



Schools In Fire Danger Zone

Back in August, we reported that 120 SA schools most at risk from bushfires would be safer this summer, with DECS guaranteeing fire-proofing and safety issues will be fixed before the beginning of the fire season.

However, firefighters have expressed fears after an investigation by the *Sunday Mail* found schools in the Mt Lofty Ranges had failed the State Government's Bushfire Safety Checklist & Audit.

Campuses in at-risk locations were found to have:

- Tree branches and twigs laying over building roofs
- Piles of dried wood left lying near buildings
- No fire breaks between schools and surrounding bush land
- Neighbouring properties with high fuel loads; and
- Roof gutters carrying flammable leaf litter.

Principals and parents also worry about the effectiveness of the new warning system to alert parents when a school will be closed on days of fire danger. Warnings will not be issued until 4pm the previous day - after students have gone home.

The CFS Volunteers Association urges all schools to comply with the safety checklist as it is a real possibility that children will be present if a bushfire breaks out.

[More](#)

Transparency Update

Last week, 150 principals got their first look at the soon-to-be launched website, myschool.edu.au. The website will be launched in 2010 and is set to provide profiles of almost 10,000 Australian schools - allowing the public to compare similar schools against each other.

Details such as student-teacher ratios, attendance rates, what happens to high school leavers and general data about students' backgrounds will be included.

But the website's main section, comparing results attained from the NAPLAN tests, has sparked the most debate – with teachers and principals worried the profiles will unfairly pin student achievement solely on academic results.

However, Education Minister, Julia Gillard believes the information would give parents not only greater choice, but the evidence they need to insist on improvements.

[First look at transparency; oxymoron no. 1](#)

Call For New Underage Drinking Laws

Under a proposed reform of drinking laws, parents could be given a \$6000 on-the-spot fine for allowing alcohol at teenage parties.

The Australian Drug Foundation is calling for tough new penalties for adults supplying alcohol to adolescents. Parents of high school students are set to receive a letter from the national drug body warning of binge drinking and their call for the new national legislation.

[No more](#)

School Retention

The State Government has announced that 2009 has seen the highest retention rate in 15 years - with a total of 77.5% of students retained in State schools from Year 8 to 12. However it is only a small increase compared to 2008, when the retention rate was 75.3%.

Premier Mike Rann attributes the new figure to raising the compulsory education age, making it compulsory to 'earn or learn' and SA's success of the ICAN initiative.

Opposition spokesman, David Pisoni, said a COAG Reform Council paper showed the nation's average retention rate was 84.2%.

[More ... just](#)

Science Targets 'Unlikely' To Be Met

A 2008 review of the State Strategic Plan shows a target to raise the percentage of Year 12 students studying maths, physics and chemistry by 15% in 2010, is 'unlikely' to be met. The latest progress report for the Plan demonstrates the proportion of students achieving a TER in those subjects has dropped from 39% in 2003 to 37% in 2008.

[More ... or rather, less](#)

Access To Grants

Two SA projects have received \$4.4 million in funding in the final round of the 'Local Schools Working Together' program.

\$24 million has been allocated to schools across Australia to encourage the sharing of sports, arts and computing facilities.

[Two more](#)

Private School Funding Revealed

Private schools will be required to reveal their financial information to the public on the new myschool.edu.au website in 2010. Public education stakeholders believe the information will put pressure on governments to reduce the amount of money given to private schools once details are made known.

Chair of ACARA, Barry McGaw, says financial information is important when trying to compare schools on a level playing field and will allow parents to equate school funding to results.

Private schools are yet to agree with the Federal Government and ACARA on exactly what will be made public.

[Private goes public ... and another one](#)

Appalling Vocational Education

According to the *Skills and Training Commission*, some schools are providing 'appalling' vocational education – prompting serious concern from the industry.

Chairwoman Denise Bradley is calling for better overall standards as schools prepare to boost the amount of vocational education available. Professor Bradley believes parents and students need to be better educated on where school VET courses could lead them.

The Business Council of Australia agreed some vocational courses were poor quality and gave students only a 'taste' of the vocation, rather than a training pathway or work-ready skills.

[More](#)