



OLYMPIAN EFFORT...

Three students at Canberra's Lake Ginninderra College, Lexie Feeney, Jane Waller and Belinda Hocking, competed at last month's Beijing Olympic Games, Feeney and Waller in archery and Hocking in swimming. Lake Ginninderra College, the designated college for students in Years 11 and 12 attending the Australian Institute of Sport (AIS), provides programs to enable AIS students to complete their secondary education while accommodating training and competition schedules. Speaking to Rebecca Hill from the *Canberra Times* before the Olympic Games, principal Martin Watson noted that Lake Ginninderra College taught roughly 10 per cent of the Australian Olympic team, accounting for past as well as present students.

...AND WORLD CUP THINKING

Schools across Victoria, meanwhile, are getting involved in the 2008 Homeless World Cup through the Adopt-a-Team project to fundraise for teams from some of the poorest African nations. Through the Education Foundation's ruMAD? – are you making a difference? – program and the *Big Issue*, students are learning about their adopted nation to break down misconceptions and prejudices about homeless and marginalised people. 'The Homeless World Cup seems to capture the imagination of most students, and we've had particular success with engaging the hard-to-reach kids,' says Adopt-a-Team project coordinator, Melissa Razuki. Hosted by the *Big Issue*, up to 56 teams of homeless and marginalised people will compete in four-a-side street soccer played at blistering pace on small, enclosed pitches to be erected at Melbourne's Federation Square and Birrarung Marr between 1 and 7 December.

REMOTE SOLUTION

There's remote, very remote and then there's Waitaria Bay. Waitaria Bay School in New Zealand's remote Kenepuru Sound, Marlborough, with a mere 17 students, most of whom arrive by boat, has funding for only

one and a bit teachers. The problem, according to a report in the *Marlborough Express*, is that the school is so far out of town that no part-timers want the job. In the last three years, 18 teachers have tried the two-and-a-half-hour drive from Blenheim or three-hour drive from Nelson, and passed up on the part-time option. Thinking outside the square of staffing entitlement ratios, parents and principal Odette Roper decided to fund the extra 0.7 salary themselves. Board of trustees chairman Trevor Offen said parents had raised 70 per cent of a full-time salary – between \$41,000 and \$49,000 – through fundraising, with some of the school's operations grant to make up the remaining 30 per cent. Thinking alternatively outside the square, they might've invested in a boat.

POLICY FAILURE

Still on ratios, JFK Memorial National School, located in – where else? – Limerick, is one of 40 schools across Ireland that have been required to make a teacher redundant, according to a report from UTV, which used to be called Ulster Television. The reason? Ireland's Department of Education has maintained the ratio of teachers to students at one to 27 rather than reducing it to one to 26 as originally required in the government's improvement plan for mainstream schools. That means some schools have one whole teacher too many while others have a bit of one whole teacher too many. Readers of *Grapevine* will surely know the ratios are fine in Australia, where policy's rarely a failure, but schools in Kilkenny with a teacher too many could all use a handy derailleur – that's the little wheelie system commonly used on bicycles to change gear ratios. Irish teachers could, alternatively, get a job in NZ.

DUMB AND DUMBER?

Instead of using the web to learn about the wide world, students are using Facebook and MySpace to gossip about each other and follow pop culture – which is bad. That's the view of Mark Bauerlein, a professor of English at America's Emory University

in Atlanta, Georgia, and author of *The Dumbest Generation: How the Digital Age stupefies young Americans and jeopardizes our future, or don't trust anyone under 30*. Why is all this peer-to-peer activity a problem? Says Bauerlein, the go-go digital age feeds instant gratification through an internet that encourages students to 'seek out what they already hope to find.' 'They want it fast and free, with a minimum of effort.' 'Kids are drowning in teen stuff delivered 24/7.' 'Going online habituates them to juvenile mental habits' – and discourages them from reading books. How did *Grapevine* discover *The Dumbest Generation*, by the way? On the internet. And is it a good read? Are you kidding? It's a book and it's more than 250 pages long.

ATTITUDE OR PLATITUDE?

Would you like to see ads of the 'Those who can, teach' variety, used in a British recruitment campaign since 2000, in our media? Commonwealth Minister for Education, Deputy Prime Minister and – apparently – Leo Burnett creative wannabe Julia Gillard is 'exploring the possibility of similar campaigns in Australia, combined with measures to help ensure that the best teachers are able to teach in the most challenging and rewarding locations.' The response from Australian Education Union president Angelo Gavrielatos, sounding like Leo Burnett's Todd Sampson on ABC TV's *The Gruen Transfer?* 'For far too long we have had nothing more than platitudes.... The best advice for the government and the minister is that with respect to strategies aimed at attracting and retaining teachers, what is required is a competitive professional salary for teachers and an appropriate level of recognition and respect for the profession by our elected leaders.' Would Sampson come up with a tagline like this: 'Those who can receive a competitive professional salary for teachers and an appropriate level of recognition and respect, teach?' Probably not.

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