



## ORANGES AND LEMONS

Come Budget night, more than \$400 million earmarked by the previous Commonwealth government of John Howard for schools programs is likely to be redirected to fund Kevin Rudd's Education Revolution policies. Likely losers include: summer schools for teachers – around \$70 million over the next three years; \$50,000 rewards to schools that showed an improvement in student literacy and numeracy results – around \$53.1 million over four years; and Teaching Australia – around \$7 million for 2008-09. Teaching Australia aims to promote quality teaching and professional standards, work that's currently being done anyway by existing state teacher accreditation or registration bodies. Prime Minister Kevin Rudd has a keen interest in a federalist rather than centralist approach, promoting improved federal-state relations through the Council of Australian Governments by tying Commonwealth government specific purpose payments to states and territories with specific projects and sectors. The school chaplaincy program, now also known as the school pastoral care worker program, will stay, as will the national literacy and numeracy vouchers program, which provides \$700 worth of tuition per student for students in Years 3, 5, 7 and 9 who fail to meet minimum national standards in literacy and numeracy.

## FRIGHTENINGLY USELESS

It's official, according to Deborah Hill Cone, writing in the *New Zealand Herald*, 'A significant number of teachers (are) frighteningly useless.' She was referring to a New Zealand Ministry of Education report called *Becoming a Teacher in the 21st Century*. The report 'is the result of extensive discussion and consultation, which raised a number of issues about the selection of student teachers into initial teacher education programs, the quality of programs offered, the quality of graduates and the support needed for new graduates as they progress towards full registration (by the New Zealand Teachers Council).' While the words 'frighteningly useless' are

absent from the report, an analysis of feedback from *Becoming a Teacher in the 21st Century* makes two points: 'There remains a significant challenge for all stakeholders to work together in a unified way to improve the quality of initial teacher education'; and 'There was a strong feeling that stakeholders other than providers, including employers, wanted more input into programs and into decisions about individual graduate quality.' The problem with teacher quality, according to Hill Cone, is that 'In this country, being a teacher is not so much joining a profession as joining a political party: the cult of NZEI (the New Zealand Educational Institute – NZ's largest education union).' Hill Cone also wrote favourably about charter schools in the United States, forgetting to mention a 2006 study by the US National Centre for Education Statistics and a 2004 evaluation by the US Department of Education, both of which found that charter schools were outperformed by regular public schools, although not frighteningly useless.

## FREE CHOICE

Western Australia's director-general of the Department of Education and Training Sharyn O'Neill has vowed to modernise recruitment practices by, gasp, letting schools choose their own principals, in line with the recommendations of a report released last year by recruitment firm Gerard Daniels, which said they were antiquated and impersonal – the recruitment practices, that is, not the principals.

## HOMESCHOOLING JUST GOT TRICKIER

California's Second District Court of Appeal ruled in March that Californian law requires parents to send their children to school or have them taught by qualified teachers if they want to homeschool them. The ruling means an estimated 166,000 homeschooled children could become truants overnight. The case arose from a child welfare dispute between the Los Angeles County Department of Children and Family Services and Philip and Mary Long, who

homeschool their eight children but are not qualified teachers. According to Justice H Walter Croskey, in a straight 3-0 ruling, 'California courts have held that under provisions in the Education Code, parents do not have a constitutional right to homeschool their children.' Brad Dacus, president of the Pacific Justice Institute, which will advise the Long family on a likely appeal to the state Supreme Court, told the *San Francisco Chronicle* the ruling had set a precedent that enabled the state to 'go after homeschoolers.' 'With this case law, anyone in California who is homeschooling without a teaching credential is subject to prosecution for truancy violation,' Dacus said. Justice Croskey ordered the Longs to enrol their children in a school and see to it that they actually attended, specifically closing the door on the option that the Longs might employ a qualified teacher and refusing to permit them to enrol their children at the Sunland Christian School, which had 'enrolled' – Justice Croskey's quotation marks – the Long children in its independent study program, although 'the children (did) not actually receive education instruction at the school.'

## A CITIZEN TEST? MY OATH

British school-leavers should swear an oath of allegiance to Queen and country – and there should be a Britishness Day, which sounds a bit like Australia Day, except it would celebrate – um – Britishness. That's the recommendation of a report by Lord Goldsmith for British Prime Minister Gordon Brown. An easy A-level in Citizenship? My oath. Reaction from grown-ups? Half-baked, puerile and silly. Lord Goldsmith – Lord must be his first name, kinda like Duke Ellington, Count Basie, the Artist Formerly Known as Prince, those guys – also recommends mentors should be appointed to teach immigrants about British customs and traditions: like eating chip butties, black pudding or spotted dick.

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