



# Grapevine

## DEMOUNTABLE MOST FOUL, OR FAIR

'The amount of time that has been spent trying to sort this matter in a logical fashion with the (New South Wales) Department of Education and Training (DET) over the past two years is just ludicrous. There have been more twists and turns than an Agatha Christie novel, and now the school community has decided to add a gripping chapter of its own by bringing in a crane and chains. If there's to be a truly climactic chapter, it will happen if or when the DET tries to remove the building. We're watching the site 24/7, and if the community has to go in and chain the demountable down, it will.' So said parent spokesperson and school council member William Cant, when parents and supporters of Black Hill Public School north west of Newcastle in January took the extraordinary action of preparing to chain down a demountable building scheduled to be removed from the school grounds by the DET. Cant said the school community was baffled as to why bureaucrats wanted to remove the demountable, which is being used as a library. 'By deciding to self-manage improvements at the school (under the Building Education Revolution program in 2010) we were able to add three new classrooms, a basketball court, solar power facilities and many other benefits at a cost of \$850,000,' Cant said. 'If works at the school had been government managed, we would have received just two new classrooms for the outrageous and unjustifiable cost of \$1.25 million dollars. The thanks we're getting from the NSW government is a slap in the face, with the DET demanding this demountable back.' The DET says it's continuing discussions with the school to establish a permanent library space and says the demountable will not be removed until those discussions have concluded.

## NOT ALL DOOM AND GLOOM

You can imagine how the folk at the Commonwealth Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations (DEEWR) and their state and territory

departmental peers feel about independent audits of big-budget programs, like Brad Orgill's Building the Education Revolution Implementation Taskforce. Orgill's team did a pile of detailed value-for-money reviews and cost analyses, and in December found that government and non-government projects are being successfully and competently delivered, mostly, although New South Wales 'used an overly expensive and sophisticated delivery approach to deliver relatively simple small- and medium-size projects.' There's also been an investigation by the Commonwealth Auditor General Ian McPhee into the Trade Training Centres in Schools Program. According to the report, released in February, the program's guidelines, monitoring and risk-management regime are clear and informative. More than that, the Audit Office found there is effective collaboration between DEEWR and state and territory education authorities. To date, the Trade Training Centres in Schools Program has awarded more than \$1.03 billion to fund 288 projects in 927 schools. According to a statement from DEEWR, since the inception of the \$2.5 billion program in 2008, all efforts have been directed to delivering value for money during building or upgrading of facilities.

## SMITHEREENS SUICIDE NOTE PROBABLY A BAD IDEA

'Imagine before she committed suicide, Nola wrote two messages; one to her parents and one to Peter. Write them both, making them different in subject and tone.' That's one of the 'Scraps' or creative workshop ideas accompanying a story in *Smithereens*, a collection of short stories from Oxford University Press edited by Richard Baines and studied by Years 8 to 10 students in some Victorian secondary schools. The Australian Childhood Foundation's chief executive Dr Joe Tucci raised concerns that the book may encourage vulnerable young people to rehearse self-harming behaviour. 'Anytime you're encouraging young people to engage in activities around problem behaviour, you're talking to their vulnerabilities,'

he told Melbourne's ABC Radio 774 last month. Tucci wants the Victorian government to review whether the book should be used in schools. The response by the Victorian Minister for Education Martin Dixon? 'I personally don't like the book and I think there are more suitable texts for Year 8s to study; however, it is a school's decision about which books are studied.' Parents should take an active interest in their children's education and make their views known to their child's school, he added. Childhood psychologist Michael Carr-Gregg told the *Age*, '*Smithereens* could give (students) ideas about self-harm and potentially lead them to believe the world is a bleaker, darker, more miserable place than it actually is.' Carr-Gregg warned that if a student harmed themselves after reading it, the school could be in breach of its duty of care. Really? Wouldn't that equally mean that where a school introduced a student to baseball and the student used a baseball bat to harm someone, the school could be in breach of its duty of care? What about the study of chemical reactions? Dissection in biology? Studying *Macbeth*? Carr-Gregg's warning would seem to suggest that the law is a bleaker, darker, more miserable thing than it actually is – but, yes, asking students to write suicide notes, even for a fictional character, is probably a bad idea.

## HANDWRITING SURVEY

Primary school teachers in New South Wales are invited to participate in an online University of Sydney handwriting survey addressing how handwriting is taught, time and resources available, and the impact of computer use on children's handwriting. The anonymous and confidential survey takes 15 minutes, available online until the end of Term 1.

Email [mdes6173@uni.sydney.edu.au](mailto:mdes6173@uni.sydney.edu.au) or visit <http://questionpro.com/t/CH3ybZEWPCw>

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