education, Employment and Training (P) set up the Mayer Committee to undertake further work on employment-related key competencies. This committee published a report Employment-related key competencies: A proposal for consultation (The Mayer Committee, 1992). It identified seven key Competency Strands: collecting, analysing and organising ideas and information ; expressing ideas and information (oral, written and graphic communication); planning and organising activities (self management, independence and monitoring one's own performance); working with others and in teams (setting common goals, allocating tasks, achieving goals and checking results); using mathematical ideas and techniques (select apply and use mathematics); solving problems (identifying problems and devising suitable solution strategies); and using technology (capacity to use technological processes, systems, equipment and materials and to transfer to new situations).

In reaction to these initiatives, the Queensland Board of Senior Secondary School Studies (BSSSS) published a working paper The common curriculum elements (BSSSS, 1991) which identified 49 common curriculum elements which should occur across Board subjects and which will meet most of the Essential Learnings and Key Competencies. At the same time, the Queensland Department of Education developed a process for curriculum frameworks which emphasised flexible organisation, autonomy and decision making,

cooperative programs and industry links and professional development. Flexibility was considered to mean that senior schools should have a wider range of teaching and learning environments; while autonomy meant that senior students should be given an greater degree of independence and control over their

own learning. Cooperation was seen to mean that senior schools should develop joint programs with other institutions (e.g. TAFE and Universities) and with local industry; and professional development was interpreted as meaning that senior schools should develop programs that provide opportunities for staff to undertake inservice and higher-degree study.

Responsibility for management and teaching and learning procedures, links with the community and professional development has been devolved to the local school level (e.g. Department of Employment, Education and Training, 1991). At the same time, Queensland Universities have been developing more flexible mechanisms by which University subjects can be completed. A report of the Queensland Board of Teacher Registration (1991) Towards a learning community has advocated that a consortium between Universities and teacher employing authorities for professional development be developed to allow school professional development programs to be accredited for tertiary qualifications.

Industry and business requirements for employees have been changing to focus on abilities similar to the Competencies Strands or the Essential Learnings. The trend towards high retention rates in schools at year 12 has reopened the debate between general and vocational education. Within this context, the Employment and Skills Formation Council report (1992) has identified four key areas for action:

(1) learning modes - there should be more options to cater for different requirements of students;

(2) key competencies - the key competencies and competency strands in the Finn Review and Mayer Committee reports should be implemented;

(3) vocational options - more vocational options should be catered for in schooling; and

(4) contextual learning - there should be more opportunities for students to avail themselves of the power of learning in context (the situation in which the learning will be used).

As is attested in regular governmental reports (Finn Review Committee, 1991), Australia's economic and social advancement are dependent on the quality of the education of its children. Any increase in effectiveness of teaching and learning at years 11 and 12 will assist this cause, particularly when such change is directed towards the needs of the students. In addition, there

is growing support for a change in teaching and learning that will improve Essential Learnings and Competency Strands of the type described above. Many school systems and schools are attempting to put into practice these national and state priorities. The process of change that this requires is a difficult task requiring the type of sophisticated intervention that only research can supply.

#### Student perceptions

According to Weinstein (1982), the study of teaching and learning has been dominated by what has been termed simple "input-output" models of instructional attempts. This paradigm suggests that students are passively exposed to certain identified instructional behaviours and conditions and the output is measurable. Weinstein contended that student mental processes are assumed without direct measurement.

In recent years there has been increased attention given to student perceptions and constructs of schooling as students participate more actively in classroom instruction and researchers understand that this instruction is influenced by students as much as teachers (Berlinger, 1976; Doyle, 1977). Current literature on student perceptions of schooling has examined a number of specific issues such as:

(1) teacher behaviour and the extent of agreement between student and teacher (Beam & Horvat, 1975; Clark & Creswell, 1979);

(2) differential treatment (Weinstein & Middlestadt, 1979) and peer interactions (Johnson, 1981);

(3) teaching behaviours and measures of student learning (Winne & Marx, 1980);

(4) self-evaluations of ability (Blumenfeld, Pintrich, Meece and Wessels, 1982) and concepts of self in the classroom (Harter, 1982);

(5) classroom climate (Fraser & Walberg, 1981) and classroom processes such as decision-making, resource allocation and

distributive justice (Whittington & Lawler, 1971; Block, 1981);  
and

(6) specific processes and practices of the broader school (McDill & Rigsby, 1973).

The literature above and other more general surveys of student opinion (McLean, 1986), have shown that much can be learned from exploring student perceptions of schooling, e.g., student life in the school from the students' perspective as they strive to make meaning of the social reality of daily school life. Furthermore, the literature has also shown that students may see the school's



policy and practice differently from what was intended. This has significant ramifications for the evaluation and improvement of teacher effectiveness.

#### Purpose of the paper

This paper describes a student survey undertaken at Hillsdale by the TELSS project. The purpose of the survey was to assess student opinion on a broad range of issues which affected their experience of schooling and to analyse this data to provide insight into student perceptions of effective teaching and learning. The purpose of the survey was to satisfy three main objectives:

(1) to provide a "profile" for the school's development plan which would be used to access departmental funding;

(2) to provide data which would help to analyse the school's educational objectives and to what extent these objectives were being met according to the students; and

(3) to provide information which could be used to focus on a number of key issues which were of interest and concern to students.

Whilst the project focused on research issues in senior schooling, the entire school population was surveyed because it was thought that concerns in the post-compulsory years could not be analysed in a vacuum.

#### METHOD

##### Methodology

A survey methodology was adopted for this study. A questionnaire was developed and administered to all students. Students who did

not attend school on the survey day were invited to complete the questionnaire at a later date. This was done to ensure that all important groups (e.g., truants) had the opportunity to express their views and concerns about the quality of education they were experiencing.

The survey methodology was chosen because it is a time-efficient method of gathering information from a large number of respondents and because there were a large number of issues to which responses were required. The decision was made to gather data from all students and not to sample because Hillsdale is a large inner city state high school that boasts great multicultural and socio-economic diversity. Genuine representation would have generated a sample of such size that it would require an efficient methodology like a survey for the number of items being covered, making the sample unnecessary.

### Subjects

The subjects of the study were the majority of students from Hillsdale. As stated above, these students were part of a distinctive and diverse student population particularly in years 11 and 12.

Hillsdale was an inner city State Secondary School of approximately 1250 students. A main arterial road ran past the school travelling to outer suburbs. The suburbs in which it was located contained a variety of accommodation. It contains accommodation that homeless youth could afford. The school appears to be fairly accessible from the city centre itself and easily accessible from cars travelling to the central business district. The main form of public transport was bus - no train lines ran near the school other than those in the city centre. Hillsdale had a year 8 intake of approximately 180, but its year 12 population was around 360 pupils. Hillsdale nearly doubled its yearly population from year 10 to year 12. This was because it had programs of excellence in sport and dance, has a wide diversity of year 11 and 12 courses and is centrally located. As a result, students came to the school from more restricted state secondary schools. However, many students also came to the school to repeat the year after failing to achieve their desired year 12 results in the private school system. Therefore, Hillsdale had a particular problem in developing year 11 and 12 programs for its students, half of whom were new to the school. Hillsdale was an innovative school. A broad curriculum was offered in years 11 and 12, including TAFE programs. There were alternative programs for "at risk" students. Students could undertake a range of community based learning experiences - work experience, community service, excursions and camps. As described above, the school had developed a Mission Statement which focused on quality, responsiveness, success, access and

partnerships; and a Senior Schooling Framework which focused on curriculum, flexible organisation, accreditation and learning responsibility.

### Instrument

The instrument used in the study was a questionnaire. The questionnaire was designed with mainly closed questions with possible replies included as multiple choice options to allow analysis by appropriate computer software as the number of the

students to be surveyed was in excess of one thousand. This loss of some rich data was compensated by having all students in the school surveyed and having the last page of the questionnaire offering the students the opportunity to respond at length, and in an entirely unstructured way, about any issue which concerned them.

The questionnaire consisted of 49 questions grouped into eight categories. Section A was a simple one which focussed on the students' geographical location and their method of transport to the school. Section B considered students' ethnicity, proficiency in English and in languages other than English. It also asked questions about whether they lived with parents/guardians or independently and to what extent they are supported financially by the government. Hillsdale has a proportion of senior students who are older than the norm for Year 12 and who for various reasons live independently. The school is particularly interested in identifying these students to ascertain their particular needs. Section C addressed issues concerning part-time employment and to what extent students need to work to support themselves whilst at school. Section D was a considerable part of the questionnaire and it centred on issues such as why the student had chosen 5, what factors had influenced their decision, to what extent had their expectations of curriculum and teaching been met and whether they thought there was value in linking the school's curriculum with TAFE offerings. Section E considered their present and future educational aspirations. Section F concentrated on the students' use of physical and human resources such as guidance officer, nurse, computer facilities, etc.. The interest here was to determine the extent to which students felt the resources were adequate to their perceived needs. Section G highlighted study practices such as length of time spent per week on study and study conditions at home. The school was interested to determine whether there were any emerging patterns between perceived poor study environments and routines and difficulties at school. Section H contained the general question described above.

### Procedure

The procedure had two distinct phases. The first phase was the design and trialing of the questionnaire, in which the first step was to determine what specific information was to be sought. In this regard, a number of draft questions were prepared for discussion by the researchers and the school's personnel. This aspect of the questionnaire's design was truly collaborative in that both school and university worked together painstakingly for many months to ensure that no question was ambiguous and that each area of the school's operation was included. Mindful of the participatory nature of action research, a number of key teachers and administrators were contacted personally to ensure that their perspective and interests were included in the questionnaire. It was important also to ensure that the proposed questions would, in fact, provide findings that could answer the central question of the study, i.e., what are the students' experiences and understandings of teaching and learning in the school. The researchers were determined not to fall into the trap of time pressures and inexperience that often render a poorly conceived questionnaire difficult to analyse at best, and uninterpretable at worst.

The final draft of the questionnaire was piloted with a group of approximately thirty students of varying ages and abilities. Of

particular interest was the students' interpretation of questions and the appropriateness of the readability level. This aspect was particularly pertinent because the same questionnaire was to be administered to students varying in age from twelve to twenty. The second phase of the research was the administration of the survey. The questionnaire was directly administered by classroom teachers. Students were given class time to complete the questionnaire. Students were given the opportunity to express their unwillingness to be interviewed. It was anticipated that groups of students who have similar and/or divergent views will be interviewed to explore their perceptions further.

The administration was observed by researchers. The focus of the observation was the extent of understanding by the administering teachers of certain questions in the survey and how the teachers' responses to student queries were constructed. This was to reduce the influence of teacher's attitudes, perceptions and interpretative limits.

The observations were also undertaken to assist in the identification of groups of students with similar or divergent views who could be the focus of follow-up group interviews.

## RESULTS

### Analysis

The responses to the closed questions within the questionnaire were collated and, where required, coded and the codings collated. The codings were examined using a straightforward frequency analysis. The responses to the open questions were separated into senior school and below and sorted looking for commonalities. As a result of this, they were listed under categories.

### Student Responses to Questionnaire

#### SECTION A

##### Q.1 In what suburb do you live?

Suburb further out from the city than adjacent suburb \* below 87 students 8.9%  
\* Adjacent inner city suburb 82 8.4%  
Near suburb out from city from \*\* along main road next to school 79 8.1%  
Outer suburb along main road past school 76 7.5%  
\*\* Suburb in which Hillsdale is situated 63 6.4%  
Near suburb the other side of \*\* to \* 51 5.2%  
Next suburb out from city from \*\* along main road 46 4.7%  
Adjacent suburb opposite side to \* 40 4.0%  
Inner city suburb opposite side of \*\* to \* 38 3.9%

Total suburbs listed: 162  
Responses less than 3.9% are not reported.

##### Q.2 Do you travel to school most frequently by: [Students were permitted to choose more than one response.]

Bus: 671 students 68.4%  
Train: 235 24.0%  
Car: 355 36.2%  
Bike: 34 3.5%

Foot: 219 22.3%

Q.3 On average, how long does it take you to reach school?

Less than 15 mins 258 26.3%

Between 15 & 30 mins 313 31.9%

Between 30 & 45 mins 216 22.0%

More than 45 mins 191 19.5%

No responses: 3 .3%

## SECTION B

Q.4 With whom do you live?

One parent/Guardian 292 students 29.8%

Two parents/Guardians 592 60.3%

Alternate between parents 40 4.1%

With Other Relatives 15 1.5%

Independently 35 3.6%

No response: 7 .7%

Q.4b If independently, in what ways could the school support you?

Financial Assistance 26 students 74.3%

Counselling 11 31.4%

Food 11 31.4%

Job Seeking 13 37.1%

Other

Extra time for assessment

and homework 2 8.7%

Understanding for lateness

and absences 2 8.7%

Pay for transport costs 2 8.7%

### Q.5 In which country were you born?

Australia 797 students 81.2%

New Zealand 38 3.9%

Vietnam 24 2.4%

New Guinea 12 1.2%

Philippines 14 1.4%

Hong Kong 8 .8%

Fiji 6 .6%

England 9 .9%

USA 4 .4%

Taiwan 4 .4%

Responses less than 0.4% are not reported.

If born in Australia, are you an Aboriginal or Torres Strait  
Islander?

Yes: 37 students 4.6%

No : 729 91.5%

No responses: 31 3.9%

### Q.6 In which country(s) were your parents/guardians born?

Australia 647 66.0%

England 53 5.4%

New Zealand 36 3.9%

Vietnam 24 2.4%

Ireland 15 1.5%

Philippines 13 1.3%

Holland 11 1.1%

Italy 11 1.1%

Brazil 10 1.0%

Scotland 10 1.0%

Germany 8 .8%

China 8 .8%

USA 6 .6%

Responses less than .6% are not reported.

Q7. Do you speak a language other than English?

Yes: 227 students 23.1%

No: 731 74.5%

No response: 23 2.3%

If yes, specify the language(s):

Italian 30 students 13.2%

French 24 10.6%

German 20 8.8%

Vietnamese 18 7.9%

Chinese 15 6.6%

Filipino 8 3.5%

Macedonian 5 2.2%

Pidgin 5 2.2%

Responses less than 2.2% are not reported.

Q.8 The people I live with speak English at home:



Always 795 students 81.0%  
Nearly Always 81 8.3%  
Sometimes 61 6.2%  
Rarely 20 2.0%  
Never 13 1.3%  
No response: 11 1.1%

Q.9 What other languages are spoken at home?

Italian 12 students 1.1%  
Vietnamese 12 1.1%  
Chinese 11 1.3%  
German 9 1.1%  
French 8 1.0%  
Polish 8 .8%  
Dutch 7 .7%  
Fijian 6 .8%  
Spanish 5 .5%  
Greek 5 .5%  
Gilbertese 5 .5%  
Responses less 0.5% are not reported.

## SECTION C

Q.10 Do you, or have you received this year:

Austudy 202 20.6%  
Abstudy 23 2.3%  
Money from another  
government source 31 3.2%  
No government assistance 576 58.7%  
No response: 149 15.2%

If (c), what is the name of the scheme from you receive money?

Child Endowment 9 29.0%  
Single Parents Plan 5 19.4%  
Pension/Disabled Pension 2 9.7%  
Family Benefits/Allowance 2 6.5%  
STEP Grant- Swimming 1 3.2%  
Responses less than 3.2% are not reported.

Q.11 Do you have a part-time job?

Yes: 239 students 24.4%  
No : 730 74.4%  
No response: 12 1.2%

Q.12 Approximately how many hours per week do you work?

Under 4 hours 51 students 21.3%  
Between 4 and 8 hours 82 34.3%  
Between 8 and 12 hours 61 25.5%  
Between 12 and 16 hours 23 9.6%  
Over 16 hours 18 7.5%  
No response: 4 1.7%

Q.13 My parents support the idea of my working.

Strongly Agree 128 students 53.6%  
Agree 79 33.1%  
Neutral 25 10.5%  
Disagree 2 0.8%  
No response: 5 2.1%

Q.14 Does the income you receive from your job, provide financial support so you can continue schooling?

Yes: 52 students 21.8%  
No : 176 73.8%  
No response: 11 4.6%

Q.15 If you found a full-time job, would you leave school before completing Year 12?

Yes: 138 students 14.1%  
No : 791 80.6%  
No response: 52 5.3%

SECTION D

Q.16 Did you enter Hillsdale at:

Year 8	647	students	66.0%
Year 9	58		5.9%
Year 10	73		7.4%
Year 11	157		16.0%
Year 12	40		4.1%
No response:	6		.6%

Q.17 Did you enter Hillsdale from:

Primary school	600	students	63.1%
Another state high school	185		17.6%
A private school	121		10.8%
The workforce	8		.8%
After a period away from school		16	1.6%
Other			
Overseas	10	students	1.0%
Interstate	8		.8%
International school	5		.5%
NZ school	4		.4%
Came and went		4	.4%
Senior College	3		.3%
Special school	2		.2%
Distance Education	1		.1%
No response:	8		.8%

Q.18 The decision to attend Hillsdale was made by:

You and your parents/guardians together	622	students	63.4%
You alone	210		21.4%
Your parents/guardians alone	111		11.3%

Other

Other family members	7	.7%
Parents/self/teachers/coach	3	.3%
Friends/parents	3	.3%
No response:	7	.7%

Q.19 For which of the following reasons was Hillsdale chosen:  
[Students were permitted to choose more than one.]

Good reputation 563 students 57.4%  
Wide subject selection 447 45.6%  
Close to home 350 35.7%  
Some of my friends attend 275 28.0%

Other family members attend 234 23.9%  
Other  
Sport/Excellence program 82 students 8.3%  
Negative responses to private school 8 .8%  
A good school 7 .7%  
Parents taught/teach here 4 .4%  
Continue from Hillsdale Primary 4 .4%  
Family school 4 .4%  
Close to parents' work 4 .4%  
Convenience 3 .3%  
Close to training facility 3 .3%  
Could not enter better school 3 .3%  
Extra-curricula activity 3 .3%  
Responses less than .3% are not reported.

Q.20 I am pleased with the decision to attend Hillsdale.

Strongly agree 362 students 36.9%  
Agree 512 52.2%  
Unsure 84 8.6%

Disagree 7 .7%  
Strongly disagree 9 .9%  
No response: 7 .7%

Q.21 I am pleased with the overall standard of teaching at  
Hillsdale.

Strongly agree 130 students 13.3%  
Agree 553 56.4%  
Unsure 225 22.9%  
Disagree 47 4.8%  
Strongly disagree 14 1.4%  
No response: 12 1.2%

The next five questions were only to be answered if the student  
was in years 11 or 12.

Q.22 Are in involved in a special program?

Yes: 92 students 9.4%  
No : 432 44.0%

Q.23 What is the name of the special program you are presently  
engaged in?

Excellence in Golf 18 25.0%  
Excellence in Tennis 9 9.8%  
Excellence in Rugby 12 13.0%  
Excellence in Dance 35 38.0%  
Excellence in Music 5 5.4%

Other

Languages 5 5.4%

SCS 3 3.3%

TAFE 1 2.1%

Q.24 I am pleased with the program.

Strongly agree 49 53.3%

Agree 31 33.7%

Unsure 6 6.5%

Disagree 0 0.0%

Strongly disagree 1 1.1%

No response: 5 5.4%

Q.25 Are you presently enrolled or have you ever been enrolled in  
a TAFE subject?

Yes: 161 16.4%

No : 354 36.1%

Q.26 Do you see any value in the study of TAFE subjects while at  
school?

Yes: 410 41.8%  
No : 83 8.5%  
Please explain:

More/better education 47 6.2%  
Vocationally valuable 39 5.0%  
Practical Experience 28 3.6%  
Work Experience 28 3.7%  
Broader horizons 19 2.4%  
Broader choice 18 2.3%  
Useful 18 2.3%  
Shorten TAFE courses  
after Year 12 15 2.0%  
Responses below 2.0% are not reported.

## SECTION E

Q.27 When I complete Year 12 I want to...

Get a job 166 16.9%  
Go to TAFE 66 6.7%  
Go to university 477 48.6%  
Repeat Year 12 9 .9%  
No response: 12 1.2%  
Other  
Job and study 93 9.5%  
Unsure 29 3.0%  
TAFE or Uni 16 1.6%  
Travel 11 1.1%  
Army, navy, airforce 11 1.1%  
Job & study 11 1.1%  
Dance 9 .9%  
Play tennis in US/college in US 8 .8%

Q.28 When I complete Year 12 I think I will...



Get a job 201 20.5%  
Go to TAFE 142 14.5%  
Go to university 438 44.6%  
Repeat Year 12 25 2.5%  
No response: 14 1.4%  
Other

Unsure 29 3.0%  
Job and study 13 1.3%  
Job or unemployment 22 2.2%

Q.29 In deciding on your subjects did you consult with:  
[Students were permitted to choose more than one.]

Guidance Officer 321 32.7%  
Parent/Guardian 709 72.3%  
Administrative Staff 55 5.6%  
Home Group Teacher 89 9.1%  
Other Students 232 23.6%  
Other  
Myself/My interests 73 7.4%  
Family 14 1.5%  
Teachers 13 1.3%  
No one 10 1.0%  
Specialist teacher/coach 8 0.8%  
Books 7 0.7%  
Friends/parents/teachers 4 0.4%  
Responses below 0.4% are not reported.

Q.30 The school curriculum guide was helpful in assisting with subject selection.

Strongly agree	203	20.7%
Agree	408	41.6%
Unsure	245	25.0%
Disagree	61	6.2%
Strongly disagree	29	3.0%
No response	35	3.6%

Q.31 Have you changed your subjects selection from your two/three year plan?

Yes:	463	47.2%
No :	481	49.0%
No response:	37	3.8%

If YES, were your reasons for doing so:

Dissatisfaction with the subject	256	44.7%
Dissatisfaction with the teacher	123	26.6%
Subject irrelevant to career	172	37.1%
Types or amount of assessment	38	8.2%
Disruptive class	33	7.1%
Friends in other classes	20	4.3%

Other

Too difficult	10	2.2%
Timetable clashes	9	1.9%
Results	8	1.7%
Overall workload too heavy	6	1.3%
Changed career aspirations	5	1.1%

Interested in another subject 5 1.1%  
Boring/lost interest 5 1.1%  
Wanted a change 5 1.1%  
Prerequisites 5 1.1%  
Responses below 1.1% are not reported.

## SECTION F

Q. 32 During your time at the school which staff have you approached for academic or personal advice and/or support?

Other students 499 students 50.9%  
Teachers 383 39.0%  
Guidance Officer 348 35.5%  
Home Group Teacher 251 25.6%  
None of the above 169 17.2%  
Members of the school Administration 100 10.2%  
School Nurse 38 3.9%  
Chaplain 25 2.5%  
Other  
No one 15 1.5%  
Parents/friends/relations 13 1.3%  
Mrs Harrington 7 .7%  
Friends 5 .5%  
Responses below 0.5% have not been reported.

Q. 33 To what extent do you use the following facilities in your own time ie. not during scheduled classes. Students were asked to rank their responses from 1(use a lot) to 5 (don't use at all).

Library  
rank 1 57 5.8%  
rank 2 111 11.3%  
rank 3 353 36.0%  
rank 4 282 28.7%

rank 5 149 15.2%  
No response 29 3.0%

#### Computers

rank 1 33 6.2%  
rank 2 67 6.8%  
rank 3 118 12.0%  
rank 4 157 16.0%  
rank 5 534 54.4%  
No response 44 4.5%

#### Art Rooms

rank 1 74 7.5%  
rank 2 64 6.5%  
rank 3 93 9.5%  
rank 4 78 8.0%  
rank 5 622 63.4%  
No response 50 5.1%

#### Dance Studio

rank 1 63 6.4%  
rank 2 34 3.5%  
rank 3 47 4.8%  
rank 4 41 4.2%  
rank 5 745 75.9%  
No response 51 5.2%

#### Drama Studio

rank 1	60	6.1%
rank 2	73	7.4%
rank 3	96	9.8%
rank 4	78	8.0%
rank 5	619	63.1%
No response	55	5.6%

#### Laboratories

rank 1	48	4.9%
rank 2	48	4.9%
rank 3	83	8.5%
rank 4	84	8.6%
rank 5	664	67.7%
No response	54	5.5%

#### Sporting Equipment/Facilities

rank 1	111	11.3%
rank 2	96	9.8%
rank 3	150	15.3%
rank 4	138	14.1%
rank 5	441	45.0%
No response	45	4.6%

#### Manual Arts

rank 1	72	7.3%
rank 2	49	5.0%
rank 3	47	4.8%
rank 4	53	5.4%
rank 5	704	71.8%
No response	56	5.7%

Q. 34 I consider the library to be adequate to my needs.

Strongly agree	94	9.6%
agree	465	47.4%
neutral	262	26.7%
disagree	107	10.9%
strongly disagree	31	3.2%
No response	22	2.2%

Q. 35 The computer facilities are adequate to my needs.

strongly agree	89	9.1%
agree	209	21.3%
neutral	582	59.3%
disagree	27	2.8%
strongly disagree	34	3.5%
No response	40	4.1%

Q. 36 The art rooms are adequate to my needs.

strongly agree	80	8.2%
agree	171	17.4%
neutral	595	60.7%
disagree	37	3.8%
strongly disagree	52	5.3%

No response 46 4.7%

Q. 37 The dance rooms are adequate to my needs

strongly agree 87 8.9%  
agree 60 6.1%  
neutral 683 69.6%  
disagree 30 3.1%  
strongly disagree 60 6.1%  
No response 61 6.2%

Q. 38 The drama rooms are adequate to my needs

strongly agree 65 6.6%  
agree 186 19.0%  
neutral 584 59.5%  
disagree 46 4.7%  
strongly disagree 48 4.9%  
No response 52 5.3%

Q. 39 The laboratories are adequate to my needs.

strongly agree 30 3.1%  
agree 167 17.0%  
neutral 629 64.1%  
disagree 48 4.9%

strongly disagree 55 5.6%  
No response 52 5.3%

Q. 40 The sporting equipment/facilities are adequate for my needs.

strongly agree 119 12.0%  
agree 247 25.2%  
neutral 507 51.7%  
disagree 39 4.0%  
strongly disagree 30 3.1%  
No response 39 4.0%

Q. 41 The manual arts facilities are adequate to my needs.

strongly agree 84 8.6%  
agree 118 12.0%  
neutral 670 68.3%  
disagree 24 2.4%  
strongly disagree 34 3.5%  
No response 51 5.2%

## SECTION G

Q. 42 How many hours per week do you spend studying?



under 5	496	50.4%
between 5 and 10	336	34.3%
between 10 and 20	105	10.7%
over 20	22	2.2%
No response	24	2.4%

Q. 43 How many hours per week do you spend exercising?

under 5	382	38.9%
between 5 and 10	324	33.0%
between 10 and 20	143	14.6%
over 20	108	11.0%
No response	24	2.4%

Q. 44 How many hours per week do you spend involved in cultural activities, such as playing a musical instrument, drama, dance. (Do not count the time you spend in school on such activities.)?

under 5	692	70.5%
between 5 and 10	148	15.1%
between 10 and 20	54	5.5%
over 20	33	3.4%
No response	54	5.5%

Q. 45 How many hours per week do you spend relaxing, eg reading a book or watching television?

under 5	177	18.0%
between 5 and 10	356	36.3%
between 10 and 20	242	24.7%

over 20	188	19.2%
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No response	18	1.8%
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## SECTION H

Q. 46 Do you have a bedroom of your own?

Yes	848	86.4%
No	117	11.9%
No response	16	1.6%

Q47 Do you have your own desk?

Yes	789	80.4%
No	170	17.3%
No response	22	2.2%

Q. 48 Where do you do your homework?  
[Students were permitted to choose more than one.]

Bedroom	768	78.7%		
Study	149	15.2%		
Lounge Room	298	30.4%		
Kitchen	161	16.4%		
Outside	122	12.4%		
Other				
dinner table	27	2.8%		
don't do homework	16	1.6%		
where I feel comfortable			8	.8%
bus/train/car	10	1.0%		
office/computer room			7	.7%

Responses less than .7% are not reported.

Q. 49 Is it easy to study at home?

yes 761 77.6%  
no 155 15.8%  
No response 65 6.6%

Additional Comments Section  
[Students were permitted up to six comments each.]

teacher /school evaluation 95 9.6%  
questionnaire response 43 4.4%  
student rights/conditions 43 4.4%  
curriculum/subjects 46 4.6%  
physical environment 30 3.0%  
general school environment 24 2.4%  
Sport/physical education 19 1.9%  
Responses less than 1.9% of the total population are not reported

Student responses to open questions

#### SENIOR SCHOOL COMMENTS

The responses of senior school students have been separated from those of the lower grades. These responses have been collated under the categories of: Teacher and School Evaluation, Discipline, Facilities, Re-Entry, Subject Choice and Homework.

#### Teacher and School Evaluation

I think that Hillsdale is a good school. It has really helped me over the past two years. Social and community studies is a really

good idea as well as the TAFE courses. I think it would be good for at least two work experiences or either two weeks of it. You don't really get much time in 1 week. Maybe you could have one week grade 11 and one week grade 12

Most teachers in the school are not /almost not approachable because I have a personality clash with almost all of my teachers.

I think that although many students dislike Hillsdale I disagree because after attending a private school which was more strict I can see how much more pleasant it is to be at Hillsdale. There are only a few things wrong with the way it works. ie. sometimes it is not strictly enough and I find myself slacking off and there should be more student run activities. Parking area would

be good.

Generally the standard of teaching at Hillsdale is high however in some specific cases it is inadequate eg. unqualified teachers taking important subjects in the senior school. E.g., Tennis School of Excellence Instructor taking senior Maths. Also the assignment loads for each subject seems unnecessarily high and becomes impossible to handle adequately. Many subject departments are inadequately funded, the main one affecting me is art. Students should be able to assess the competence of their teachers.

The teachers shouldn't be so critical with the students. They should be more understanding and supportive. A certain Modern History teacher talks at you so fast you barely understand what happened. Also if you ask a question that he considers is stupid, he'll tell you you're stupid so that you should know the answer- so basically you keep on not knowing the work or understanding. Being an independent student is difficult. Sometimes we have no money and that stress on top of assignments and exams that are poorly organised can lead to much stress. Teachers just need to be a little understanding instead of thinking we can do everything, as well as eat, sleep, clean, shop, cook and move house just because we're young.

I am unsure whether my enthusiasm for Hillsdale is based upon ignorance since I have only attended here 9 months. Certain acquaintances of mine cannot stand the place and have attended for several years. However I perceive their attitude as simply a reaction to the rigid social structure and generally conformist doctrine of the school system. From my experience of schools which extends to an International level Hillsdale is the best school I have been to. What makes it so is the manner by which the school really attempts to relate to the students. I believe the principal is particularly admirable in this respect. Please this is not supposed to be the writings of a sycophant. I almost wish this was anonymous so that it would be taken seriously.

I would prefer is some of the classes were single sexed because of the disruption of the boys.

I would just like to say that I think ..... classes (SCS) are more beneficial than any class I have done in the last years. She's an excellent teacher and she should have all the room she needs to implement new and more useful classes.

It is a common thought at QDSE that we are often left out through no fault of Hillsdale staff. We feel isolated. It would be good if we could mix with others more.

I realise that it is expensive to run the excellence programs however I feel that the subject choice for the dance students ( I cannot comment on any of the others) is far too limited and the attitude of some teachers (teachers that do not teach dance students) toward ballet students is quite disgusting. I'm sick of being treated like a bimbo simply because I study dance. I feel that some teachers don't respect the fact that we actually work hard at dance they have a preconceived image that we run around a room all morning.

As a member of QDSE I only spend 3 hours at Hillsdale High School. Yet I still feel that my comments should be acknowledged as I know I am not the only one with these thoughts. I am disgusted with the lack of subject choice for the students in QDSE. We should have a decent choice as this is our future that we are preparing for-or trying to prepare for. We are handed five subjects (with a mere decision between Maths in Society and Maths 1 and Biology or Art). I would appreciate perhaps a foreign language or an academic subject such as Maths

I am not at all pleased by the teachers who go back on their word especially in the case of word limits in assignments or due dates.

Some teachers I think have an attitude, such as authority. But others are OK and others I don't know about. A lot do however and I do not like it, because they do not have to put up with it

eg. the other day I was sitting down under the cow shed and this teacher (female) came up to me and ask me to pick up papers. I said, "I'm eating my lunch", she looked at me as if to say "I don't care what your doing but do it now" and she just kept on going on about picking up papers while using real sarcastic tone and continuously pointing to the papers "I" just said "NO!" and she walked away. In fact I think this teachers who think they

know it all are totally rude and just because they are teachers who think they rule the world and are allowed to tell you what to do and where to go, what to wear , how to speak, the way I see they don't have the right to at all as far as telling students what to do. In fact they're here in their job for own benefit!? It's not going to be nice and easy going school with these ferrets running around telling us what to do. I want an interview.

I feel that some of the teachers are a bit petty sometimes when it comes to little things. I think more thing to do with the real world would help you more when you finish school. And some of the school rules should be changed because some of them are not needed.

I moved to Hillsdale because was failing at the Gap. Without M..... made me wake up and grow up! I am proud of myself over the past months. I have got a part-time job earning me \$114.84 per week. \$100 of this goes into the bank as I am saving for a car. The rest I spend on bus fares. I have also got an average of A/B for all my subjects. I feel I'm owe this all to M..... . Hillsdale would not have such a good reputation without the TAFE subjects as it is very well known for this. I would just like to remind the school "we are not academics taking board subjects". Some of us need TAFE subjects. Please do not take them away from us.

I feel that Hillsdale is a relatively good school however it should provide a more flexible plan for mature aged students.

Hillsdale is a school too far away to travel and the time to get to school is a waste. The school system and administration, teachers (except for a few) are at a low standard.

The education system is pathetic.

This survey is OK but it could use some improvement in finding out the views and opinions of students.

I attended Brisbane Girls Grammar for the first six months of year 11 (before that I lived on the Gold Coast and went to Southport High). Anyway I felt that many of the teaching methods used by teachers at Grammar were out of date. The teachers, administration staff and guidance officers were not easily approachable type people I could not relate to the whole basic attitude of the school. I was, lucky in a sense, that my parents supported me in my decision to attend 5. The staff, particularly administration have been very supportive. I feel the teaching standards are higher at Hillsdale than they were at Grammar. I wonder why so many people spend large amounts of money to send their children to private schools?

I find it particularly distressing that in year 12 some classes are being taught subjects in which teachers have no more than one or two years experience themselves with the various areas of the syllabus. The class falls behind and are consequently taught to the assessment and I don't feel that I am receiving much of an education. I feel sorry for the students who rely on the teaching. (ie. they find it hard to teach themselves later on a home) to pass the tests.

I am also rather annoyed at the amount of time we are given to



submit our QTAC preferences. The last weeks of third term is one of the busiest and most stressing times as it is and I am well aware that other educational institutions received the QUT booklet at least weeks before Hillsdale received ours.

I have recently lost my father and have found the school has been very supportive particularly the admin. But now we have no income coming into the family and the government assistance is based on last financial year. There should also be stress management class for years 11 and 12 so we learn to cope with the stress and can therefore achieve what we want.

I don't think that this school fulfils the needs of all students and after education cuts I feel the only students catered for are those with talents. I feel this holds back the potential of some students.

The teachers in some cases move through work too quickly and leave the ones having trouble behind and subsequently are left to try to catch up while lowly slipping behind the rest of the class.

All in all Hillsdale is a great school, with more than adequate facilities, most of the teachers are nice and good at their job.

Being in year 12 is the biggest stress and I just want to finish. I have tried really hard to cope and to work well but I know I will not be rewarded in the end.

Teachers grabbing students when teachers become mad. Teachers always assuming you're in the wrong before finding out facts about the situation. Think they're always in the right. Smoking.

She gives me lots of support. I am happy at school and pleased I came here.

Constant review of teachers ability to teach must be reviewed. Some teachers are very slack and student word over a teacher never seems to have any importance, i.e. the teacher knows best.

I think Hillsdale is a good school because it has more opportunities than my other school and more subjects and its more normal.

Some teachers are inadequately trained to teach students especially in the areas of Maths and Science. I find that the teachers in the Maths and Science Department (and Commerce) are impatient with students and care is not given to enough students in order to achieve the best possible results. Too much work is given to students too soon and there needs to be more practice work in class.

I think that the excellence programs are good but the admin should not only really review the people from these programs. If they're reviewing people it should be everyone or no one at all. What I'm trying to say is that the school should not only pick on the excellence programs. They do heaps for the school's reputation. Also if they're gonna get people to vote for house captains, they should take notice otherwise it'd just be a waste of time voting which it is at the moment.

School is boring. Teachers give you a hard time.

A lot of my friends agree with me that the maths teachers at the school are inadequate and should concentrate on his tennis

skills.

I find school very boring as a lot of my teachers do not teach me anything and some of my classes are very disruptive. Often I find myself sitting in class doing nothing from my own experience and talking to the other students, I can say that the maths teachers at this school should find another job.

## Discipline

I feel that if it were at all possible for Hillsdale to have smoking area in the school for lunchtime use, I and most of the other smokers, would be 100% for the use of this area.

80% of classes should come back into school rules.

Should only have to attend 80% of classes and attend every lesson when there is a test.

Most learning techniques themselves are learnt through self-discipline and therefore a lot is left to the student to learn and apply themselves.

Some of the school's regulations are reasonably ludicrous. eg. hair regulations. I personally think that at a state school (where uniform isn't law) any hair cut should be allowed as long as the hair is clean and groomed. Also if a person is wearing the wrong uniform, the reason for not wearing the correct uniform should be taken into consideration. Smokers within the school should be given permission to leave school at lunch and morning tea to have a cigarette. It is impossible for them to go a whole day without a cigarette.

Needs more discipline, especially in year 11 eg. punishment for wagging class. Too many people get to grade 11 and take the new freedom for granted as I did. As a result they fail.

## Facilities

There should be no work experience and TAFE put into the higher grades throughout the year. I probably use the computers if there were more incorporated in the art room eg. graphics. Also the art dark room should be totally renewed with better facilities.

More computer access for non-computer students, encouragement for sporting activities

This school has provided all the facilities I need. The administration staff are very effective and ensure a not overly, but reasonably, disciplined school. Perhaps a little more discipline could be enforced. We need more trees near the oval but other than that I can't complain. It's a great school.

There should be more surveys to see how the students feel about our school and its equipment, subjects and facilities.

I don't think it is fair that you need a note just to enter your own school library or the fact that you have to sign in a book if you have a spare. You go in and just wait for a librarian to investigate you, wanting to know what you're doing and why etc..

The library is able to be improved. Hillsdale is a very good school and is working well to enable its students to achieve high standards and good skills for later life.

## Re-Entry

I am in year 12 and am doing non-board subjects and I have a girl with special needs (.....) in 3 of my classes. She does not do any work at all but yet the teachers spend more than half the lesson explaining things to her. It gets very frustrating. She does whatever she likes eg. walking in and out of class for no reason. No teacher stops her or even asks her where she is going. Yet if anyone else tried that they would be in trouble. Also if I want to complain there is no one to complain to. M..... brought her into the school and the admin. don't care. It make not only me but any one I'm know in any of her classes feel very stupid and now I hear there are plans to bring more special needs students to the school.

As I am a re-entry student I have experienced school life with Hillsdale with an outlook of hope. I choose this school for its reputation, wide range of subjects and equity amongst teachers and students (equity exists most of the time). Although I doubted the administrative staff in the beginning I have found them to be very helpful and organised. Nothing in particular annoys me about Hillsdale although there is in some cases teacher/student favouritism (but you get that at every school). Overall I think the school is excellent environment for one to complete one's studies.

There should be free bus travel for secondary school students as there is free train travel. This is a large expense especially for students who are independent.

## Subject Choices

Last year when I asked the ..... for help with my subject selection, he told me he was sick of people asking him about subject selection and that he'd really like to get this over and done with. On the whole he had a very negative attitude and was not helpful at all and I have not been back to him with any problems, school related or personal and I do not intend to in the future.

School subjects need to be rated equally like they are in secondary night school. It is unfair that people who enjoy a subject and have a major interest in it decide not to do it due to the fact that it is not

a) a board subject

b) a pre-requisite for a TAFE or a university

c) it isn't rated as high as other subjects .

More schools of excellence for sports such as netball should be offered for most of the girls who have great skill in the game and would like to improve their skills.

In reference to Q(30) (school curriculum guide) the school curriculum outlined a lot of subjects in great detail very well. There were a great range of subjects to choose from. However it is all just words on paper because many of the choices aren't offered in the end anyway. I missed out three times on the subjects I wanted to do because they were not offered. In Art I

choose to do Costume and Stage Design and Painting. Both were not offered and I was stuck in Print-making. My marks have suffered because of this. In English second semester I did not get any of my three choices and I was put in Speaking and Writing Effectively class. Luckily I changed to one more enjoyable. I think that if we are going to print the outlines for the subjects in the book they should be prepared to run those subjects. A lot of people's marks will suffer otherwise.

Sport I feel sport should be compulsory. I took photos of the athletics carnival and just looking at the smiles on the competitors communicates to me the fact that sport can be a very relaxing and meditative time. A time that helps people gain both physical and mental health. Note: I don't play sport but I would if it was compulsory. UNIFORM. I feel that the uniform is an important part of Hillsdale. It's going downhill. I am a prefect but we are not given any support of the authority to really make a difference to the school uniform. If the teachers let students get away with incorrect uniform then of course the students will not care about prefects. MAGAZINE I think the magazine should become a more important part of the year 12. For people who are wishing to partake in a career that follows with magazine style work the school magazine could be valuable experience.

I think that the practical side of school subjects are more useful to me, eg. doing such things as letter writing for work experience, getting a portfolio together, doing art work, less study and more work experience and learning skills outside in the workforce.

#### Homework

I would like more time to relax but it is not possible with the amount of homework study and assignments I have every night

I think that maybe I concentrate on sports (athletics) a lot more than school work, I don't study as much as I should, but I still manage to pass. I don't like the current assessment policies: and some of the teachers attitudes towards it.

I spend hours studying my subjects but my results don't show the amount of work.

I haven't got enough time for both school and sport. The idea of excellence in sport (and others) is good but due to this program you lose many lessons per weekend get behind. It should be a fulltime program.

I don't spend ant time studying at home.

With music practice of 2 hours day plus the added burden of homework one has to suffer. I will not sacrifice my future career to coincide with the boundaries of the school curriculum.

I have found this year to be extremely difficult regarding assignments. I often have an assignment due almost every day and this has gone on all year. Most of my assignments require extensive research information, which is not available at the school library. As I live in a northern suburb isolated from both state and university libraries it is extremely difficult to find the time to research them. I have found, although not through my choice, many assignments have had to be left till the last minute because of the work overload. This places enormous stress on students, which I have found through talking to others.

The workload placed on year 12 is too much. My own family



commented on how I was 'snappy' and cranky up until the QCS test. With my involvement in the school music program, I am in the senior ensemble and vocal and choir groups, I find it hard to keep on top of my assignments. Although I receive good marks I always hand them in on time I still have to rush them. I would have liked to have continued with class music but due to the actions of the teacher I found it hard to continue. I was having trouble but was unable to receive any help in the subject.

I feel that there is way too much pressure placed on our lives eg

assignments, exam, etc. as well as having the normal problems as being a teenager. Teachers should get together and see when we receive other assignments and not just give them to us all at once and have an attitude of "oh well this is high school, that's your problem".

The assessment program is unevenly spread out which makes completing assignments well and studying for exams very difficult. A more efficient plan should be worked out. This would ease a great amount of pressure and enable us to do assessment thoroughly.

#### JUNIOR SCHOOL COMMENTS

The comments of the junior school students were also categorised under the following headings: Teacher and School Evaluation, Discipline, Facilities, Re-Entry, Subject Choice and Homework.

## Teacher & School Evaluation

I do believe that ..... should not be teacher at this school because she can not control the class and she does not teach the relevant information that we need to know for the exams we have.

I think this school has a very good range of subjects and teachers although the standard of teaching varies. All administrative staff are helpful and understanding and all my classes are made enjoyable by my great teachers. I hope to continue my schooling here until grade 12. This school is proof that public schools can be as good if not better than private schools.

I believe Hillsdale caters exceptionally well for my needs and wants. Most facilities are of a high standard and teachers helpful.

I feel that classes are too large for the students to learn to their capabilities.

More students should choose Hillsdale State High School to attend because it has a wide range of subjects for student's needs. Nobody will push you to do certain subjects if you don't want to.

I think that the teachers should listen to the students more and not jump down their throats if your standards are not up to the teachers.

Teachers are very helpful to your need. The school have a lot of equipment/facilities that you'll enjoy. Hillsdale is not a racist school like Kedron. I'm proud to be attending Hillsdale State High School.

I don't like school, thank you.

I think Hillsdale State high school is the best state high school there could be. Some methods of teaching could be improved in some areas such as Maths. But overall its the best school for me.

I think you should be able to pick your teachers even though this may not be possible. Because if you have teachers you like you work better. I think they should have health and PED everyday like they did last year. And sport should still be on Wednesday afternoons because I love sport but I can't do it because I have already filled up my subject selections. Now I have only sport twice a week.

I don't like the behaviour of some teachers. I know I'm only a student but I really disapprove what ..... can do, like she puts you down so much and she's a smart cookie. She's so immature.

She's like a kid and to conclude she thinks she's the best.

Well I think that the teachers are great at doing there job. My most favourite types of teachers are the kind of people who mix as with you it feels great.

I think Maths classes have been badly organised. They result in concentrating a great deal of no of so called "under achievers" in the one class. This creates a bad environment of bad attitudes. In such classes there will be even less a chance of improving achievement and are not successful. There is also a lot of negative attitude towards the success of teaching and learning from both the teachers and the student. There needs to be a new approach to learning and teaching through communication. The gap between student and teacher is widening and I think smaller classes where a more personal approach to teaching is needed.

As a student for three years at Hillsdale I think that overall the school has a 50% rating compared to other schools. It is situated at a good place, the teaching is all right but that does not change my ideas on leaving at grade 10.

I enjoy going to Hillsdale and as I want to follow a profession in law I can't wait till year 11 when I can do a subject on Law. I also enjoy using drama department as I love acting. I think the library should have two copies of books , one for resources and another for borrowing. I don't think year 13 should be compulsory.

Hillsdale High School has been a pleasure to attend. The teachers and staff etc. are all really nice and helpful (except for a few exceptions). The school is not strict but it is not easy. I have learned a great deal and plan to keep going here in the future. I would recommend this school to anyone who isn't sure what school they want to attend. It's really great.

I think this school is all right, the better teachers are quite all right, better than the ones at my old school. Australian teachers are very different from the Kiwi ones. They, over here, are much louder, they yell a bit much. I think the school is quite cool and the bad thing about it is the amount of detentions they give out.

This school I believe is quite good but sometimes I feel we

should have something to do during lunchtime hours. Some teachers are quite strict and I feel sometimes students are being pressured. Sometimes when doing an assignment students are not given enough time. But all in all the subjects are given to us are great.

I believe that some teachers do not treat all students as equals and if you do not understand they get angry and I don't think that's fair as if we generally don't understand they should help us. Also if teachers have a bad day they sometimes take it out on the students but if it is the opposite we get in trouble. I also don't think its fair the way some teachers put you down. I think student and teachers need to communicate more.

feel that overhead transparencies and continual viewing of the same video, oh let's say, 10 thousand times is an effective teaching method.

I'm interested in participating in the drama school of excellence next year. I think the school of excellence is very credible.

I don't think the school's policies and rules are backed up by the actions they make. Lots of threats about rule-breaking are made but action is hardly ever taken. The school desperately needs to look at the way teachers behave in the classroom. A lot of teachers don't actually teach students. They stand up the front and talk about things that are completely irrelevant.

I went to the counsellor to help me for subject choices. After the session I knew nothing that I didn't already know. A lot of my classmates feel the same.

I think Hillsdale is a very good school. There is always a teacher there to help you if you need help from problems with friends or home to problems with your school work. The LAP program is also good because parents and others give up their time to help us. This way we get the extra schooling /teaching to make us understand our work.

I find that some teachers like to change your ideas and I also think that there is a lot of favouritism.

I think Hillsdale is really a good school. I would recommend it to other kids who don't know what high school to go to. Kids with bad attitudes and reputations should not be allowed in the school, e.g., ..... gives the school a bad name. Parents would

not consider that Hillsdale is a suitable school for their children.

I'm happy with this school.

I don't think that the teachers listen to you. I find that a lot of teachers don't listen at all and I get really annoyed with this. I also don't like the attitude of the admin. I think they are a bunch of dicks (don't tell) but this school is very good for a student who is in one of the excellence programs and its good for the people who get good teachers but when you get a particular teacher that you don't like they put you down and I think that sucks just because you call them a teacher they think they have all the seniority in the world. And I hate it.

We need more good teachers, some teachers don't even bother trying to teach. But the school is quite good (the subjects). The school community is good. New equipment is needed especially in the science rooms. Some teachers only come to school to get paid. To some teachers they take their problems out on you.

I feel the school is quite good with its wide range of courses as

we'll as the excellent subject (ie Excellence in Golf) and it is still growing. The teachers just need to be more enthusiastic in their teaching but I think the school students are very good, as well as stick together. We need longer lunch hours. New desks are needed especially in the science blocks. The teachers don't really want to teach, they only come because they are paid for it, not all teachers though.

I only ever study when I have an exam. Some teachers at this school can't teach us properly and the others are rude and cruel. They tend to mark us on our attitudes.

I enjoy coming to Hillsdale High School very much. One of the reasons I like this school so much is because of the extracurricular activities such as debating, instrumental music school musicals etc.. I enjoy being involved in these activities as I feel they broaden my knowledge, and I enjoy the experiences.

Most teachers do not have a sense of humour and most library teachers steal your pens.

I think that our ..... gives a very distorted view of our options after we leave school. When he talks to us it sounds as if most of us have no hope of going straight to university and in any case why would we want to (this is his view not mine). He really pushes us.

## Discipline

I think that (especially in the summer) we should have the choice of wearing cotton (100%), uniform as synthetic sweats and is too

hot and unhealthy. There should at least be cotton shirt in the uniform shop ). I feel strongly about this as I do not wear synthetics unless I have to. I think that but travel to and from school should be free as it is a large and unnecessary expense. I think that seeing as there is a compulsory sports day each year there should be a compulsory arts day (visual and performing). I don't think that the jewellery rule should be so rigid as jewellery has no direct on your school work and that's what we are here for right. I think that there should be a senior common room (like there was a long time ago). When I came to this school I was told there was no set rules!

The classes can be very disruptive and a lot of teachers do not know either to handle the problem or to have the power to do anything. I think teachers should be given more power to do so and not hesitate to punish any student disrupting the class. I also think that part of the teachers job should be to uphold the school rules by checking uniforms, behaviour in the school grounds (more teacher should be given lunch duty.). A lot of these questions only touched the surface, more thought should be given and more direct questions.

I think that my English teacher is the only teacher that I have and that has no control of her class (we do no work). While other teachers are very good. Some or one put me and others down. No it's not on!!!

Classes should be smaller, less people, less school bullying.

I feel that its every one's own choice about their career, they need somewhere proper to study and I think some teachers should make a better effort too, with teaching. So should children. They need some encouragement.



Hillsdale is a good school but I think it could be improved in certain ways. Kids with bad attitudes and reputations should not be allowed in school because it gives a bad reputation but also some should be given a chance.

Uniform code can be too big a hassle because of this strictness. Sometimes school has to understand people have other problems/commitments which sometimes interferes with school. Not everyone has a perfect life.

I find the strict uniform, code a hassle as I have moved from a school with no uniform code. And with a part-time job and my homework sometimes I can't fit in the time to do a load of washing so I occasionally wear a pair of school coloured socks and have not enough time to receive a note from my mother in the morning early as she is not awake yet. Thank you.

Why can't students smoke at school even if there was a special place for them to smoke. Because if teaches can smoke then students should be allowed to smoke as well.

For better teaching and learning better discipline and swifter, more bluntly active punishment and a wider range of library resources are needed.

### Subject Choice

I have enjoyed my three years at Hillsdale State High School. A school like this is great because of all different subjects which could be done, and being able to get along with the teacher and all the different people and friends.

I wish to go to University and to pursue my career options but if I do not succeed in entering university I would like to do what ever possible to get into it even if I have to repeat year 10.

All different units of a subject should be on different lines so you can do a number of them. There should be more of a variety of

TAFE subjects. There should not be a year

I think that kids should have a choice in sports like swimming and others things, I'm asking this because I don't like swimming at all and a lot of others don't like swimming either.

I object to the fact that this school makes it compulsory to attend religious education. I also think that after year 8 students should not have to participate in HRF but maybe instead have theory/learning about drugs, sex, our bodies, etc. for 10 periods per cycle. I think there should also be more protection from the rain as there is not enough sheds for 50 people.

I think we should be allowed to pick every subject we want as long as we know what we want to be because I do and some subjects which are known to be done, such as in year 8 are not ever relevant to our goals. Teachers should learn to control most temper and teach more students about the subjects their feelings.

I am very pleased with the dance, music and drama subjects. Although I would like to comment on dance. I have been dancing for 9 years and am very advanced in my dance. My friends and I were wondering if an advanced dance class could be arranged in the near future. We get quite bored as we know practically all the steps. If a advance class would happen I would be very grateful. Dance, drama and music is the main reason why I come to this school. Another problem is the teachers-they some of them are rude and misunderstand you and judge you on your attitude not your ability.

You should be allowed to choose what subjects you want to do rather than having to do subjects you don't want to do eg. you have to do Economics, Art, Tec and Computer. I don't want to do any of those -high school is about freedom to do what subjects you want. When I do subjects I don't like my results are never as good . I concede the fact that you have to do Maths, Science and English however some subjects are just totally irrelevant to what you want to do when you grow up. Also I am rather disgusted at teachers at this school. Some of them everyday we are given a maths test (not real ) and he just sits there doing his own thing. To prove that this way of teaching doesn't really work. In a very important maths test every person failed and I'm not in a class of dumb people. I nearly got a VHA last semester and now I'll be lucky to get a HA.

A lot of the subjects that are said aren't what I like. I'd like to do more of one subject (Art). Also I don't think that Science should be compulsory. English is more important in the work force, so if you want to do something in then science field then you should choose Science.

In grade ten sport/HPE/HRF should not be compulsory (prac) but theory should. It is ridiculous that we spend something like eight hours doing sport when we could be in the classroom. This is supposed to be a non-religious school. Why do we have Christian eduction once a week? maybe we could study (briefly) a range of religions, e.g., Buddhism etc. not just Christianity.

I think we should be able to select our subjects in grade 8 but I think Hillsdale High is a very good high school.

Facilities

Some school equipment is in a dismal state , and when this hinders the ability to learn adequately, I believe the school should do something . eg lighting and sound.

I think all of the facilities are good. Some of the teachers could help more sometimes.

I would very much like to use the dance facilities but have marked not used, as grade 8 students don't have this option.

At many times the practice rooms at the music block (drama studio) are all taken. There are particular rush times during the year when auditions , exams etc. are taking place and there is no room. All the school instruments are awful and the standard of music is at extremes. There should be provision made to those of higher and lesser degree. I understand the lack of financial resources.

I would like to see a better gym.

We need a gym.

We need more facilities for drama!

Need more facilities, need to be able to talk to someone very confidential so you don't have to bottle up your problems. (in and out of school). Have more seats around the school. at lunch time.

I think that some of the desks need replacing as they are falling apart.

It would be good if there were more sporting facilities - e.g., a gym, our own gymnastics equipment, starting blocks, more qualified coaches. This would give students more opportunity to excel in all sports. Most subjects teachers seem to be reasonable but I have had some which are inadequate. Some teachers 'in class' teaching should be reviewed.

Many students are not aware of the availability of facilities mentioned in section F. Many students also do not make use of the sections in F, but that doesn't mean that they are not needed. I would probably make use of the computers for assignments etc. if I know that we were allowed to.

Concerning library facilities - our library is a great place for studying and has many good points, but I have found the non-fiction books to be on the whole out of date.

There should be more handball facilities. There should be elective student councils that has a large amount of control over student rights (uniform, recreation, assemblies, student events) RE should be religious education not Christian propoganda. All religions should be taught (possibly including guest speakers from various places of worship in Brisbane). This does not mean the RE has to take more that it does, merely that the time should be shared and not given to one sect of one belief.

New rings and backboards are needed at the basketball courts.

I think that our classrooms are in desperate need of upgrade. The library needs more facilities such as new books, videos etc.. The drama department needs upgrading. I travel to school by

train and bus. The train is free but the bus fare is to be paid by us. I think schools should have some sort of free bus service as bus fares can end up being quite costly. I think there should be government assistance for all scholars not when you turn a certain age but for your whole schooling life. When you add up the cost of uniforms, books, etc. it's very expensive.

More paint brushes for the art department, new desks and chairs needed. Waste of money on unnecessary gadgets for teachers pleasure. Deputy Principal can be hard to co-operate with e.g. not understanding about student rights.

## Homework

I think that in the younger grades (8&9) students need to be shown how to use their time more effectively. (time management). Study habits need to be more developed, maybe a teaching a session to show students how to go and study. As much as I hate homework I think that it should be given every second day for each subject. This allows students to get a routine. Perhaps the policy could be if you haven't done your homework don't bother coming to class unless there is a good reason.

I think more practice tests should be given I think books on how, where and what to study should be given out. I think parents should try harder to get their children to study. I think there should be more courses of excellence.

I hardly study at all and I feel that it is a waste of time going

through grade 12 when most employers want more than a senior certificate. The job structure needs to be looked at or make more positions at Uni available and don't judge people on a number.

## DISCUSSION

### Demographics

Students who attend Hillsdale State High School represented, in total, 162 suburbs spread throughout Brisbane, but the most frequent response came from the close suburbs which were not on

the main road (17.3%) and the close suburbs along the main road (12.2%). The student numbers from adjacent locality are quite understandable because of the proximity of these suburbs to the school and because there is no other state high school in the region, but those students coming from further out go past, and in some cases directly past, other state high schools. This would seem to indicate that a high proportion of students and their parents have deemed Hillsdale to be able to offer what a number of more local schools cannot. This point is supported more strongly when the home suburbs are analysed in terms of the travelling time to reach Hillsdale. The results are that only 26% percent of the school population take under 15 minutes to travel to school. Just under 32% take between 15 and 30 minutes while a substantial 41% require more than half an hour of travelling time. Specific reasons for these longer travelling students choosing Hillsdale are given later in the paper.

A clear majority of students (68%) said they use a bus service to go to school but nearly one quarter of the students come by train. Hillsdale is not on a train line so these students either go to town and then catch a bus to Hillsdale or they stop at one of the train-bus interchange stations on railway lines that are in the same portion of the metropolitan area as Hillsdale and catch a bus to the school. In any case, train travellers are inconvenienced in that they need to use two modes of transport to arrive at the school.

Over one third of the students (36%) come to school by car. The reasons for this are obviously varied but although Hillsdale is not on a train line, it is an inner city school, which is just off one of the city's main arterial roads into the Central Business District. One would assume that it is quite convenient for parents to drive their children into school on the way to work.

### Home Environment

Only 60% of students live with both parents/guardians which is consonant with state norms. Of the remaining 40%, 30% of students lived with one parent while the rest formed three small but distinctive groups: 15 students (1.5%) lived with other relatives; 35 students (3.6%) lived independently of parents; and 40 students (4.1%) said they alternated between parents. As stated previously, these statistics are not dissimilar to those of other inner city schools across the nation but nevertheless, they have implications for home life stability, conditions for private study and general well-being of students.

Independent students were asked to suggest ways in which the school could support them. 84% of the 26 independent students said that financial assistance was of major concern. Other concerns which were identified were appropriate counselling, support in job seeking, food and flexibility with assessment, homework and class attendance.

It seems that re-entry, mature age and independent students have found the school to be quite satisfactory for their needs, but they have expressed concerns which are specific to their situation:

"As I am a re-entry student, I have experienced school life with Hillsdale with an outlook of hope. I chose this school for its reputation, wide range of subjects and equity amongst its teachers and students... overall I think the school is an excellent environment for one to complete one's studies."

"Being an independent student is difficult. Sometimes we have no money and that stress on top of assignments and exams ... can lead to more stress."

"I feel that Hillsdale is a relatively good school, however, it should provide a more flexible plan for mature aged students."

### Ethnicity

The majority of students were born in Australia (81%) but 68 other countries were also recorded. For parents, the response was obviously similar but, as would be expected, more parents



were born overseas (66% Australian born). The results are a little surprising because one would expect a more multi-cultural clientele in a large inner city school. When one combines Australian born parents with those born in New Zealand, the United Kingdom and the United States, in total 78.4%, the cultural ambience of the school is predominantly Anglo-Saxon. At the time of the questionnaire, there were 37 (4.6%) students who were of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander descent. Linked to ethnicity were the questions concerned with languages spoken at home. Just under a quarter of the students said that they spoke a language other than English. Of the seventy-two languages indicated, the most frequent were Italian (13%), French (11%), German (9%) Vietnamese (8%) and Chinese (7%). Only 10% indicated that the language spoken most commonly at home was not English. Students who have a different language and/or cultural background are supported by specialist teachers in the school.

#### Employment

Approximately one quarter of the students who attend Hillsdale State High school receive financial assistance from a variety of government schemes. Only 24% of students said they had part-time jobs of which, the majority were employed for under eight hours per week. The results showed clearly that students had overwhelming support from their parents to maintain part-time employment (87%).

It was interesting to note that 23% of the students who have part-time work said that their income was used to support them whilst at school. This would seem to indicate that a sizeable proportion of the student body is expected to contribute to their upkeep whilst at school or live in families that are experiencing degrees of financial difficulty.

A focus of the survey was to know how many students remained at school only because they could not find paid employment. Only 138 students said that if they were offered a full-time job, they would leave school; the responses were fairly evenly divided between upper and lower secondary students.

#### Entry to Hillsdale State High School

66% of the school's student population entered at Year Eight level, directly from a local primary school. There was, however, a high entry level in Year 11 (16%). This is because the school has developed a wide curriculum offering and a reputation for flexibility, particularly in the senior school.

Many students (64%) indicated that their decision to attend Hillsdale was a collaborative one made with their parents. It is

interesting to note that 21% of students made their own decision to attend the school without referring to parental advice and 11% of students did not have any input into the choice of school but had to rely on the preference of their parents/guardians. Much smaller groups of students accepted advice from family members, friends and teachers (in all 2%).

Students were then asked to identify the reason(s) for choosing Hillsdale. Approximately fifty different responses were given for their choice but the reasons which were recorded most frequently were as follows:

Good Reputation (57%)

Wide Subject Selection (47%)

Proximity to Home (36%)

Friends were in Attendance (28%)

Other Family Members were in Attendance (24%)

Sport/Excellence Programs (8%)

It is obvious that the school enjoys a very positive reputation in the community. As has been seen from the expanse of the feeder areas, this standing is by no means limited to the local community.

## Teacher and School Evaluation

The questionnaire then invited students to reflect on their

decision to attend school and to determine to what extent they were pleased with their decision. The results were extraordinarily positive with 89% of students saying that they were either pleased or very pleased with their decision. A small number of students were still undecided with under 2% recording a negative reply.

In response to the overall standard of teaching in the school, more than half of the students who completed the questionnaire agreed that the standard was good and 13% of students agreed strongly. A sizeable proportion of students were unsure (23%) with a very small minority (6%) expressing dissatisfaction. A similar result can be drawn from the responses of students enrolled in the special School of Excellence programs. Of the 92 students enrolled in such programs, 87% indicated that they were pleased or very pleased with their respective programs. These results are a clear mandate to teachers that students are satisfied with their present lot. No criteria was offered in the questionnaire, however, for students to appraise teacher effectiveness. Consideration was not given to students' experience and understanding of effective and ineffective teaching. It appears that a number of questions will need to be posed to students in an interview situation, to explore and clarify the criteria that students used in forming their opinion. Approximately 25% of students took the opportunity to make an unstructured comment at the end of the questionnaire which focussed on a variety of issues which concerned them including the very purpose of the questionnaire. The strongest response, however, dealt with students' relationship with teachers, their perception of teacher competence and their level of satisfaction with the school. Concerns were expressed about particular teachers, the staff as a whole (including support personnel) and the school's overall effectiveness. The following is a representative sample of what students in both Senior and Junior classes reported:

I don't think this school fulfils the needs of all students and after the education cuts, I feel the only students catered for are those with talent.

I think this school has a very good range of subjects and teachers although the standard of teaching varies. All administrative staff are helpful and understanding and all my classes are made enjoyable by my great teachers.

A proportion of Senior students were particularly concerned with the level of preparation that some teachers showed in class. They thought that a few teachers were poorly trained and lacked the experience required to successfully teach a Senior class.

I find it particularly distressing that in Year 12, some classes are being taught subjects in which the teachers themselves have no more than one or two years experience with the various areas of the syllabus.

Some teachers are inadequately trained to teach students in the areas of Maths and Science

Generally the standard of teaching at Hillsdale is high, however, in some specific cases it is inadequate e.g. unqualified teachers taking important subjects in the senior school. Students should be able to assess the competence of their teachers.

A few students took the opportunity to make comments which were quite critical of their teachers, but this opinion did not seem to be supported by the overwhelming majority:

Most teachers in the school are not/almost not approachable because I have a personality clash with almost all of my teachers.

There should be a constant review of teachers' ability. Some teachers are very slack and the student's word over the teacher never seems to have any importance.

I don't like the behaviour of some teachers. I know I'm only a student but I really disapprove of what...can do.

Whilst many more students were less critical, they did ask for improved understanding, patience, diligence and support from their teachers:

The teachers shouldn't be so critical with the students. They should be more understanding and supportive.

I believe that some teachers do not treat all students as equals and if you do not understand they get angry and I don't think that's fair because if we generally don't understand they should help us. I also don't think its fair the way some teachers put you down. I think student and teachers need to communicate more.

Many students took the opportunity to commend the school and its teaching staff, citing adequate provision of physical resources, discipline procedures and the care and concern shown by staff as examples of a "good" school:

This school has provided all the facilities I need. The administrative staff are very effective and ensure a not overly, but reasonably disciplined school.

Well I think that the teachers are great at doing their job. My most favourite types are the kind of people who mix with you.

I think Hillsdale is a good school. There is always a teacher there to help you if you need help with problems... .

#### Vocational Education

Responses to the questionnaire registered that 16% of students have been or are presently enrolled in a TAFE subject. When asked whether students saw value in the study of a TAFE subject at school, the result was definitively positive. 78% of senior students saw value in TAFE subjects being available at school and offered the following reasons to substantiate their point of view:

- . TAFE in general, offered a better education
- . TAFE courses were seen to be vocationally valuable
- . TAFE courses offered a more practical approach plus work experience
- . TAFE courses broadened one's horizons

Student perceptions of the value of TAFE courses are a reflection of, and must be considered in the light of community trends in educational thinking. The first is the general propensity of the community to lean towards vocationally based courses within the framework of the national agenda for workplace training, practical competencies and the Australian Vocational Certificate. Changes in curriculum have been called for as a response to the unprecedented increase and diversity of students now participating in post compulsory schooling (Green, 1993). In the recently administered Parent Questionnaire, 71% of parents who responded supported an increase of vocational training in the school.

The other is that the students seem to be appreciating and enjoying their experiences of TAFE courses offered to this point in the school. TAFE courses in Australia are experiencing a surge of popularity as student and parental attitudes move from seeing them as the undesirable alternative to university education, to choosing them as a first preference for tertiary education or at least an acceptable and worthy alternative to traditional university education. Students and indeed employers, are viewing vocationally oriented courses not as alternatives for academically weak students but as educational pathways which are intrinsically of value.

### Aspirations

The intent of the next statement, When I complete Year 12 I think I will... was to ascertain, however broadly, the extent to which students' expectations were matched to the realities of unemployment, competitiveness in tertiary selection and scholastic achievement in their senior years. Of the 49% who said they wanted to go to university, only 4% had doubts about securing a place. Students were more realistic about gaining a TAFE place with the number of students doubling to 14%. Jobseekers increased by 3% and those who thought they would repeat Year 12 increased to 2.5%.

From the responses one must conclude that there is little difference between students' aspirations and what they think they will actually realise when they leave school. The school may need to consider a more active and sustained information program to ensure senior students are aware of all of their options after Year 12 in particular, the different pathways to university education and alternatives to university education.

### Choosing Subjects

A clear majority of students (72%) said that they consulted with parents when making subject choices but only 33% said that they asked advice from the school's guidance officer. This is surprising because one would reasonably assume that a school's guidance officer would have the most up to date information on subject choice linked with career aspirations. Further probing would be necessary to determine why so many students are not using the available service. It may be a matter of public relations, misinformation, or time constraints, considering there is only one officer for a large school population. In any case, it seems vital to ensure that parents are given every opportunity to inform themselves of current understandings of education, pre-requisites needed for further study and their children's abilities so as to minimise their pre-conceptions and prejudices in the advice they give to their children in subject selection.

The above information is linked to a later question which asked students which staff they have approached for academic or personal guidance. The most common response here was that students had sought advice from other students (51%). This result may be a reasonably common one in high school, in that students will frequently seek support, guidance and sometimes direction from their peers but one must wonder about the appropriateness and value of some of this advice. A number of



schools have recognised the power of peer counselling and guidance and have consequently introduced peer support and leadership programs where senior students learn about effective ways of supporting their friends and colleagues. It may be interesting to canvass support for such programs amongst stakeholders at Hillsdale State High. Similar programs may also be useful for classroom and homeroom teachers who were consistently mentioned by students responding to this question (65%).

A majority of students found the school's Curriculum Guide to be useful although there was a reasonably high percentage of students (25%) who were unsure of its use. This may mean that the publication is not used to its capacity and needs to be promoted differently or perhaps redesigned.

Nearly half of the students who responded to the questionnaire have changed their subject selection from their two/three year plan. The most frequent reason given was dissatisfaction with the subject (45%) but a substantial proportion (37%) of the student body cited irrelevance to career aspirations as the reason for changing their selection. Other reasons offered were dissatisfaction with the teacher (27%), amount and type of assessment (8%) and disruptive students (7%). A number of other reasons were suggested by very small numbers of students: friends in other classes, the subject was too difficult, timetable classes, poor results, heavy workload, etc..

### Facilities

Interest was expressed in knowing student perceptions on a number of the school's existing facilities, so two questions were asked about each of the specialist areas in the school. The first asked about frequency of student use while the second question was designed to determine the students' perceptions of adequacy. Students were to rank their use of the facility and its adequacy on a 1 (use it a lot) to 5 (don't use at all) scale. It seems extraordinary that only 6% of students said that they use the library extensively followed by 11% who gave their use of the library a number 2 ranking. 44% of students chose rank number 4 or 5. In terms of perceived adequacy, 57% agreed or strongly agreed that the library facilities were adequate. 27% of students took a neutral stand while 14% found it to be inadequate. 12 students complete their studies, 49% aspire to university education whilst only 7% are interested in a TAFE course. This response is surprising in light of the support that students in general gave to TAFE courses being offered in schools. A modest 17% are interested in securing employment whilst 9.5% wish to combine further education with a job .

I don't think it is fair that you need a note just to enter your own school library. You go in and just wait for a librarian to investigate you, wanting to know what you're doing and why.

When students responded however, to a question on the adequacy of the library facilities in the questionnaire a high 47.4% of students agreed that it was adequate to their needs. This may indicate that the library itself is adequate to students' need but perhaps the service they receive is lacking. A significant proportion (26.7%) however, remained neutral on the issue which would lead one to wonder why a notable portion of the student body does not use the library. This, of course, raises a series of pertinent questions about accessibility, staff service, training in information retrieval, methods of classroom teaching and the relevance of the library's current collection.

From the available information, especially when one also considers the remarks about the library in the "additional comments" section of the questionnaire, one can only conclude that the library is seen to be ineffectual or at least irrelevant to a significant number of students. Further study would be necessary to determine the nature and scope of the changes required to develop the library into an effective, vibrant and well patronised resource centre.

Comments were also made about the facilities in general, at the school. The areas identified in terms of needing an upgrade or development were Handball, Gym, Art and Drama areas, Science rooms and desks in various classrooms and classrooms themselves.

One student requested that consideration be given to more computer access for non-computer students while another student identified some dissatisfaction with the Music area. A small proportion of students (14%) said that they used the computer facilities consistently whereas a high 70% did not use the computers much at all. This may be a matter of concern noting the widespread applicability of computers to one's general education and the prevalent use of this technology in all areas of work. Many students (59%) suggested by their neutral response

that they had little understanding of whether the computer facilities were adequate or not. This would suggest a marked indifference and that the majority of students at Hillsdale High have not been exposed to or have chosen not to be exposed to computer technology.

Responses to other facilities mentioned in the questionnaire scored very low in terms of usage but this is due to the comparatively low student enrolment in these subject areas.

### Study Habits

Approximately half of the students in the school study for under five hours per week while a third of the students have said that they study between five and ten hours. Only 13% study for any longer periods. The difference between the study habits of boys and girls was marginal although it was shown that generally the girls study for longer than the boys do. 19% of girls study between 5 and 10 hours per week as compared to 15% of the boys. 7% of the girls study between 10 and 20 hours as compared to 4% of the boys.

In reference to the amount of time spent in cultural activities, 70% of students said they were involved in such activities for under 5 hours per week with merely 3% of students who were involved for over 20 hours. This is in marked contrast to the number of hours students spend relaxing. Over a third of the students spend between 5 and 10 hours relaxing per week with 25% spending between 10 and 20 hours. A smaller but still significant number (19%) spend over 20 hours.

The final questions were designed to elicit how many students lived in an environment which was conducive to effective study. 86% of students who attend the school have their own bedrooms and 80% have their own desks.

Students were asked where they did their homework and permitted to choose more than one venue. Nearly 94% of students complete their homework (at least sometimes) in the presumed uninterrupted environment of their bedrooms or studies, but 30% of students do their homework in the lounge room, 16% in the kitchen and 12% outside. When asked if it was easy to study at home, 78% said "yes". From these results it seems that generally there are no large scale difficulties with students studying at home. Some consideration and support however, must be given to the 20% of students who said they did not have a desk nor a regular place where homework can be completed in comfort.

A small number of students complained about the level and/or complexity of homework. One student explained that she was involved in Music practice for two hours per day and that general homework on top of this became a substantial burden and she was unwilling to presumably waste time on irrelevant homework when she had already set her vocational aspirations.

A number of comments were made regarding assignments. Some Senior students said that there are too many set assignments placing an "enormous stress" on students; a situation exacerbated

by the fact that many assignments require research materials unavailable at the school library and some suburbs are distant from both State and university libraries. Other students explained that even their families had noted the level of pressure, stress and general uneasiness that too many assignments placed on their lives. The comment was made that teachers should co-ordinate more effectively the "due date" of assignments:

The assessment program is unevenly spread out which makes completing assignments well and studying for exams very difficult. A more efficient plan should be worked out.

A further comment was that assignment loads for each subject seemed unnecessarily high which made it "impossible" to handle them adequately.

### Discipline

There were no specific questions asked about student perceptions of discipline in the school but the issue was taken up with vigour by many students in the unstructured "additional comments" section of the questionnaire. The responses focussed on the dichotomy between school discipline policy and practice, disruptive classes and their control and more effective and direct punishment:

punishment for wagging class. Too many people get to grade 11 and take the new freedom for granted as I did. As a result they fail.

from my own experience and talking to the other students.

The classes can be very disruptive and a lot of teachers do not know either to handle the problem or to have the power to do anything. I think teachers should be given more power and not hesitate to punish any student disrupting the class. I also think that part of the teachers' job should be to uphold the school rules by checking uniforms and behaviour in the school grounds, (more teachers should be given lunch duty).

I don't think the school's policies and rules are backed up by the actions they make. Lots of threats about rule-breaking are made but action is hardly ever taken. The school desperately needs to look at the way teachers behave in the classroom.

Hillsdale is a good school but I think it could be improved in certain ways. Kids with bad attitudes and reputations should not be allowed in school because it gives a bad reputation but also some should be given a chance. Some teachers should be exchanged eg. art teachers should stay as art teachers and not change to maths. Teachers should stick with their own subject and not be able to teach others that is in their profession.

For better teaching and learning, better discipline and swifter, more bluntly active punishment and a wider range of library resources are needed.

The extent of the comments on this issue would suggest that a medium to high proportion of students have reservations about the effectiveness of the school's method of handling disruptive students. Comment spanned the broad spectrum of discipline issues ranging from uniform infringements to more serious breaches of conduct.

#### CONCLUSIONS

The aim of this study was to gather students' perceptions in general of their experience of teaching and learning in an inner city school and to provide data for an analysis of the school's educational objectives and the extent to which they were being met. Student perceptions can be useful in providing data to help understand and improve school learning environments (Gage, 1972;

Walberg, 1976; Fraser 1985).

The school has a student body which is diverse in its ethnic background, aspirations and expectations of schooling. Students have an interest in the development of vocational education and the development of school facilities. They have expressed dissatisfaction with the approaches of some of the teaching and support staff and disappointment with some of the school's facilities. Whilst the students made a number of criticisms and expressed sustained disapproval of some of the school's policies and practices, in general, one must conclude that the students view the school and its staff favourably. Furthermore, Hillsdale is perceived in the community as an educational institution which is responding to changing perceptions of the role of schooling evidenced by its introduction of a number of initiatives which the students seem to appreciate.

The questionnaire collected data concerning a number of matters to draw an accurate, albeit broad picture of school life but therein lay the questionnaire's foremost limitation in that it had to refer to diverse areas of school life. It appears that it

will be useful for further studies to choose one of the emerging issues to offer a more focussed, detailed and authoritative line of inquiry. According to what the students have said and the frequency of certain responses, the following are the areas that would seem to need to be investigated further:

- . Student perceptions of the library's effectiveness
- . Student perceptions of teacher effectiveness
- . Student perceptions of alternatives after Year 12

It is the intention of TELSS to follow this student survey with a stage two study which will bring together like minded students to discuss further their perceptions of schooling at Hillsdale. It will also encourage teachers, administrators and parents to consider what the students have said about their school and how this impacts on effective teaching and learning generally, but with particular reference to autonomy in learning, vocational relevance, responsiveness to diverse learning styles and the multiplicity of teaching strategies.

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