



In brief

Inquiry reports on state of school libraries

The House of Representatives Standing Committee on Education and Employment in June released its report on the role, adequacy and resourcing of school libraries and teacher librarians in Australia. The committee recommended, among other things, that: the Commonwealth government partner with all education authorities to fund the provision of a core set of online database resources, to be made available to all Australian schools; the new national curriculum include a component of training for teacher librarians; and the Commonwealth government commission a thorough workforce gap analysis of teacher librarians across Australian schools.

Garrett gives the nod to performance scheme

Speaking at the third National Stakeholder Forum of the Australian Institute for Teaching and School Leadership (AITSL) in May, Commonwealth Minister for School Education Peter Garrett confirmed the AITSL will play a 'crucial role' in implementing the Commonwealth government's performance scheme. 'AITSL will be central to the process of developing the new Australian teacher performance management principles and procedures,' he told the stakeholder forum, by video link.

Best by reputation

The University of Melbourne at 45th is Australia's highest ranked university in the *Times Higher Education (THE)* World University Top 100 Rankings, by reputation. Next are Australian National University and the University of Sydney, in the 51-60 bracket, then the University of Queensland in the 81-90 bracket. The *THE*'s world top 10 are Harvard, Massachusetts Institute of Technology, Cambridge, California at Berkeley, Stanford, Oxford, Princeton, Tokyo, Yale and California Institute of Technology.

Aussie students online, on top

A NEW PISA REPORT SHOWS KOREAN STUDENTS ON TOP, BUT STUDENTS FROM AUSTRALIA AND NEW ZEALAND ARE NOT FAR BEHIND.
STEVE HOLDEN REPORTS.

The *Students On Line: Digital technologies and performance* report released by the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) in June shows that 15-year-old students in Australia are equal second with New Zealand when compared with 17 other countries in terms of their ability to use information and communication technology (ICT) to learn. Students were assessed in terms of their ability to read and evaluate information on the internet, assess its credibility and navigate webpages. Students from South Korea rank first.

The report draws on results from a computer-based assessment of reading, an optional part of the Program for International Student Assessment (PISA) carried out by the OECD in 2009. The assessment measured students' ability to navigate to information, read breakout boxes and charts online, and understand and evaluate onscreen information.

In most countries, students' results in computer-based reading were broadly in line with their performance in the PISA 2009 print-based reading tests, but in Korea, Australia, New Zealand, Sweden, Iceland and Macao-China, students performed significantly better in computer-based reading than print-based reading.

'Digital technologies provide a great opportunity to make students more active participants in classroom learning, to tailor learning better to individual students' needs and to give students access to the world's current research and thinking,' said Barbara Ischinger, OECD Director of Education.

The report reveals that girls perform better than boys in computer-based reading, but the difference is less marked than in print-based reading. Girls scored an average of 24 points more than boys in computer-

based reading, compared to an average score of 39 points more in print-based reading, the equivalent to one year of schooling.

The report also reveals that computer use at school has little impact on results, while using a computer at home has a marked impact. To help students at school, computer use should be integrated into curricula and more invested in professional development for teachers to assist them in using ICT for teaching and in helping students learn, says the OECD.

Commonwealth Minister for Schools Education Peter Garrett described Australia's performance in computer-based reading as a 'terrific result.' 'High-level digital comprehension is a vital life skill,' Garrett said. 'The report also shows that the link between higher socioeconomic background and performance was not as strong as in other countries, making Australia one of the most equitable countries for digital reading skills.'

Welcoming the report, Allan Shaw, Chief Executive of the Association of Heads of Independent Schools of Australia (AHISA), applauded the emphasis in the report on the need for ongoing investment across all countries in professional development to ensure better integration of digital technologies in pedagogical practice.

Shaw also warned that digital literacy does not come cheap. 'There is an emerging concern among school leaders that the cost of implementing digital technologies in schools is out of proportion to student learning gains,' Shaw said. 'The OECD analysis of PISA results gives school leaders a very useful guide in assessing learning and teaching practice, and the use of digital technologies in their own schools, and will help them discern the where and how of investment in these technologies.'



Union splits

THE INDEPENDENT EDUCATION UNION OF AUSTRALIA HAS SPLIT FROM THE ACTU AFTER THE PEAK UNION BODY APPEARED TO FAVOUR THE AUSTRALIAN EDUCATION UNION, REPORTS **STEVE HOLDEN**.

The Independent Education Union of Australia (IEUA), representing more than 68,000 members in non-government schools, disaffiliated from the Australian Council of Trade Unions (ACTU) last month.

The split came after ACTU Secretary Jeff Lawrence changed a question in the Working Australia Census asking members of ACTU-affiliated unions to what extent they agreed unions should be campaigning on 'improving funding to and quality of education and training' to add, 'including adequate funding for public schools.'

In a letter to Lawrence advising of the decision to disaffiliate, IEUA Federal Secretary Chris Watt wrote, 'There is an unwillingness or incapacity of the ACTU to represent the interests of our members and, worse, there is evidence of an unapologetic decision to support the interests of another union ahead of ours.' As Watt also noted, 'The current positioning of the ACTU in relation to education and school funding is...inconsistent with ACTU policy.'

Lawrence told reporters, 'We've always acted in accordance with ACTU policy.'

Tasmanian school closures?

WITH TOUGH TIMES IN TASMANIA, 20 STATE SCHOOLS WILL CLOSE, BUT WHETHER THAT WILL REQUIRE A REFUND OF \$14 MILLION IN BER MONEY TO THE COMMONWEALTH REMAINS TO BE SEEN. **STEVE HOLDEN** REPORTS.

Tasmanian Premier and Treasurer Lara Giddings in June delivered a tough budget that included 20 state school closures and increased class sizes in a bid to save the Tasmanian Department of Education an \$200 million over four years.

There is, however, a hitch: 19 of the 20 schools on the Tasmanian government's closure list together received more than \$14 million in Building the Education Revolution (BER) funding from the Commonwealth government. According to the *BER Guidance Memo 4: Debt recovery process for school closures*, apparently written by Loretta Pollard, clauses 12 and 18 of the Funding Agreement specify that:

'We have a right to repayment of the calculated portion of the funding where at any time during the designated use period: (a) the facilities cease to be used principally for

the approved purpose; or (b) the facilities are sold or otherwise disposed of.

'Any amount owed to us under this agreement, will, without prejudice to any other rights available to us under this agreement or at law or in equity, be recoverable by us as a debt due to us.'

According to the memo, 'In relation to recovery of funding where construction has taken place and consistent with the efficient, effective and value-for-money principles that apply for the use of Commonwealth funding, all schools are required to use any asset funded under BER for a reasonable time period.'

Minister for Education in Tasmania's Labor-Green Government Nick McKim told Killick, 'My advice is that legally we are not obliged to make any repayments to the Australian government.'

CEOs sleepout

Chief executive officers from the education sector joined their corporate counterparts in June for the sixth Annual Vinnies CEO Sleepout across Australia, getting a taste of what life is like on the streets for thousands of homeless Australians and raising \$4 million to support Vinnies homeless services.

Participants included Dan White, CEO of the Catholic Education Office, Sydney; David Craig, Director of Marketing and External Relations at Australian Catholic University; Nat McGregor, CEO of University of Newcastle Services; Stephen Parker, Vice-Chancellor of the University of Canberra; John Davidson, School Director at Orana Steiner School, Canberra; Alison Jeffries, Principal of St Clare's College, Canberra; Anne Coutts, Principal, and Bruce Handley, Head of Senior School of Canberra Girls' Grammar School; Adrian Marron, CEO of Canberra Institute of Technology; Judy Walsh, Principal of St Michael's Primary School Kaleen, Canberra; Ros McLennan, Assistant Secretary of the Queensland/Northern Territory branch of the Independent Education Union of Australia; Warren Peat, Principal of John Paul College, Queensland; Peter Glasby, School Director at Samford Valley Steiner High School, Queensland; Natalie James, Victorian State Manager of the Commonwealth Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations; Berry McSherry, CEO, and Lynsey Murrie, Director of Hospitality/ Business at Australian Training College; Anna Negro, Acting Principal, Martina Millard, Peter Morgan and Sharon Gillett, all Deputy Principals, and Tony Grant, Business Manager of Sacred Heart College, Melbourne; Marie Wood, Senior Education Adviser, and Anne Spencer, Consultant at Catholic Education South Australia; Patricia Hindmarsh, Director of Catholic Education Tasmania; and Geoff Bateman, CEO of the Northern Territory Christian Schools Association.