



### LIFE SAVINGS FOR THE CHILDREN OF THE FIRE

Hats off to Maralyn Parker in Sydney's *Daily Telegraph* who tells the once-in-a-lifetime story of Warren Poole, principal of Denistone East Public School in north-western Sydney, and Year 4 student Nadeesha Pallegedera. 'It was just before the bell and this fourth grade girl came into the office dragging her school bag. She opened the bag and struggled to lift out a very large tin money box. You know the type of money box, the one that has a \$50 dollar note embossed on the side. She lifted the large money box onto the counter and pushed it across to me. When I picked it up I had to use two hands to lift it – it was that heavy. When I asked her what the money box was for, she just said, "It's money for the children of the fire."

"How much is in here?" I asked,

"I don't know," she said, "but I have been saving it all my life." And then she zipped up her bag, smiled and quietly left the office. This young fourth grade student had just donated her life savings! Do they come any better?' For the record, as Parker notes, Nadeesha donated \$457.53 and two pennies. The pennies are now in Poole's top drawer. Parker also notes, since Denistone East's enrolments have jumped from 700 to about 800, 'Hopefully its seven demountables will be replaced by permanent buildings using the Rudd Education Revolution money.'

### REPRIMAND FOR PADDLING JUDGE

The State Commission on Judicial Conduct in Texas reprimanded justice of the peace Gustavo Garza for violations of judicial conduct that included giving the parents of truant children the option of corporal punishment – by paddling, that's hitting them with a wooden paddle – instead of paying a US\$500 fine. The commission found that Garza exceeded his authority by providing a 'safe haven' for corporal punishment. According to the *Brownsville Herald*, Garza said he believed the reduced truancy rate in the school district outweighed any harm from the paddling. The commission investigated

an incident in which a man, who agreed to paddle his 14-year-old stepdaughter because he could not afford the \$500 fine, was criticised for paddling too softly with what court staff referred to as the Board of Education. The commission found that Garza failed to advise parents that community service was available as an alternative to a fine and that, 'Judge Garza routinely facilitated and permitted the paddling of juveniles in his courtroom, thereby clothing the practice with an improper judicial blessing,' the commission wrote in its March public warning. Garza was not otherwise disciplined.

### KOREA EDUCATION IN CRISIS

High rankings in international assessments notwithstanding, the educational system of South Korea is in crisis, according to Lee Wal-gyu, a former principal of Seokjeong Girls Middle School in Gangwon, South Korea, writing in the *JoongAng Daily*. Public school education is being crippled by private education academies that teach students ahead of schedule, wrote Lee. 'Recently, Education Minister Ahn Byong-man made a surprising confession about public education in a talk to public school principals,' he wrote. 'He said that the teachers were outstanding, world-class instructors, but they were not teaching as well as the instructors at private academies. Since students have already covered the material at the private education academies, there was little for the teachers to do.'

### STRICTLY CLASSROOM

A pilot program in 26 British schools, funded by the Aldridge Foundation and being evaluated by a team from Roehampton University, is aiming to improve social skills and teamwork – by getting them into ballroom dancing.

### MORE LITTLIES...

According to a report in the *Sydney Morning Herald*, a whole lot of littlies started school this year. That's not surprising, except that record numbers of children are enrolling in government schools and are on average

younger than previous cohorts. The reason? The collapse of ABC Learning, and uncertainty about the future of about a quarter of its 961 centres across Australia, combined with the economic downturn. Both, according to the *Sydney Morning Herald*, have led parents to start their children at government schools a year early to avoid the uncertainty or expense – or both – of child care. Add to this the fact that we have more littlies as a result of the baby bonus scheme of the previous Commonwealth government of John Howard, and perhaps surprisingly given Howard's apparent toughness on immigration, as a result of immigration, which rose to a record level, 177,600, in his government's final term.

### ...AND MORE BIGGIES, TOO

At the same time, as Roy Martin notes in 'On balance: Public and private schools... and the global financial crisis,' in the Leadership section of this edition, the economic downturn has led non-government school students to enrol in increasing numbers at government schools. An Australian Secondary Principals Association (ASPA) survey of almost a third of Australia's government secondary school principals has found that 45 per cent are reporting rising enrolments, with government schools on average enrolling 14 students previously at non-government schools. According to the ASPA survey, 47 per cent of these enrolments come from Catholic schools, 14 per cent from higher-fee independent and 28 per cent from lower-fee independent schools. While secondary school principals say fewer than 20 per cent of these enrolments are related to the global financial crisis, they also point out that parents often don't say why they are changing schools. With more littlies and more biggies going into government schools, and a teacher shortage, the obvious question is this: how are state governments resourcing a system experiencing increased demand?

*This month's Grapevine is by Steve Holden, Editor of Teacher.*