



Tragic loss of a young life

A 13-year-old student appeared in the Brisbane Children’s Court on 16 February, charged with the murder the previous morning of fellow student Elliot Fletcher at St Patrick’s College in Brisbane’s north.

The 12-year-old student was allegedly stabbed in the chest during an altercation at about 8.15 am at the private Catholic boys’ school. He died shortly after arriving at the Royal Children’s Hospital in Brisbane, having suffered a puncture wound to the chest.

The 13-year-old student was arrested by police after he was found near the school with a minor stab wound to the neck, believed to have been self-inflicted. A knife was also found nearby.

Dr Michael Carroll, the principal of St Patrick’s College, described the student’s death as a ‘tragic loss of young life.’

‘My immediate concern is the welfare of the families affected, and all students and staff at the college,’ Dr Carroll said. ‘I have informed students and staff of this tragedy, and counselling services are available to all students and staff.’

Friends set up a Facebook page to express their condolences and post memories of the 12-year old. A few hours later, the site, RIP Elliot Fletcher, was desecrated by cyber vandals who posted abusive messages and obscene images. Queensland Police have launched an investigation.

Quake, aftermath devastate Haiti

JANUARY’S MASSIVE EARTHQUAKE ‘A CATASTROPHIC SET BACK’ FOR THE PEOPLE OF A FAILED STATE ALREADY HIT BY POLITICAL INSTABILITY, NEGLECT AND POVERTY. **STEVE HOLDEN** REPORTS

The 7.0-magnitude earthquake that struck Port-au-Prince and other densely populated areas of Haiti on 12 January has devastated the already impoverished Caribbean failed state, not least because it destroyed the United Nations headquarters, which would have coordinated the relief effort. With power and phone services cut and roads blocked with rubble, aid agencies struggled to reach many of those most in need.

Elisabeth Byrs, spokeswoman of the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, admitted, ‘We have never been confronted with such a disaster in the UN memory. It is like no other.’

Haiti already faced a serious humanitarian crisis before the earthquake hit. Political stability has been precariously maintained by a peacekeeping mission – the UN Stabilisation Mission in Haiti or Mission des Nations Unies pour la stabilisation en Haïti – mandated by the UN Security Council, which in 2004 deemed political instability in Haiti to be a threat to international peace and security in the region.

Haiti already faced a severe food crisis in 2008 without a natural disaster after the Haitian parliament refused to ratify president René Garcia Préval’s choice of a prime

minister. January’s massive earthquake has made bad matters much worse.

About half of the nation’s 15,000 primary schools and 1,500 secondary schools were destroyed or damaged. Minister for Education Joel Jean-Pierre told Reuters, ‘At the time of the disaster, just before 5 pm, there were many schools still working because this was the second session of the day, and the universities were all still working, so many, many people died inside.’ Close to half of Haiti’s 10 million people are under 18 years of age.

The UN’s Flash Appeal for Haiti is focusing on reactivating the educational sector. According to Irina Bokova, director-general of the UN Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation, reviving the education system is vital for the country’s long-term prospects.

‘The destruction of...numerous secondary and primary schools..., and the human loss of teachers and students, is a catastrophic set-back for a country already hit by other disasters,’ Bokova said in a statement. ‘Education is at the core of Haiti’s recovery and is the key to Haiti’s development.’ Whether recovery leads to the creation of a functional Haitian state remains to be seen.

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My School: Transparency or league table?

THE MY SCHOOL WEBSITE PROVIDES FAIR COMPARISONS OF SCHOOLS AS A BASIS FOR SCHOOL IMPROVEMENT – OR NOT – AND ASSESSMENT BECOMES A MAINSTREAM ISSUE. STEVE HOLDEN REPORTS.

For the Commonwealth Minister for Education and Deputy Prime Minister Julia Gillard it's about transparency. For the Australian Education Union (AEU) it's about league tables. Supporters say the My School website provides the kind of accountability required for real improvement in the see-no-evil world of education. Detractors say it enables the kind of naming and shaming that will hurt students and demoralise educators in already disadvantaged schools. Assessment and reporting has turned into a very hot issue.

Debate on the pros and cons of publishing school performance data went mainstream after the controversial My School website launched, crashed and relaunched in January. According to the Australian Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting Authority (ACARA), which is responsible for the My School site, users tried to make more than nine million hits on the first day.

By day two, the website was still experiencing technical problems, not to mention inaccurate data. ACARA Chair Barry McGaw said, 'It is clear that there are many interested in accessing school performance information. The site will provide a basis for

school improvement that we have not had in this country before.'

With a few teething problems in the website's measure of 'statistically similar schools,' McGaw might more accurately have said, 'The site *should* provide a basis for school improvement.' As Miki Perkins reported in the *Age*, Arthurs Creek Primary School north of Melbourne and Geelong Grammar School are 'statistically similar,' according to My School's Index of Community Socioeducational Advantage (ICSEA). As Perkins observed, Arthurs Creek's portables and Geelong Grammar's 'state-of-the-art facilities' don't exactly compare. ACARA chief executive Peter Hill told Perkins the ICSEA could be adjusted.

Before the website launch, delegates representing more than 180,000 teachers at the AEU annual federal conference in January voted not to cooperate in the implementation of National Assessment Program – Literacy and Numeracy (NAPLAN) testing this year unless the Commonwealth government introduces measures to prevent the media using NAPLAN data provided by My School to create or publish league tables.

The AEU will hold an executive meeting in April to assess whether the Commonwealth government has introduced appropriate measures. In the event that it hasn't, it will direct AEU members not to open the boxes containing NAPLAN tests by Years 3, 5, 7 and 9 students scheduled for May.

'All we're asking for is for the government to introduce measures to stop league tables,' AEU federal president Angelo Gavrielatos said.

Julia Gillard described the proposed action as a boycott. 'It's in the interests of individual students to have information about how they're going on tests that are sat by children right around the country,' she told Sabra Lane on ABC Radio's *AM*.

'It's in the interests of parents to have information about how their child is going in national tests and, importantly, it's in the interests of every child, every school and the nation overall to know how each and every school is performing.'

Asked whether a refusal to cooperate amounted to unprotected industrial action under the Commonwealth government's Fair Work legislation, the Minister said, 'I don't rule anything in or anything out about how we would deal with this kind of ban if it was put in place.'

Independent Education Union federal secretary Chris Watt told the *Australian's* Justine Ferrari his union, representing 64,000 non-government school teachers, was not planning a NAPLAN boycott.

'It's a matter of balancing our genuine concerns about league tables versus the value of the testing regime itself,' Watt said.

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