

# AUSTRALIAN EDUCATION DIGEST

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## OPINION

### A Lot More needed for an Education Revolution

*Ian Keese, Online Opinion, 7 February 2008*

Until Federal Labor's education campaign began, school education had a low profile in the party's public statements. They may have been content to let the Coalition stumble from one empty gesture to another, or they may have been afraid of "scaring the horses" by raising the spectre of Latham's "hit list" of private schools. But there was also a practical reason - from colonial times school education has been primarily the role of the State Governments.

It is in the Australian States that the expertise, energy and creativity have operated and in which the knowledge of what works and does not work resides. As Barry McGaw pointed out in his presentation at the Fabian Education Conference in August last year our results on international comparisons show that these systems have put us among the world's best, but serious problems about equity are developing that need to be addressed, which I will come back to.

Maybe the biggest failing of the Coalition Government was not to realise that they knew practically nothing about the nuts and bolts of education. For them, ignorance was truly bliss.

The federal government does not run one school or employ one teacher. Of course in the 21st century the federal government does have the financial power to attempt to bully states, and this is what the Howard government did so disastrously, engaging in symbolic gestures that had little real effect on student learning - flagpoles, a minimalist simplistic view of reporting to parents, chaplains - instead of directing money and energy into what was actually working.

There was of course a more malevolent message not so subtly delivered - the denigration of public education at the expense of private education.

Where the Coalition was, in my opinion, on the right track - moving towards a national curriculum and rewarding quality teachers - what could have been a pragmatic co-operative approach was replaced by an ideologically driven heavy handedness. It is interesting that the two former ministers, under whose watch this happened are, at present at least, the opposition leader and deputy leader.

What has Labor promised so far? The proposals put forward provide only a small part of what could be done to make what is essentially a good system into a world class one. They also have the advantage of not interfering significantly in what are basically state matters. These are the promises:

Read more at <http://www.onlineopinion.com.au/view.asp?article=6928&page=1>

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## **NEW NATIONAL CURRICULUM BOARD CHIEF SPEAKS OUT**

### **Faith school boom 'creates division'**

*The Age, 25 February*

The rapid growth of faith-based schools under the previous federal government has threatened the social cohesion of the nation, according to Deputy Prime Minister Julia Gillard's most senior education adviser.

The frank comments of Professor Barry McGaw, appointed this month to be the new head of the National Curriculum Board, contrast with the Howard government's celebration of the proliferation of small independent schools, encouraged by generous public funding.

"These people often form a narrowly focused school that is aimed at cementing the faith it's based on ... If we continue as we are, I think we'll just become more and more isolated sub-groups in our community," Professor McGaw told The Age.

His comments are likely to worry the independent sector because the Government is reviewing the funding model, which Professor McGaw said had created the "worst of all worlds".

Read more at <http://www.theage.com.au/news/education-news/faith-school-boom-creates-division/2008/02/24/1203788146680.html>

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## **Class sizes may be increased**

*WA Sunday Times, February 02, 2008*

Australia's new education tsar says he supports large classes.

Barry McGaw, charged with co-ordinating a new national curriculum, said reducing class sizes was a waste of money and more specialist teachers should be hired to help struggling students instead.

The decorated academic and policy maker argued that slow learners slipped through the cracks just as easily in smaller classes as they did in larger classes.

"Teachers unions have pushed for reduced class sizes, but I think it's not the most important thing," he said.

"It's a waste of money. You don't get the best bang for your buck."

Finland, which has the highest literacy rate of 15-year-olds in the world, invested heavily in the early years of education, Mr McGaw said.

Prime Minister Kevin Rudd appointed Mr McGaw as chairman of the National Curriculum Board this week.

Read more at <http://www.news.com.au/perthnow/story/0,21598,23148756-2761,00.html>

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## **Stop holding back top students: curriculum chief**

*The Age, 1 February*

Australia has fallen behind in reading because there is too much focus on lifting the results of struggling students, rather than also making our top students perform even better, says the man spearheading the Federal Government's first national school curriculum.

Melbourne University professor Barry McGaw said yesterday that Australia's international ranking had dropped in recent years because too much emphasis had been placed on boosting the results of students at the bottom end of the performance scale, and not enough on improving the skills of those at the top.

Educators and governments should "behave like women and multi-task", he said, by working to lift the game of all students.

"The debate should not be constructed around the notion that you can only do one thing at a time. In other words, we should focus on the whole range of performance. At the bottom end, you might say that we need more specialist support, but at the top end, we should have all teachers push students out with high-level reading skills and so on," Professor McGaw said.

Read more at <http://www.theage.com.au/news/education-news/stop-holding-back-top-students-curriculum-chief/2008/01/31/1201714153287.html>

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## **HOT TOPIC: FUNDING**

### **Should Private Schools Have Their Funding Reduced, The Case For:**

*Andrew Blair, President, Australian Secondary Principals Association*

I am not a bleeding heart, not a member of a union, I was educated at an exclusive Melbourne private school. I am head of a national principals association, and I believe that we have hit the point of absurdity in school funding in Australia.

Exclusive private (or government-supported schools) have enjoyed massive funding increases, and are overfunded to the detriment of those in need.

Such a ballooning of money to private schools seems to fly in the face of the premise behind the change in funding arrangements that the then minister for education, Rod Kemp, announced in 1999, and that came into force in 2001.

Previously, funding was calculated through the Education Resources Index and changed to the socioeconomic status model, which calibrated funding to a school based on the parents' socioeconomic status, using students' addresses linked to the Bureau of Statistics database.

The neediest schools were supposed to derive the greatest benefits. But as a result, some private schools have registered extraordinary increases in Commonwealth funding since SES was introduced.

Read more at <http://www.theage.com.au/news/national/should-private-schools-have-their-federal-funding-reduced/2008/02/16/1202760669094.html>

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## **Should Private Schools Have Their Funding Reduced, The Case Against:**

*Michelle Green, CEO, Association of Independent Schools of Victoria*

Now is not the time to reduce education funding.

Today governments are recognising that Australians want more, not less money invested in educating young people at school.

Taking funds from one sector and giving it to another is not the answer.

Opponents of funding for independent schools focus on the direct contribution made by the Federal Government and ignore funding provided by state governments.

This is because when the Federal Government's figures are used and state figures are ignored, government schools look worse off.

But it's only half the story.

Read more at <http://www.theage.com.au/news/national/should-private-schools-have-their-federal-funding-reduced/2008/02/16/1202760669094.html?page=2>

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## **\$50m elite schools piggybank**

*Deborah Gough, The Age, February 17, 2008*

Victoria's top 10 most "profitable" private schools made more than \$50 million from school fees and Federal Government largesse in one year alone, with one school pocketing a \$12.7 million "profit".

All schools contacted by The Sunday Age stressed that the funds were surpluses because schools are not-for-profit organisations and the money is ploughed back into the school.

The figures do, however, show just how much money some private schools are making, and have sparked calls for the Rudd Government to rethink its commitment to the current funding model.

The top six most cashed-up schools (including their controlled entities) made an average of \$7.4 million each in the 2006 calendar year, according to audited financial reports.

The audited figures of the top 10 schools revealed they made a collective surplus of \$54.4 million, with their coffers bolstered by \$40.5 million in federal grants. The schools' combined wealth put their net worth at \$677 million.

Critics described the surpluses as "obscene and gobsmacking".

Read more at <http://www.theage.com.au/news/national/50m-elite-schools-piggybank/2008/02/16/1202760669040.html>

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## **It's class war as elite schools roll in money**

*Deborah Gough, The Age, February 17*

When it comes to schools, \$12 million goes a long way — it's enough, in fact, to run a secondary school for 1500 students for a year.

Victorian Association of State Secondary Principals president Brian Burgess said Scotch College's consolidated entity surplus of \$12.7 million, revealed today in The Sunday Age, was more than half the entire budget at his last school, Eumemmerring College, Victoria's largest multi-campus school.

"You could easily run a good eastern suburbs school with 1500 students with \$12 million. Some of the largest schools in Victoria would operate on their profits," Mr Burgess said.

Read more at <http://www.theage.com.au/news/national/its-class-war-as-elite-schools-roll-in-money/2008/02/16/1202760669091.html>

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## **HOT TOPIC: BULLYING**

### **Psychologists say fad hitting girls' schools**

*Stephen Drill Sunday Herald Sun February 03, 2008*

A cruel new slap attack fad at elite schools is driving distraught girls to seek counselling. Girls who are not promiscuous or are seen as a threat to group leaders are hit on "Slapfest Days", psychologists say. A group of girls picks out a student and repeatedly slaps her behind teachers' backs.

Psychologist Dr John Cheetham said he had treated victims from Melbourne's private schools. "It's devious, sneaky, vicious and it's humiliating for its victim," he said. "The victim lives in fear."

He said there was also peer pressure to have casual relationships with students from nearby boys' schools. "In one case, the girl was targeted because she wasn't sleeping around," Dr Cheetham said.

Bullies slap victims on the arms, back or legs. Most of the attacks happen at lockers or as students enter classrooms.

Psychologist Jennifer Garth said school would become a terrifying place for Slapfest Day victims. "It would certainly have an effect on their self-esteem and would lead to an immense amount of anxiety and possibly depression," she said.

Read more at <http://www.news.com.au/heraldsun/story/0,21985,23148641-2862,00.html>

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## **TERTIARY EDUCATION**

## Chubb's university challenge

*Emma Macdonald Canberra Times 20 February 2008*

The Labor Dawkins higher education reforms are a failure and the Rudd Government should ditch a one-size-fits-all approach to universities if it hopes to bring about a real education revolution, according to Australian National University Vice-Chancellor Ian Chubb.

Professor Chubb has laid down the gauntlet to the new Labor Government, saying the current system is a hangover from past Labor reform compounded by policy failures under "the lengthy incumbency" of the Howard Government needs a radical overhaul.

As Labor's education minister in 1988, John Dawkins oversaw a massive reform program, turning colleges of advanced education and institutes of technology into universities.

Professor Chubb says the current system serves only to penalise success and new funding and flexibility is needed to allow the best universities to prosper and to propel Australia on to the world stage.

Read more at <http://canberra.yourguide.com.au/news/local/general/chubbs-university-challenge/1186190.html>

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## LITERACY & NUMERACY

### One in five students falling short in maths

*Farrah Tomazin, The Age February 2, 2008*

The Federal Government has conceded it faces an uphill battle to lift education standards as new figures show one in five students fail to achieve basic maths standards by the time they start high school, while indigenous children, boys, and those in remote areas continue to lag behind.

Two months after Labor was swept to power promising an "education revolution", the annual National Report on Schooling has found that 20% of year 7 students do not meet national numeracy benchmarks, and a further 11% do not have basic reading skills.

Literacy continues to be a problem in Victoria, which is the lowest ranking state when it comes to year 3 reading, despite students being the best performers in writing.

One in three children are not completing year 12, according to the report, with indigenous students and children in remote schools well behind their counterparts.

Federal Education Minister Julia Gillard yesterday said she was worried about some of the findings, and admitted that "significant challenges remain" to ensure all students achieved the standards expected of them.

But she said the report showed state and territory governments were working on improving results, prompting criticism from the Opposition, who accused her of failing to hold Labor leaders accountable.

"Julia Gillard has to remember that it's her state Labor counterparts who are responsible for setting curriculum and upholding standards," said Opposition education spokesman Tony Smith.

Read more at <http://www.theage.com.au/news/national/one-in-five-students-falling-short-in-maths/2008/02/01/1201801037842.html>

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## RESOURCES

### Panasonic Releases Interactive Whiteboard for Education

Interactive whiteboards are an exciting digital technology that can make lessons more dynamic and engaging for educators and students at all stages of learning.

An interactive whiteboard, connected to a computer and a projector, becomes an extension of a computer desktop. Software such as Microsoft Word or Powerpoint, as well as education software, can be projected directly onto the board. Teachers and students can interact with information on the board in real time. The board software enables teachers and students to write or draw onto the screen, and to add notes, diagrams, text and images.

Interactive whiteboards make it easy to integrate multimedia such as video and sound into lessons, and to access global resources when the computer is connected to the Internet.

Interactive whiteboards can benefit students by providing highly visible, collaborative learning opportunities. Learning with an interactive whiteboard can also enhance students' computer skills - essential for their futures.

Teachers can easily organise and share digital teaching and learning resources, and save electronic notes and drawings made on the board for lesson review, and for digital portfolios for assessment and reporting.

Panasonic has released an interactive whiteboard designed for education - the UB-T780 elite Panaboard. The reduced glare surface and durability of the elite Panaboard makes it particularly suited to everyday classroom conditions.

Until 16th May 2008 schools that purchase a UB-T780 will receive a bonus projector (limit 1 projector per school).

Read more at <http://www.panasonic.com.au/products/details.cfm?productID=6518>

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### Book: History's Children - History Wars in the Classroom

*by Anna Clark*

What is it about Australian history? Students dismiss the subject for being boring while politicians and concerned parents fret over their lack of historical knowledge. Teachers struggle to get their kids interested in Australia's past while history wars rage in the media all around them.

For a subject that's widely dismissed for not exciting much emotion in the classroom, Australian history doesn't suffer from anything of the kind when it comes to anxious public debate over its status in schools. The classroom has become the battleground of the 'history wars', yet no-one ever asks the children what they think about Australian history and what they like – or don't like – about learning it.

Through interviews with around 250 Australian students and teachers from a wide variety of schools, Anna Clark asks how they teach and learn Australian history. This book is a lively and often surprising read that throws all kinds of challenges to students, teachers and indeed, politicians.

Online price at UNSW Press is \$29.95.

Read more at <http://www.unswpress.com.au/isbn/9780868408637.htm>

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## Dusseldorp Skills Forum Launches New Website

The Dusseldorp Skills Forum has launched a new-look website for 2008 and invites everyone with an interest in the issues affecting young people's learning, personal development and future pathways and opportunities, to visit, explore the range of information resources, and read about current and continuing project initiatives.

DSF seeks to achieve changes needed to enable all Australians to reach their potential through the acquisition of skills and knowledge.

In particular, the Forum seeks to benefit the community by stimulating innovation and educational developments through the provision, recognition and advancement of productive skills in the Australian workforce.

DSF is an independent, not for profit body which funds its own work.

<http://www.dsf.org.au/>

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## INTERNATIONAL YEAR OF PLANET EARTH 2008

### Need for Global Action on Global Warming

*Rt Hon Gordon Brown, Prime Minister of Great Britain 9 November 2007*

In the years after 1945 the world came together to rebuild broken economies and fractious societies and billions of new investment was mobilised to redevelop post-war Europe.

And at the heart of that endeavour was the Marshall Plan that transferred 3% of national income from America to Europe and it was a collaborative effort under which countries cooperated for common goals.

And at that time leaders had to fight against short-sightedness, inertia and the dominance of old backward looking dogmas but they met the challenge because they understood in 1945 that prosperity was indivisible, that to be sustained it has to be shared, and that meeting the costs and burdens and bearing the burdens were the only guarantee of prosperity and security.

And today again I believe we face another fateful choice.

Building a low carbon global economy demands a worldwide commitment on a comparable financial scale.

It will require billions of new investment in clean energy.

The climate change crisis is the product of many generations, but overcoming it must be the great project of this generation.

And this project will have to involve not just America and Europe, as in 1945, but the entire community of nations.

Read more at <http://www.number-10.gov.uk/output/Page13791.asp>

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## Pressure now on ocean fleets to go green

*Michael Richardson, Canberra Times*

Often steaming in international waters far from land, the world's fleet of ocean-going ships has largely evaded scrutiny as a source of harmful air pollution and global warming emissions.

But this lack of regulation is about to change as the fleet, which carries 90 per cent of trade, expands rapidly and pressure increases to impose tighter fuel and other standards on the trillion-dollar shipping industry.

Calls are also growing louder to include the shipping and aviation industries in any new international deal to cut greenhouse emissions.

Neither is covered by the Kyoto Protocol which expires in 2012.

The clean-up proposals and their cost implications are being closely monitored by Australia and main Asian ports like Singapore, Shanghai and Hong Kong.

Australia is one of the world's top 20 economies. As an island continent that must trade to prosper, it is also one of the most dependent on maritime trade.

Almost all of Australia's overseas commerce by volume, and 75 per cent by value, is carried by sea.

Read more at <http://canberra.yourguide.com.au/news/opinion/opinion/pressure-now-on-ocean-fleets-to-go-green/1165889.html>

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## LANDMARK RESEARCH REVISITED

### The Accountability of Private Schools to Public Values

*Deb Wilkinson, Richard Denniss, Andrew Macintosh*

Discussion Paper Number 71 - August 2004

#### Public values

Enrolments at private schools have been growing rapidly in Australia and now account for 32 per cent of the total. The Federal Government has suggested that this is, at least in part, the result of the lack of 'values' being taught in public schools.

But at the same time the affordability of private schooling has improved due to large increases in Commonwealth funding.

Despite the shift to private schooling, there remains widespread agreement in the Australian community about the values that school education should promote. These values include equality of opportunity, the right of all children to a high-quality education, rejection of discrimination and respect for ethnic and religious differences.

Everyone seems to agree that, so far as they can, both private and public schools should contribute to the graduation of young adults who are tolerant, egalitarian and respectful of others.

It has always been accepted that organisations must be accountable for the public funds they receive. The large increase in government funding for private schools prompts the question of whether those schools are sufficiently accountable. Are they committed to the public values that all schools are expected to uphold?

While the private school sector, in all of its diversity, promotes some of these public values some of the time, some private schools fail to uphold them. Yet these schools remain answerable primarily to their own boards rather than to the Australian public.

To the extent that some sectors of the private school system actively seek to be exclusive, either because of the fees they charge or on religious grounds, the private school system cannot achieve the degree of inclusiveness inherent in the public school system.

This paper considers some of the failings of private schools to protect public values and argues that the receipt of government funding should be contingent on upholding them.

This focus should not detract from the many laudable qualities of the sector as a whole, nor does it suggest that there are not some failings of the public school system. Its purpose is to attempt to balance what has been a very one-sided debate and to call for the application of the normal principles of accountability for the billions of dollars of Commonwealth and state funding spent on private schools each year.

Read more at [http://www.tai.org.au/documents/dp\\_fulltext/DP71.pdf](http://www.tai.org.au/documents/dp_fulltext/DP71.pdf)

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## **AWARDS AND PRIZES**

### **AEU Rosemary Richards Award**

All women members of the AEU and its Branches and Associated Bodies are encouraged to apply for this year's Rosemary Richards Award.

Rosemary Richards was a proud feminist, unionist and educator. She was a respected leader, colleague and friend who played a crucial role in shaping the AEU as an organisation which reflects feminist principles. Sadly, Rosemary passed away in November, 2006 after a long battle with illness.

This award, now in its second year, is in recognition of the significant contribution that Rosemary made to the AEU as an organisation and to all its members, women in particular.

Across the AEU, women's employment rights and women's union participation has been steadily advanced due to an active, committed and predominantly female membership, but challenges still remain.

All financial women members of the AEU are encouraged to apply for the Award which is aimed to extend women members' experiences and participation at all levels of the AEU (or international public education union) by supporting initiatives including but not limited to:

- the design and implementation of a discrete project;
- the establishment of a work-shadowing arrangement or a mentoring arrangement;
- research or study experiences; and
- formal and/or informal training and development opportunities.

As an example to applicants, the inaugural award project (2007) involved a recruitment and activism strategy for women working in two Victorian TAFEs. The project involved mentoring and a team approach within the union as well as the clear benefits of trialling and assessing new strategies to engage women.

Please contact the AEU Victorian Branch (03 9417 2822) if you are interested in the outcomes of this project.

The scholarship is valued up to \$10,000 per year.

Applications are due by Friday, 2nd May 2008

Read more at <http://www.aeufederal.org.au/Women/RRichards.html>

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## **Hewlett Packard Rewards Green School Initiatives**

Computer manufacturer Hewlett Packard has offered an HP Pavilion dv6733TX Entertainment Notebook PC, valued at \$1,999, to the person who can correctly identify six Easter eggs hidden on the HP Education website and most creatively describe a green initiative in their school in 25 words or less.

Entries close 31 March.

Read more at <http://h20426.www2.hp.com/solutions/edu/au/en/>

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## **REMINDERS**

15-17 March - ASCD Conference - New Orleans, USA - <http://www.ascd.org/annualconference>

4-5 April - Switch to Green Conference & Expo - Canberra - <http://www.switchtogreen.unaa.org.au>

14 April - entries close for National Youth Week National Talent Competitions - <http://www.youthweek.com>

21 April-16 May - Boys, Engagement, Bullying, Cyber-Bullying & Learning - Melbourne, Adelaide, Perth, Brisbane, Sydney - <http://www.radii.org/aben>

2 May - National Walk to School Day - <http://www.walk.com.au>

2 May - entries close for Australian Museum Eureka Science Prizes - <http://www.australianmuseum.net.au/eureka>

28-30 May - Council of Education Facility Planners International Conference - Melbourne - <http://australasia.cefpi.org/>

1-30 June - MS Readathon - <http://www.msreadathon.org.au>

3-6 June - International Conference on Learning - Chicago, USA - <http://www.LearningConference.com>

26-28 June - World Education Forum SA International Conference - Adelaide - <http://www.infront.com.au/evt/wef/>

6-9 July - National Conference for Teachers of English Literacy - Adelaide - <http://www.englishliteracyconference.com.au>

9-12 July - Environmental Education Up The Track - Darwin - <http://www.cdu.edu.au/ehs/AAEE/>

25-27 July - NSW Federation of Parents & Citizens Associations State Conference - Albury - <http://www.pandc.org.au/>

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27-29 August - Society for Provision of Education in Rural Australia Conference - Melbourne  
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10-12 September - World Conference on Mental Health Promotion - Melbourne -  
<http://www.margins2mainstream.com/>  
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19-20 September - AASE/AJCPTA National Conference - Fremantle - <http://www.gemspl.com.au/aase/>  
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20-21 October - ACSSO National Education Conference - Brisbane - <http://www.acsso.org.au>  
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25-28 October - International Research Conference on Service-learning and Community Engagement -  
New Orleans - <http://www.researchslce.org/2008conference.html>  
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## **SPONSORS**

### **Announcing a New Range of Free Student Diaries for 2009**

A new range of free Student Diaries is being launched to assist secondary schools in their forward planning for 2009. The diaries are customised to your school, and will carry a personalised cover - designed by one of your students, who is then automatically entered into a nationwide cover artwork competition

These diary ranges are produced by Academy Publishing, who have been actively involved in the education sector in Australia for the past seven years, and have produced secondary and tertiary sector diaries in New Zealand for many more years.

For more information and contact details: <http://academypublishing.com.au/>  
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Fundraising Directory - [www.fundraisingdirectory.com.au](http://www.fundraisingdirectory.com.au) Also: [www.fetesandfestivals.com.au](http://www.fetesandfestivals.com.au)  
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Drug Awareness Website - [www.drugawareness.com.au/](http://www.drugawareness.com.au/)  
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Australian Schools Directory - [www.australianschoolsdirectory.com.au](http://www.australianschoolsdirectory.com.au)  
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