

## Mainstream or separate classes?

This month's *TCF News* considers the controversy created by Pauline Hanson's comments about autistic students being removed from mainstream classes. For all students with disabilities, it considers the dichotomy between mainstream and separate classes and why there is debate about such matters.

There is also a review of a new book on work, *Workship* by Kara Martin in which a few relevant questions for teachers are raised, then a report from Ian Cochrane and finally, there is the draft minutes of the AGM.

John Gore

## Not in my school!

So Pauline doesn't want students with autism in mainstream classrooms. (*I'll not back down*, SMH 22/6/17). Perhaps she is not the only one, but after the recent attack on her by disabilities groups and supporters of inclusive education, I think most of her supporters will be silent. Pity, because there is an issue here worthy of more exposure.

For many years, mainstream teachers have been concerned that in their class of 20 - 30 students they have been increasingly getting more students with disabilities - physical, emotional and intellectual as well as those students with behavioural disorders, and this is without acknowledging those with learning disabilities. They have sought support which is limited and have not been provided with the continuous assistance that these students and their teachers need. However, despite this, most teachers support inclusiveness policies that place these students in mainstream classes. So it was sobering to read (SMH 27/06/17) a letter to the editor by Ian Hyman OAMCA stating *Mainstream classrooms are no place for children with significant disabilities - this includes autism*. On the board of two not for profit servicing organisations for people with disabilities and with a Down syndrome child, Hyman says *In some serious cases individualised attention is required for schooling in small classes with teachers' aide support*.

For decades there has been a tussle between these two points of view with local schools increasingly catering for students with disabilities irrespective of the amount of support available. It is easy to understand the parents who have students with disabilities because they want their children to be integrated into the mainstream of society and there is no better way to do this than through participating in a mainstream class, mainly in a public

school, even if the nature of the disability stops the child from full participation in every activity.

From a Christian perspective, inclusiveness is a core principle that reflects the character of Christ where he showed extraordinary acceptance of people with disabilities and disease. His perception of the nature of the people he met also meant an inclusiveness of culture, gender and ethnicity. Inclusiveness has its origins in love, equality and fairness from the one who undeservingly included us in his family as sons and daughters and loved us as such. It's hard to argue against inclusiveness.

However, the world is not as God created it. Sin has cast its shadow and disease, suffering and death have their reign. Aging ensures that everyone experiences disability and emotional and mental stress in their lifetime, sometimes before birth. For a school system, how these matters are handled in relation to children should embrace these inclusiveness principles, but in a "fallen" world, the extent of some disabilities may require attention outside mainstream classes. Multiple physical disabilities where children cannot feed and toilet themselves, children whose behaviour has become psychotic and represents a danger to themselves as well as others and children who have difficulty in communicating with anyone else are some that are not able to be taught by a teacher, teachers' aides and other children in a mainstream class. They require either separate classes or schools. The issue for educators is how these disabilities and needs are defined and what would be considered appropriate facilities and support. It is here on the margins that the battles are fought over inclusiveness and separate education.

Special schools and classes were the norm for public schools until the late 1980s. From that time there has been a deliberate movement to place students with disabilities within local classroom. In many cases, facilities have needed to be built to accommodate these students and the support offered by teachers' aides has multiplied. Some special schools have closed and district special classes disbanded. However, special classes in primary and secondary schools and special schools continue. The extent of some students' disabilities has required special placement. Some parents have welcomed this placement while others have fought it. Everyone has their own story at the margin about a placement where it all went wrong. Education officers don't have the Wisdom of Solomon to make these decisions, but they do have the support of disability professionals and, through good communication, the family of the child.

Pauline Hanson's belief that children with autism should be taken out of mainstream classes will not win a lot of support, but it is a reminder that some students may not cope in a mainstream class and that their needs will be best met in separate classes or schools. There is no over-riding rule here. Placement must be what is best for the child, but the needs of mainstream teachers, their students and the family of the child needing support are all important considerations.

There will always be marginal cases and how these are handled will define policy and direction. Today that direction is towards mainstream classes.

John Gore

## Book Review

Kara Martin, *Workship: how to use your work to worship God*

Graceworks Pty Ltd 2017, Available from Koorong. Price \$22 approximately.

There are few Christian books that tackle the issues surrounding Christians and work. This new publication by Kara Martin is both comprehensive and challenging. It does not lumber under the weight of theological argument but expands on the theology to explore pathways to practical dimensions of work and uses concrete examples.

Martin uses the title *Workship* which comes from combining the two meanings of the Hebrew root - work and service, our work should both honour and worship God and serve God and others. The book is constructed in three sections - *A Biblical view of work*, *Spiritual disciplines of work* and *Practical wisdom for working*.

*A Biblical view of work* outlines six perspectives: Work as gift, a good thing, cursed and who redeems work? righteous working and eternal work. The Biblical referencing and reasoning is both scholarly and practical. Martin not only includes examples from everyday life but provides for each chapter a prayer and questions for *Taking it further*. I found the chapter on *Righteous working* particularly helpful because it provides a framework with characteristics and work implications for dimensions under the titles of US focussing on God and our relationship with him, IN looking at personal qualities and OUT which focuses on social justice.

In the *Spiritual disciplines of work*, Martin outlines - *Holy working*, *Gospel working*, *Prayerful working*, *Incarnational working*, *Spirit empowered working* and *Social justice working*. Again each section has practical examples and finishes with a prayer and *Take it further* questions.

As teachers and educators in a rapidly changing work environment, the last section *Practical wisdom for working* is extremely challenging. Martin tackles the issues of *Vocation*, *Work and identity*, *Working relationships* and *Kingdom business*. My questions from reading this section are: Is teaching still considered a “vocation”? Are Christians called into teaching? Is the identity of Christians increasingly being defined by their work? Is Kingdom business only direct Gospel presentation and witness? At a time when Christians teachers are feeling the pressure of increasing secularism, are they more prone to hang up their faith at the classroom or staffroom door?

*Workship* finishes with some Appendices of a practical nature relating to applying spiritual disciplines for work. In all, this is a book of insight and challenge which although comprehensively theological is practical in nature.

John Gore

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## COCHRANES RETURN FROM BANGLADESH

From Ian and Jill Cochrane

Our visit to Bangladesh earlier this year seems like yesterday. Staying for less than a month, instead of our usual two months, proved to be a wise move. The purpose of our visit in February and March was threefold: to catch up with staff at both LAMB School and Livingstone School; for me to observe lessons at both schools to see how the teachers are progressing in their teaching; but, most importantly, to seek some recovery in our relationships with Bimal, the Headmaster, and his wife Parul. To not lose the relationships with Bangladeshis that we have developed since 2005, it was important that we go.

The police had uncovered plans to bomb the LAMB Project as well as bomb making factories, which they then destroyed. This was a surprise to LAMB workers, most of whom are Muslim. For the first time it was too dangerous for us to travel by train, as the ten hour journey would have us at the mercy of "mischief makers". We needed to fly to the nearest domestic airport to LAMB Project. We were allowed to come and go from the LAMB compound freely, but were restricted to travelling less than two kilometres away.

It was so good to catch up with the many friends we have made over the last 12 years, including the chaplains and teachers at both LAMB and Livingstone schools. All but one of the teachers had improved the quality of their teaching. With that one exception, they continue to improve every time I observe them. What a joy it is to see them teaching so well!

It was amazing to see the change in Bimal, the Headmaster of Livingstone School. We both felt that we had re-established our relationship with him. What a difference it makes when you actually meet face to face, rather than correspondence by email. Bimal is very fortunate to have such quality teachers on his staff. All of the staff at Livingstone School received a cost of living increase in their salary, to their surprise and delight, with the better teachers paid more than others, as has been the case since the start of the school.

In order to keep up somewhat with increased costs of books and other materials, Bimal has once again slightly increased the school fees. This always results in a loss of students - about 60 this time, far more than usual. As a result, the school numbers are down to about 160. There are still about equal numbers of boys and girls at the school. Part of the decrease in numbers may also be due to the decision to stop the school at Year 8 for a few years until the school consolidates its position.

I remember, daily, that Livingstone School would have closed long ago, were it not for the ongoing generosity of many people over the last nine years. We are now in the final 18 months of the sponsorship scheme.

We remain totally convinced of the wisdom to make LSB financially independent, and have given at least five year's notice that all sponsorship will cease at the end of 2018, when Livingstone School turns 10 years. We have now agreed to stop the Australian sponsorship over three years, starting this year, as stopping altogether at the end of 2018 would be disastrous for LSB.

Praise and pray:

1. That the 2017 visit was one of real blessing; and
2. That we are nearing the end of the sponsorship scheme.
3. For wisdom and insight for Bimal as he makes financial decisions over the next three years especially, to enable the school to consolidate its position.