



## In brief

### Honoured

The Prime Minister's Prizes for Science were announced last year. Winner of the PM's Prize for Excellence in Science Teaching in Primary Schools is Dr Matthew McCloskey, director of studies at Sydney Grammar School's Edgecliff Preparatory School, while the Secondary Schools winner is Debra Smith, head of science at Centenary High School in western Brisbane.

### Named and shamed

Kellogg's runs 'one of Australia's worst junkfood marketing campaigns to target children,' according to Parents Jury, which gave the cereal manufacturer two awards in its annual Fame and Shame Awards last year. Kellogg's LCM snackbars won the pester power award while Nutrigrain won the smoke and mirrors award.

### Queensland leads on equality

St Aidan's Anglican Girl's School in Brisbane won the 2010 Equal Opportunity for Women in the Workplace Agency (EOWA) Business Achievements Award for an education and training organisation with fewer than 800 employees, while Griffith University won the EOWA award for an education and training organisation with more than 800 employees.

### Under pressure

The Educational Trends Survey Report by Easy School Resources, a commercial provider of online reporting and assessment, reveals that time-related issues are a pressure for 70 per cent of respondents, while student-related issues are a pressure for 69 per cent, curriculum and lesson planning issues are a pressure for 64 per cent, and assessment and reporting issues are a pressure for 32 per cent. A massive 95 per cent of respondents said National Assessment Program – Literacy and Numeracy results should not be included on the My School website.

## Class size

THERE'S A SUREFIRE WAY TO GET THE MAINSTREAM MEDIA TO PICK UP AN EDUCATION STORY, AS **STEVE HOLDEN** EXPLAINS.

The Grattan Institute's Ben Jensen late last year released his report, *Investing In Our Teachers, Investing In Our Economy*. The report made familiar recommendations: improve the quality of applicants to the teaching profession; improve the quality of teachers' initial education and training; evaluate and provide feedback to develop teachers once they enter the profession; recognise and reward effective teachers; and 'move on' ineffective teachers – in the sense of 'move along,' presumably, although it's possible that may mean 'make a move on.'

Sure, educators would agree with most of those recommendations, and argue the case on some, but this story made it as far as Sydney *2UE*'s breakfast show with John Stanley and Sandy Aloisi. *2UE* talkback!

Why? That may be because the report also questioned education union policy to reduce class sizes. Read Jensen's report, though, and the class size argument is really just bait on the teacher effectiveness hook.

Trevor Cobbold, the national convener of Save Our Schools, took issue with Jensen's report. Cobbold accepts that the emphasis should be on teacher effectiveness, but says the class-size research actually bears closer examination.

'The report ignores research evidence that lower class sizes can significantly improve achievement by low-income and minority students,' Cobbold says. 'The central issue is to reduce the large achievement gaps between high-income students and low-income, Indigenous and remote-area students.'

## ICA in voluntary administration

Independent Colleges Australia (ICA), the non-profit entity established in 2004 that runs Casey College and Melton College in Melbourne, went into voluntary administration in November. ICA was established by the childcare giant ABC Learning before its spectacular collapse in 2008. ABC Learning founders and major shareholders Eddy Groves and Le Neve Ann Groves as well as ABC Learning director Martin Kemp were on the original board of ICA in 2004. They are no longer ICA directors.

The original make-up of the ICA board fuelled concerns about a corporate connection between the for-profit ABC Learning and ICA in 2005. Those concerns led then Queensland Education Minister Anna Bligh to revise eligibility requirements for government funding of private schools. As Bligh explained to Emma Alberici on ABC TV's *7:30 Report* in 2005, 'I think it's important to understand that, in Queensland,

schools can operate for a profit. They can be accredited to be for-profit schools but they can't get government subsidy to do that. It is the policy of our government, and certainly I know of the Commonwealth government, that public subsidy should go to schools who are returning every cent of surplus, if there is any, back into that school.'

ICA chair Frank Peach told Alberici in 2005, 'ICA today is a company which operates at arm's length from any other company.... We will establish a service agreement with a company in due course.... I think it is unreasonable to...suggest that somehow or other there is an unhealthy relationship with ABC (Learning).'

In identical letters, Casey College principal Mark Robertson and Melton College principal Andrew Ponsford told parents in November that 'a number of parties have indicated an interest in taking over the school(s) as a going concern from 2011 onwards.'



## A national curriculum... in 2013

WHEN THE NATION'S EDUCATION MINISTERS MET LATE LAST YEAR, THEY ESSENTIALLY AGREED THAT THE NATIONAL CURRICULUM NEEDS MORE WORK. **STEVE HOLDEN** REPORTS.

Commonwealth, state and territory education ministers met in Canberra for a Ministerial Council for Education, Early Childhood Development and Youth Affairs (MCEECDYA) in December to consider the draft Prep to Year 10 national curriculum for maths, science, English and history.

While an agreement looked shaky after New South Wales Education Minister Verity Firth intimated she'd follow advice from the NSW Board of Studies to reject the curriculum, MCEECDYA agreed that work on developing the curriculum should continue, with the curriculum to be finalised by October, two years later than originally intended.

MCEECDYA's formal communiqué appears to indicate that the ministers remain concerned about content, achievement standards, special needs students and implementation. Tellingly, the ministers also want to see a clear conceptual framework for the curriculum as a whole. Ministers agreed to a number of steps towards substantial implementation by 2013, including:

- establishing a national common approach to the achievement standards across all states and territories, and trialling and validating that approach
- states and territories developing additional material to support effective implementation of the curriculum to accommodate their different curriculum development, approval and implementation requirements
- finalising a clear overarching framework that assures the place and integrity of all learning areas within the context of the overall school curriculum, and different state and territory structures
- developing curriculum content and achievement standards to meet the needs of special needs students, and

■ engaging with the teaching profession in the implementation of these processes to ensure comprehensive preparation for substantial implementation by 2013.

Educators have questioned the conceptual framework since the Commonwealth government in 2008 announced somewhat preemptively that curriculum development would follow a subject-based model starting with English, mathematics, the sciences and history, followed by geography, languages other than English and the arts, with the rest to come some time after.

According to Commonwealth Minister for School Education Peter Garrett, the Australian Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting Authority will finalise, for ministers' approval, the achievement standards and any adjustments and refinements that may need to be made to the content of the curriculum by October.

The MCEECDYA agreement looks like a win for the Australian Curriculum Coalition, representing education's 13 national peak professional and industrial bodies, which wrote to Garrett last October to express 'concerns about the process of development, work to date, conceptual framework and structural issues of the first drafts, assessment and reporting issues, and, finally, implementation issues.' The Australian Curriculum Coalition also called on governments to fund and otherwise support professional learning to do with the national curriculum.

To the pessimist, the MCEECDYA decision may look like ministers have agreed not to disagree, at least not until October, when presumably the agreed next steps will have been taken. To the optimist, it may be that those next steps, successfully taken, will result in the world-class curriculum for the 21st century everyone says they want.

## Flood disaster

A third of Queensland was declared a disaster zone when massive flooding swamped the south-east of the state in January. As the waters receded and the death toll rose, teachers and teacher aides were found among those who lost their lives. The grounds and buildings of scores of Queensland's schools were inundated. They included Alpha State School (SS), Arcadia Valley SS, Baralaba SS, Bli Bli SS, Brassall SS, Brisbane State High School (SHS), Bundamba SS, Centenary Heights SHS, Central Queensland Christian College, Chancellor State College, Chevallum SS, Condamine SS, Conondale SS, Coominya SS, Corinda SS, Currimundi SS, Dalby SHS, Darling Heights SS, Delaneys Creek SS, Denison SS, Emerald School of Distance, Fairholme College, Fernvale SS, Fig Tree Pocket SS, Flagstone Creek SS, Forest Hill SS, Gabbinbar SS, Geeham SS, Gindie SS, Glenore Grove SS, Golden Beach SS, Goovigen SS, Graceville SS, Harristown SHS, Harrisville SS, Hatton Vale SS, Helidon SS, Hercules Road SS, Ipswich East SS, Ipswich SHS, Ithaca Creek SS, Jericho SS, Jindalee SS, Jones Hill SS, Kawungan SS, Kenilworth State College, Kingaroy SS, Kingsthorpe SS, Lawnton SS, Mapleton SS, Marist College in Emerald, Milpera SHS, Milton SS, Morayfield East State School, Morayfield SHS, Moreton Downs SS, Mount Tarampa SS, Mountain Creek SS, Mundubbera SS, Murphy's Creek SS, Nambour SHS, Nambour SS, Nanango SS, Noosaville SS, Oakey SHS, Oakey SS, Oxley SS, Patrick Estate SS, Peachester SS, Port Curtis Road SS, Quinalow Prep-10 SS, Rangeville SS, Rocklea SS, Ryeford SS, St Patricks School in Emerald, Sherwood SS, Strathpine West SS, Taabinga SS, Thallon SS, Thangool SS, Theodore SS, Tinana SS, Toogoolawah SS, Toowoomba East SS, Toowoomba SHS, Toowoomba West Special School, Tullawong SHS, Warra SS, Warwick East SS, Warwick SHS, Warwick West SS, Wilston SS, Withcott SS, Wowan SS and Yarraman SS.