Gonski counts!
3 principals on why Gonski funding adds up
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More than 13 million children from the Middle East and North Africa are missing out on school because of armed conflicts, according to a UNICEF report.

The AEU’s campaign for a specific entitlement for domestic violence leave is gaining ground.

The AEU’s Gonski campaign coordinators have been travelling around the country to spread the word and hear how the extra funding is making a big difference to schools.

Hundreds of submissions to the Senate inquiry into the education of students with disabilities have made it clear where the funding shortfalls lie.

Hard-won leave entitlements are on the chopping block.

Renewed optimism after the changing of the guard in Canberra.

For many Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children, delays in diagnosing disabilities are compromising their education and denying their schools the extra funding they need.

Schools using more personalised, individualised teaching are getting strong results, leading to calls to resource such programs on a national basis.

A Brisbane school was shocked into action after one of its asylum-seeking students became a victim of harsh government policy.

Technology competitions take classroom learning into the real world and, win or lose, every student benefits from the experience.

Gonski funding is helping to boost numeracy and literacy initiatives at NSW’s Bennett Road Public School. See story page 8.
The report, *Education Under Fire*, highlights the “disastrous situation” in nine countries affected either directly or indirectly by wars. The hopes of an entire generation are at stake unless the international community acts, the report says.

“Attacks on schools and education infrastructure — sometimes deliberate — are one key reason many children do not attend classes,” the report says.

In Syria, Iraq, Yemen and Libya alone, the report says, nearly 9,000 schools are out of use because they have been “damaged, destroyed, are being used to shelter displaced families or have been taken over by parties to the conflict”.

While death, mayhem, hunger and disease are among the most obvious risks to civilians in these conflict zones, the collapse in primary education is another compelling reason for families with young children to escape the conflict areas.

The report also details how teachers are being detained, intimidated, injured – and sometimes even killed – forcing them to abandon their jobs and flee for their lives.

UNICEF is trying to raise over US$300 million to improve education in the region and is calling on support from the international community to work to reduce the number of children out of school.

Governments should be explicitly obliged to ensure that the right to education is a reality for all children and young people, says Education International’s general secretary Fred van Leeuwen.

He called on wealthier countries to contribute more to meet the needs of refugee and displaced children, including access to education.

The *Education Under Fire* report can be downloaded at tinyurl.com/pcwx9el
“Be bold,” the former governor general Dame Quentin Bryce urged more than 180 senior high school girls at a recent Young Women and Leadership Q&A in Melbourne. Students qualified for the event by writing up to 150 words identifying the issues they would advocate if they were in the role of governor-general for a week. The issues ranged from gender equality and other forms of inequality to refugees, domestic violence and sport.

In response to students’ questions, Dame Quentin said she’d had to grow a thick skin to deal with all the criticism she had attracted as a lifelong feminist and she admitted there was particular pressure on women ‘firsts’.

“I wish that more women leaders at international level in various endeavours, but particularly in political life, would be more open about that,” she said.

Pay equity remains a “key heartland issue”, she said, adding that she still remembered the “phenomenal shock” when she discovered just after starting work that the man sitting beside her earned a third more than she did.

There’s a vast gap between rich and poor in the opportunity to learn rigorous mathematics in Australia’s schools, a new study has found.

Unequal access to the maths curriculum in Australia is among the highest in the OECD, according to education researcher Trevor Cobbold from Save Our Schools.

The study also found that unequal access to the maths curriculum is a major factor behind the large achievement gap in mathematics between rich and poor, says Cobbold.

The study was published in Educational Researcher, the journal of the American Educational Research Association.

It found that the most affluent students generally receive better opportunities to learn rigorous mathematics across the OECD, but they have a particularly large advantage in Australia.

Australia has the sixth largest gap between the top and bottom socio-economic status quartiles in access to rigorous mathematics of 33 OECD countries, Cobbold says.


For more information go to nla.gov.au/digital-classroom

Library’s ‘digital classroom’

**Be bold**

Dame Quentin Bryce with students from Braybrook College.

The ACTU’s website for schools, Worksite, is now linked to the Australian Curriculum.

The website covers major areas of interest to students including work experience, first jobs, rights at work and the role of unions.

For more information go to worksite.actu.org.au/australian-curriculum

You can find out more about this year’s event at peoplesclimate.org.au

**29 November People’s Climate March**

Hundreds of thousands of people around the world are expected to take part in rallies on 29 November in the lead-up to the United Nations Climate Summit in Paris.

Last year’s People’s Climate March saw 700,000 individuals march in cities around the world. In New York more than 300,000, including the UN secretary-general Ban Ki-moon, took to the streets. Some 10,000 marched in Melbourne and there were also marches in Sydney, Canberra, Adelaide, Brisbane, Perth, Newcastle and Darwin.

Along with a number of other organisations, the AEU is a partner for the People’s Climate March.

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When children are forced to marry

A 12 year old girl, forced to marry a 27 year old man in New South Wales last year, became pregnant soon after but later miscarried.

Her father and the man she married have now both been jailed for more than seven years.

Wide, an estimated 15 million girls aged under 18 are forced or coerced into marriage every year — one every three seconds. But there is growing awareness that this is not only an overseas concern.

The Gillard government made forced marriage illegal in March 2013. Since then, some 49 cases have been reported to federal police — most of them girls aged under 18.

A new education resource kit aims to raise awareness of forced marriage among secondary students, and to provide valuable information to teachers and support staff.

Slavery-like practice

The government describes forced marriage as “a slavery-like practice, a form of gender-based violence and an abuse of human rights”. It occurs when “a person gets married without freely and fully consenting, because they have been coerced, threatened or deceived”.

It can occur in any group, religion or ethnicity, and there are reports of forced marriage from all over the world. While men and boys can be victims of forced marriage, most reported victims are young women and girls.

Young people are really into social justice, and they want to know about the laws that apply to them.

It can involve young people being taken overseas to marry, or older husbands being brought to Australia to marry women or girls in religious, not civil, ceremonies. Forced marriage differs from legal arranged marriage because of the lack of consent.

The resource kit has been developed by anti-slavery campaign group ACRATH — Australian Catholic Religious Against Trafficking in Humans.

Aimed at students aged 14-16 and developed to be socially and culturally inclusive, it comes with professional learning materials to prepare and support educators in delivering such sensitive material.

The program can be taught as a stand-alone unit of 12 sessions, but ACRATH project worker Liz Payne says it is best integrated into the curriculum so that forced marriage is not seen as an issue divorced from broader personal and social wellbeing education. “It’s about civics and citizenship, and about healthy relationships,” she says.

Education provides options

Understanding that forced marriage is illegal can be empowering for students, says Payne, and it can show those at risk that they have options.

Part-funded by the Australian Government and developed in conjunction with a number of human rights-based NGOs, police and education departments, the kit has been trialled in secondary schools across three states and is now being fine-tuned, ready to be launched late this year.

Payne says students responded positively to the learning sessions. “It’s a subject that speaks to young people because it’s real life. Young people are really into social justice, and they want to know about the laws that apply to them”

For young people who find themselves forced into marriage, the consequences can be wide-ranging and severe.

“They can include things like false imprisonment, early sexualisation, early and repeated pregnancies that are usually unmonitored especially if someone is under 18 years of age. Some victims are repeatedly abused as a result of being forced into marriage,” says Payne.

Resources

Find out more about the forced marriage education resource at acrath.org.au.

More information about forced marriage and the law, including a community pack available in seven languages can be found on the federal Attorney General’s website at bit.ly/IFTWS5x.
The new prime minister has an opportunity to show leadership by committing to the final two years of the Gonski package.

Early results prove Gonski’s success

In the last few months, the AEU’s Gonski coordinators have been talking to schools and principals, and explaining to the community the benefits that Gonski funding will bring.

I have travelled to Gonski events in New South Wales, Queensland and my home state of South Australia and have had the privilege of meeting educators who are passionate about their work.

People are excited by what they can do with extra resources and the effect this has on students. Low-SES schools have helped improve literacy through early intervention, targeted support and professional development. Schools with high numbers of students from non-English speaking backgrounds are able to employ community coordinators and offer ESL support. Others are finally able to focus on students with disability and learning difficulties to give them the individual support they need to lift their academic performance.

Improved results

To take one example: Katoomba High School’s extra funding has delivered improved HSC results, engagement programs, the school’s first music program, and an exciting Landcare project that turned a piece of burnt-out bushland into a community facility and a learning environment.

Young lives are being changed by quality education.

We are seeing young lives changed by quality education.

New education minister Simon Birmingham has an opportunity to show leadership on this issue.

We don’t need a continuation of Christopher Pyne’s high-handed insistence that resources did not make a difference – something every teacher knows to be wrong.

Wide support for Gonski

If Malcolm Turnbull seriously wants Australia to be an ‘agile, innovative and creative’ nation, what better way to lay the groundwork than by properly resourcing schools, so all students can reach their potential?

We have also received support from Australia’s business and community leaders at the National Reform Summit in August, which called on all governments to deliver needs-based funding and extra resources to schools.

Campaigning is tough, and it’s easy to lose heart. But this fight is too important to lose.

I’d like to thank all the principals who’ve told their ‘Gonski stories’, as well as all our members and supporters for embracing our Gonski campaign and getting involved in Gonski Week activities. Rest assured you are making a difference.

Correna Haythorpe

AEU FEDERAL PRESIDENT

Correna Haythorpe

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HOW SCHOOLS ARE GIVING A GONSKI

We already know that the extra Gonski funding is making a big difference – imagine what the final two years would do.
There’s an infectious glee that pervades conversations with teachers and principals about Gonski funding. Having the cash to buy teaching and learning materials, hire specialists and pay for ongoing professional development were items on a wishlist for many educators for years. Turning their dreams into reality was the first step after receiving the Gonski funds.

Educators in states where Gonski funding is flowing directly to schools (NSW, SA, and Queensland) now have the satisfaction of seeing the stellar results emerging from the various programs they have introduced.

But there’s a frustration underneath the satisfaction. Both the Turnbull Government and the Opposition have so far refused to guarantee the final two years of federal funding for the six-year Gonski funding package.

The last two years are crucial because they are when the majority of extra funding is to be delivered to schools. Six years of Gonski would see schools reach a level of funding that would give a serious chance to all those students struggling with some form of disadvantage. It would provide real support for the dedicated teachers and schools who battle daily to meet the diverse and often challenging needs of their students.

Gonski: supporting a complex school community

At St Johns Park High School, at Greenfield Park in Sydney, 91 per cent of the 1,000 or so students are from a non-English speaking background. Some 60 per cent of students come from families in the bottom socio-economic status quartile and more than 80 per cent are in the bottom half.

About 130 students are refugees.

It’s a complex community. Principal Sue French agrees, adding briskly “but all kids should be at school — end of story”.

The school had attracted “significant additional funding” for several years under the now discontinued National Partnerships Program, and Gonski, along with other New South Wales government programs, picks up where that left off.

French has seen “substantial change” as a result of a raft of programs and new resources.

She proudly points to a lift in retention to Year 12 from 79 per cent to 91 per cent as one measure of success.

“In last year’s HSC we had five kids with an ATAR over 99 and 15 over 90 out of a cohort of 170 who applied for an ATAR. That’s a really outstanding result given our demographic,” she says.

Of the many programs introduced, French says project-based learning is one that’s been successful at improving engagement and has allowed the school to create “really good” relationships with the community.

“When our kids exhibit their projects, their families come to watch and that further increases engagement. Our school hall was full with parents and kids for the last exhibition,” she says.

Another approach has been to focus more on individualised learning, identifying the needs for individual students. “It engages them seriously and that improves the literacy and numeracy,” says French.

Professional development for staff has also been a major element of the school’s approach.

Sue French
Principal of St Johns Park High School

PHOTOGRAPHY BY MICHAEL AMENDOLIA

Students at NSW’s St Johns Park High School and Bennett Road Public School are feeling the benefits of extra Gonski funding.
Matt Plummer has been scraping the bottom of every barrel of school funding he can find to help lift the performance of his 520 students at Bennett Road Public School in Sydney’s western suburbs.

When Plummer took on the principal’s role there wasn’t enough money in the bank to buy the materials to run literacy and numeracy programs. But $186,000 in Gonski funding came along at the right moment, allowing the school to provide the much-needed classroom resources.

“It’s pretty hard to teach literacy and numeracy without the right materials. It’s impossible for the teachers,” says Plummer.

At the same time, the school was one of the first to benefit from a NSW government project, Early Action to Success, which provided an instructional leader expert in providing literacy programs, in particular.

“With the Gonski funding, some professional development for our teachers, and the expert help of our instructional leader, everything clicked into place,” says Plummer.

The school also formed a partnership with Dr Catherine Attard, a specialist in numeracy at the University of Western Sydney.

“Getting experts in to help makes an incredible difference. We’ve got great teachers, but they need that extra input to help them be even better,” says Plummer.

The university helped with the...
We designed the professional learning to suit our teachers and what they need for the next step of advancement.

Professional learning underpins success

Professional learning, onsite at school, has been a bonus of the Gonski funding for Casino Public School in the Northern Rivers area of New South Wales.

Principal Garry Carter says that, rather than sending teachers out to learn for a "one-hit wonder workshop", the program of professional learning is tailored for each teacher and it's ongoing.
“We designed the professional learning to suit our teachers and what they need for the next step of advancement. We’re looking at the strategies that will make the most improvement for students at a point in time,” says Carter.

The school collects and analyses data that indicates the social and emotional wellbeing of students as well as their progress in literacy and numeracy and there’s been some impressive results.

“Initially we saw a huge bounce. We saw 18 months of growth in the children's academic levels on top of their chronological year growth,” says Carter.

“We were pleasantly shocked.”

Children have been encouraged to map their own learning progress, and they’ve even picked up the language of educators, says Carter.

“I was standing in a Year 2 class, listening in while the kids were describing where they were in terms of the numeracy continuum.

“One little boy said ‘Miss, I’m not quite sure whether I’m at that facile level yet because I’m still using my fingers sometimes’. The teacher assured him he was definitely a facile counter because he was using multiple strategies and not relying on his fingers all the time.

“Then a number of the children made a commitment to the kids who were still counting on and counting back, that they’d help them to work out the strategy to help them move on the data wall.”

Specialists support teachers, help kids
Having the funds to employ specialist professionals such as occupational and speech therapists has had a big effect at the school and it’s also provided new skills for teachers.

Carter says the specialists provide strategies that teachers can use in their classrooms.

“For example, we’ve had students who couldn’t sit still in a circle on the carpet so the OT came up with a strategy where the child is offered a cushion covered in different textures. It helps the child to concentrate and removes the disruption.”

The use of the specialists fits with the academic, social and emotional wellbeing of students’ development.

“A large number of our kids need to leave a lot at the school gate each morning. It’s important to have the resources to help them cope and be successful at school.” Carter says.

St John’s Park High School has been able to develop individualised learning programs for students.

YHA offers secure, clean and affordable accommodation for groups across Australia. Each year, thousands of educational groups are welcomed by YHA! Choose from a range of places to stay, from the beach to the bush to the city.

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visit yhagroups.com.au
The AEU’s campaign for a specific entitlement for domestic violence leave is gaining ground.

**Escape clause**

Employers have always been able to grant leave to employees experiencing domestic and family violence but it’s typically been taken from accrued family leave or as leave without pay.

The AEU and other unions have, however, long been campaigning for a specific family violence leave entitlement for members.

AEU federal president Correna Haythorpe says access to family violence leave sends a strong message to principals, education departments and HR professionals that family violence is not a private issue.

“Schools need to recognise that family violence is a workplace occupational health and safety issue and their obligation to a victim of family violence is as it would be to an employee being victimised in some other way.

“The ability to be able to take a day off to see a solicitor or attend court – or two days to relocate to new accommodation – is extremely beneficial,” says Haythorpe.

**Recent wins**

Educators in the Australian Capital Territory are entitled to an extra entitlement of 20 days of paid family violence leave per year. In NSW, up to five days special leave can be used although access to other forms of leave may be granted on request.

In Tasmania, where educators are entitled to personal leave of 10 days per year (20 days in the first year of service) for illness, injury, family care or domestic violence reasons, there’s an extra benefit. If the amount of leave is insufficient, educators can access up to 20 days additional paid leave per year.

Other states and territories don’t provide extra leave for family violence victims although the governments in South Australia, Victoria and Queensland have promised to introduce a new entitlement. In the meantime, educators in those states as well as those in Western Australia and the Northern Territory must use their regular accrued personal leave entitlements or make a special request.

In August, Victorian Premier Daniel Andrews announced his government would develop a model family violence leave clause for all public sector agreements, as they come up for renegotiation.

“Schools need to recognise that family violence is a workplace occupational health and safety issue and their obligation to a victim of family violence is as it would be to an employee being victimised in some other way.

**Unions united**

Under its White Ribbon campaign, the ACTU has filed a claim with the Fair Work Commission for paid family violence leave to be included in all awards.

It’s seeking the specific entitlement of 10 paid days for permanent staff (and 10 unpaid days for casuals) to recognise the critical need for women to maintain their financial security should they need time off for court appearances, medical and legal appointments and to make safety or relocation arrangements.

These are measures urgently needed. At the time of going to print, 67 women had been killed by their partners this year. An estimated one in three Australian women experience family violence.

Governments need to urgently act, says Haythorpe.

“If they’re serious about addressing family and domestic violence, they’ll fund support mechanisms rather than leaving it to individual schools to carry that burden.”

To find out more about the ACTU’s White Ribbon campaign, and sign the petition, visit: australianunions.org.au/whiteribbon

**White Ribbon Day 25 November**

The United Nations General Assembly declared November 25 the International Day for the Elimination of Violence Against Women. The White Ribbon has become the symbol for the day.

The campaign aims to raise men and boys’ awareness about how they can help prevent violence against women.

**1800Respect**

If you’re experiencing domestic or family violence or supporting someone who is, 24-hour seven days a week counselling by qualified and experienced professionals is available on 1800 737 732.

For more information go to 1800respect.org.au
The AEU’s Gonski campaign coordinators have been travelling around the country to spread the word and hear how the extra funding is making a big difference to schools.

Sharing your stories

Kelly Bowman will be covering almost 30,000 square kilometres in the NSW south coast seat of Eden-Monaro over the coming months as one of the Gonski campaign coordinators out and about in the 18 target seats.

Known as a bellwether seat that usually indicates the outcome of an election, Eden-Monaro was won from Labor by Liberal Peter Hendy at the last election. It’s a diverse electorate, says Bowman, and includes both rural and high-density urban areas, such as Queanbeyan.

“It has one of the most multicultural communities in Australia too. There’s extreme wealth as well as very poor areas and there’s a big Indigenous population,” she says.

Bowman began her teaching career almost 30 years ago in the rural town of Bombala, famous for being briefly considered as the site for the federal parliament. She’s since moved to Queanbeyan and teaches visual arts at Karabar High School.

Of the 63 schools in the electorate, Bowman has so far visited about half, receiving a “very warm” reception. She’s talked to principals and teachers and attended P&C meetings to explain how Gonski works and the importance of getting a commitment from all political parties for the whole six years of funding.

The Coalition government has only agreed to fund the first four years but the final two years of the package contain most of the funds.

While there’s now a new prime minister and education minister, there’s been no change in the government’s position on Gonski funding.

Parents “fired up”

Bowman says parents are extremely interested and concerned about schools funding.

“After the P&C meetings I feel like I’ve been to a revival meeting. The parents are so enthusiastic and fired up once they understand what it’s all about. You can almost see the shades falling from their eyes. Then they get a bit angry because they feel they’ve been duded,” she says.

In fact, some of the P&Cs are organising a forum to put the pressure on for funding and inviting politicians and candidates.

Bowman’s also made contact with former professional rugby league player and independent Queensland Senator Glenn Lazarus, inviting him to visit his old school, Karabar High, to talk to the school’s successful rugby team. “He had a tear in his eye at one point, reflecting on his own experiences at school and what made a difference to him,” says Bowman.

Meanwhile, principals and teachers are enthusiastic about the difference made by the first stage of extra funding, says Bowman.

“All the principals, especially in primary schools, have been talking about their ability to obtain specialist aids for kids in support units. And there are the schools that can now afford literacy and maths programs to address gaps in kids’ development.

“It’s just so important that we win this campaign for the extra two years of funding because so much work has already been done and it is a golden opportunity to have significant dollars put into schools.

“When I retire, I want to leave the classroom in better condition than it was when I was a student in the 70s!” Bowman says.

Remarkable outcomes

Paula Nunan says working as a Gonski campaign coordinator in the Queensland seat of Longman has been uplifting.
Nunan, who teaches Year 7 at Murgon State High School, northwest of the Sunshine Coast, was happy to take a break from her regular job because she feels strongly about the need for the Gonski funding.

“My area is rural and has a high degree of educational complexity and we need the Gonski funding. We need it to make a difference for the students and staff at my school. I was happy to relocate and do anything I can to realise the dream so we can make a difference,” she says.

One of the most successful programs she’s heard of to date has been at the small Wamuran State School where there’s been “remarkable outcomes” in behaviour management after the school used its Gonski funding to introduce a program called Fun Friends.

“Or there’s one example of a principal saying things like: ‘We now have kids who love to write.’

“That’s when, as a teacher, I get ‘goose bump’ moments because teachers are able to turn around behaviour and performance to make a real difference.”

The new programs and their beneficial effects are making teachers feel valued as professionals too, says Nunan.

“Teachers finally have the capacity and resources to do what they need to do to help their students achieve.”

The community is noticing the difference, she says.

“A principal told me yesterday that her school is now the school of choice in the area. Parents have said they’ll physically move so they can send their child to the school. That was a real boost for that school,” Nunan says.

“That increased community confidence is because people can see the benefit of those programs.

“It’s been a real privilege doing this job, being able to go into other schools and communities and to hear such positive responses,” Nunan says.

Teachers finally have the capacity and resources to do what they need to do to help their students achieve.
Hundreds of submissions to the Senate inquiry into the education of students with disabilities have made it very clear where the chronic funding shortfalls lie.

BY MARGARET PATON

Gazing into the disability gap

When the AEU surveyed principals across Australia for its State of Our Schools report this year, more than four out of five (84 per cent) respondents said they didn’t have enough funding for students with disabilities. They said they had taken funding from other areas of their school budgets to compensate.

Principals called for more classroom assistance, specialist support and professional development for teachers.

Not surprisingly, these requests mirror concerns in the 254 submissions lodged with the Senate inquiry into the education of students with disabilities.

A 2012 Australian Bureau of Statistics survey found that 190,000 students with disabilities had received extra education funding, but there had been no support or special arrangements at schools for another 133,000.

The full extent of underfunding will be updated and clarified when the Nationally Consistent Collection of Data on School Students with Disability (NCCD) is finalised before the end of the year. The federal government has promised to use this data to deliver increases in funding for students with disability from 2016, but there are still no details as to how this is to be achieved.

Brendan Millar, principal of Footscray West Primary School in Melbourne, says he is concerned about students falling through the gaps in the system.

“In particular, the need to support students with autism is much greater than it used to be,” he says.

“It takes an incredible amount of time for staff to put in a submission, which comes from a serious concern about a child and their ability to learn. The submission’s not accepted in time because they’ve been asked to add information. It’s an ongoing challenge.”

His school’s experienced leadership team has learnt to work around limited budgets, but that hasn’t diminished its concern, says Miller.

At Lucindale Area School in South Australia, principal Adrian Maywald says the goodwill and expertise of teachers, staff and the local community regarding students with disabilities is “incredible”. But his school has to dip into its regular resources for those who don’t fit into the bottom fifth percentile that’s funded, such as those with behavioural, social-emotional or intellectual issues.

There is no extra funding for over 100,000 school students with disabilities.

A Senate inquiry, due to report on 3 November, has received more than 200 submissions on the subject.

Under-resourcing and funding submission difficulties contribute to teacher stress and burnout.

BRIEFLY

Theresa Duncombe and her son Ben have lobbied the federal government on access to education for children with disabilities.

Theresa Duncombe and her son Ben have lobbied the federal government on access to education for children with disabilities.

A 2012 Australian Bureau of Statistics survey found that 190,000 students with disabilities had received extra education funding, but there had been no support or special arrangements at schools for another 133,000.

The full extent of underfunding will be updated and clarified when the Nationally Consistent Collection of Data on School Students with Disability (NCCD) is finalised before the end of the year. The federal government has promised to use this data to deliver increases in funding for students with disability from 2016, but there are still no details as to how this is to be achieved.

Preliminary data from the 2013 NCCD shows that 13.1 per cent of students have some form of disability, and that 88.2 per cent of these needed some form of adjustment at school. This is far in excess of the 5.3 per cent currently receiving funded support.

It’s no wonder principals say that current funding is inadequate and making it tough for schools to meet the needs of students with disability, despite the best efforts of educators.

Theresa Duncombe and her son Ben have lobbied the federal government on access to education for children with disabilities.
“Often we’re told we can’t expect any funds or resources, but they will give recommendations and strategies, which we need to resource ourselves,” he says.

His school’s partnership location is spread over a 250km radius with support services 300km away at Murray Bridge. This often means that, when he completes referrals for support services, there is no-one to provide them in a timely manner. He has suggested a more flexible approach so the funds become available in cash form.

He also advocates video conferencing for professional development, to save funds for training teachers offsite.

The whole disability funding situation means teachers “miss out” in terms of their life balance and wellbeing, and it’s not sustainable, he says. “Eventually you’ll have burnt-out staff, particularly in country regions, as well as students who aren’t achieving their full potential due to support processes being ineffective.”

Stress and burnout
An increase in staff burnout, staff turnover and stress-related issues due to under-resourcing were cited by Aspley East State School in a submission. It has one of the largest special education programs in mainstream Brisbane primary schools, with about 60 of its 800 students having a recognised disability.

Leanne Smith, the school’s head of support services, cautions against funding alone being seen as the answer.

“There needs to be a structural change in the school system [to boost] professional development,” she says. “There’s no funded time off for teachers in Queensland to do a special education degree. Anyway, in the modern classroom, teachers are so emotionally and physically tired, there’s no time or energy left to study.”

In the State of Our Schools survey, almost two-thirds of teachers said their training hadn’t fully equipped them to teach students with disabilities. Smith says it’s very difficult for teachers to implement individual curriculum plans for such students without support.

“It’s not unusual for a teacher to be responsible for at least two to five individual curriculum plans in addition to teaching the mainstream curriculum to the class.”

Despite teaching staff at Aspley East State School having done extensive professional development and research in inclusive education, challenges remain. “We don’t have the staffing resources to implement high-impact best practices, such as co-teaching, to any significant degree. Nor do we have sufficient funding to provide the level of high-quality professional development recommended to us by [internationally recognised special education consultant] Dr Loretta Giorcelli.”

Compulsory unit
AEU federal president Correna Haythorpe says chronic underfunding of disability education is a growing issue for schools despite numerous reports on it in recent decades.

“Students with disabilities can participate in schools and get great results with in-class support, equipment and individual learning plans. All these things require funding.”

All teaching courses should have at least one compulsory unit on disability education and graduate teachers should have access to a disability education expert in their first two years of work, she says. Ongoing professional development in disability education for more experienced teachers is also crucial.

The AEU has urged state and federal governments to commit to the full six years of Gonski funding, including the overdue provision of the full disability loading. With that commitment, there’d be extra funding for those 133,000 students with disabilities.

“The federal government promised at the 2013 election that they would extent disability funding to all students who needed it by the 2015 school year,” Haythorpe said.

“This promise has still not been delivered, and there is no funding set aside in the Budget for the 2016 school year. It should be a top priority for new Education Minister Simon Birmingham to provide full support to all students with disability who need it.”

“Gonski was an incredibly brave paper to write,” says Footscray West principal Millar. “It shows public education outperforming private schools by 10 per cent academically... It would be nice to see the recommendations followed up.”

Margaret Paton is a freelance writer and casual primary school teacher.
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Hard-won parental leave entitlements are on the chopping block.

How you can help protect parental leave

“It’s important to remember that these hard-won benefits are essential to a progressive society,” says Haythorpe. “There’s a high level of ignorance in the community about the need to support women in their caring responsibilities for children and older people.”

If access to the government scheme is curtailed, says Haythorpe, educators will be left with their state-based entitlements (varying from 14 weeks in different jurisdictions). They won’t be able to have the additional 18 weeks, leave, forcing them to return to work earlier. That will reduce the rate of babies being exclusively breastfed for the first 26 weeks (the period the World Health Organisation recommends).

PPL entitlement cuts will also affect overall female workforce participation and gender equity - already low in Australia – and increase economic pressure on the majority of households that depend on two or more incomes.

“Oh other effects will be long-term but no less significant,” says Haythorpe. “They include the loss of parental bonding and the effects of that on child development; and our ability to attract new recruits to teaching, especially in areas where we have skills shortages.”

The AEU urges teachers to take action by joining the ACTU’s Save Paid Parental Leave campaign and signing a petition to be presented to the Senate.

For more information, visit: australianunions.org.au/ppl
New hope for early learning

Prime Minister Malcolm Turnbull's cabinet reshuffle means there’s a new minister, Simon Birmingham, responsible for the sector. And, there’s hope that Birmingham will reconsider the way the sector is funded to provide some certainty to educators, parents and children.

This comes after the sector was revolutionised, following the decision to provide a minimum 15 hours per week, delivered by a university-qualified early childhood teacher, to all children in the year before primary school.

But it's never been permanently funded. The federal government has been handing out funds for 12 months or two years at a time. Then there's an anxious time while the sector waits for state and territory governments to sign agreements each time to receive the funding.

The sector is calling on the new minister to permanently secure the funding to allay fears that the federal government wants to pull out of funding early childhood education.

If the states and territories were left to foot the bill alone, the 15 hours would definitely be at risk says Howard Spreadbury, vice president with early childhood responsibilities at the AEU's South Australian branch.

"It's likely the states couldn't afford to pay the Commonwealth's share," says Spreadbury. "It'd be poor social policy by the Commonwealth to remove a level of support that's been in place for years.

The flow-on effects of dismantling the 15 hours would be widespread, says Shayne Quinn, vice president (early childhood) of AEU's Victorian branch.

"Centres have already gone through a massive and challenging change process to implement universal access," says Quinn. Taking it away would create as much disruption but with detrimental consequences, she adds.

"The effect on staff of all the change, including the inevitable loss of jobs, would be devastating. It's also possible that jobs in the sector would become less attractive because of the reduced hours," she says.

"It's alarming that we're having these conversations when everyone knows the importance of early childhood education. The research makes it abundantly clear that it's an investment that we can't afford to ignore."

For Kerry Strugnell, preschool director at Kurralta Park Community Kindergarten in Adelaide, removing the funding for the 15 hours would be "a huge step back."

"The 15 hours has just been fantastic professionally, pedagogically and for the community. In fact, the community has really embraced it," she says.

At Howard Springs Primary School in the Northern Territory, preschool teacher Helen Dickson says a return to 12 hours would mean a major restructure.

She says there's pressure on preschool places and it's likely that class ratios, which are due to reduce next year, would remain high to accommodate more children.
Playing catch up
Universal access was one of a number of reforms that brought big changes to the sector, including a new national system of regulations – the Early Years Learning Framework and the National Quality framework.

The reforms are an indication that Australia needs to catch up to high-performing countries. For example, OECD countries that perform best are investing much more in early childhood education and care than Australia, says Susan Krieg, Flinders University’s co-ordinator of early childhood programs.

“The countries that see childcare as a public, shared and important responsibility demonstrate the relationship between consistent ongoing investment in early childhood education and long-term educational outcomes,” says Krieg.

A body of research supports that notion. For example, a major longitudinal study in the United Kingdom has confirmed that preschool enhances a child’s development.

The Effective Provision of Preschool Education Project, carried out by London University’s Institute of Education, studied 3,000 children, their parents, their home environments and their preschools.

The researchers found that the amount of time spent at preschool was important and that disadvantaged children in particular benefited significantly if they attended a good quality preschool.

“It’s valuable research, says Krieg. “What’s particularly powerful about the work is that it’s so big and it’s longitudinal. And it differentiates between the quality of the programs offered.”

Krieg is keen to see major Australian research looking at the effects of the 15 hours. She recently published the results from her own latest research, Access, quality and equity in early childhood education and care: A South Australian study.

One of the key findings underlines the importance of quality. The research confirmed the relationship found in other studies between the quality of the centre and the changes in a child’s cognitive development.”

Kerry Strugnell
Preschool director

More time brings more benefits
At Bunyip Kindergarten in central Victoria the extra time provided by the 15 hours universal access has helped to build better quality relationships with children and their parents.

Teacher and educational leader Freida Davidson says the extra five hours provided by the federal funding made a big difference.

“We’re able to achieve a lot more in the program. And there’s also more time to identify children with developmental issues. It just gives us more time to observe and then take action,” says Davidson.

Parent Raelene McLean agrees. “The extra hours help the children be more socially ready for school and have more skills and knowledge.”

That means, she says, that there’s less burden on the school and avoids the need to have extra support for the students that aren’t coping.

McLean also sees a difference in the children. “They have more of a sense of belonging or of ownership. It’s their place.”

There’s also more time to get out into the community and practise their skills, says Davidson. “We can fit in more visits to the primary schools, to help with their transition, and to the supermarket with a list and the retirement village for a singalong.”

The lack of certainty about the funding is disappointing, says Davidson. “There’s a lot of balancing to do: timetables, staffing arrangements, the availability of space, and the needs of families and communities. So much hinges on whether we have the 15 hours or not.”
For many Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children, delays in diagnosing disabilities are compromising their education and denying their schools the extra funding they need.

BY CHRISTINE LONG

Disadvantage undiagnosed

For Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children in regional and remote communities, having a disability diagnosed is often a difficult, drawn-out process. In the meantime, schools, teachers and parents are left to do the best they can.

"If you’re an Aboriginal child with a disability, it’s almost a double risk factor for your education," says Scott Avery, policy and research director at First Peoples Disability Network Australia.

Autism is one frequently undiagnosed disability. Autism education organisation Positive Partnerships says the lack of visibility of Aboriginal people with autism means it’s "mostly unheard of" in many areas. "Lack of appropriate services, appropriate diagnostic assessments and tools, the absence of trusted relationships, and the fear of shame and blame have led to lower numbers of children formally diagnosed with autism."

When Avery visited a school in northern Queensland, teachers were asked if they had taught children with autism. "Two or three put their hand up," he says. "Then we asked how many had taught kids with repetitive behaviours that are impacting on their learning, and half the room put their hand up."

Conversations with community members revealed difficulties in getting assessments for children with hearing problems, too. A child with a suspected disability can be in primary school before an official diagnosis is made, says Cass Brown, a teacher at Ski Beach, near Nhulunbuy on the Northern Territory’s Gove Peninsula. "I’ve worked as a preschool teacher and, even though we’re not psychologists, we pick up things and we have to note things down," says Brown. "We call in our specialist teacher and do the paperwork - it just seems never-ending. We need to do that before we can get to a paediatrician and have that conversation with the parents."

"We find that, if you start in early January in preschool, they probably aren’t going to get assistance until they get into the primary school setting. By then you’ve missed almost two, or even three years, of having assistance for that student."

The delay has significant implications. "It means the child is withdrawn most of the time," says Brown. "They don’t have access to good-quality education. Instead of dealing with the issue of the child having the disability, we look at it as a behaviour issue."

Our struggle in Ski Beach is because we’re remote and don’t have the resources the cities have. The parents can’t just take the child to a paediatrician, and when one does come they’re booked up in advance."

In the relatively large township of Nhulunbuy a paediatrician flies...
in every two weeks. “But you’re not going to get that opportunity out in a remote community,” says Brown.

An undiagnosed disability can contribute to “double discrimination” if it’s a factor in the expulsion or suspension of a student, says Avery.

“We’ve heard of things like kids getting suspended for not turning up for school. I can’t get my head around that. Is it because they have a disability and they’re just not engaging with the practice?

“That’s one of the things that bothers me about blanket measures like attendance. We need to be smarter, more nuanced, in understanding some of these factors.”

**Alcohol-related disorder**

Foetal alcohol spectrum disorder (FASD) can also go undetected. An affected child might be quiet and withdrawn or very violent, because its spectrum is so wide-ranging, says Melanie Baldwin, women’s officer at the AEU’s NT branch.

“With something like FASD, literacy levels will remain very, very low because they don’t have the capacity to retain information,” she says.

Teachers who are less aware of how FASD impacts on children may treat it as a behavioural issue. “We’re aware of it because we live it,” says Brown. “But if someone else has just come up from the southern states, it’s not as talked about down there.”

The lack of a diagnostic tool is a significant barrier to getting FASD diagnosed. “The science is way behind,” says Avery. “The tool is still in the developmental stage and not ready to be rolled out, but everyone in the community knows about FASD.” They might not use that term, but they can see children with behaviours that affect learning.

There is an assessment tool for hearing, he adds, “but they can’t get the assessments done to the level that’s needed.”

Baldwin says teachers now face a higher level of high-needs and special-needs children in their classrooms as a result of services being cut and the impact of a “massive drinking culture” that has developed in the past 30 years.

It requires teachers to draw on all their skills to cater to individual children’s needs, she says. “Our schools have done a lot of work on FASD and teachers now know there’s only so much we can do. We try to do a lot of visual learning. Teachers pull out all the tools they have in their kit.”

This goes beyond the classroom, to the sensitive conversations teachers have with parents. Some parents find it hard to acknowledge their child has a disability, says Brown. In one case she had to have five conversations with a mother before she would admit there was an issue that needed addressing.

“That’s a skill we have to learn. How do we do this without the parent feeling that you could be picking on their child.”

Having a qualified special-needs teacher can help, but they can be difficult to attract and retain. A school in the NT’s Barkly region has been trying to recruit one for eight months, says Baldwin, adding that it made a huge difference when a qualified person was in the role. “She knew about networks she was able to get working and she insisted that specialists come. She also sat down with teachers on a weekly basis and supported them in modifying...
It’s really about kids having different learning needs, and we need to accommodate that.

Scott Avery
Policy and research director at First Peoples Disability Network Australia

learning programs for the children.”

A student with muscular dystrophy, who was in a wheelchair, was given daily help to improve her fine motor skills. Now she has to wait for fortnightly visits from a physiotherapist who travels from Alice Springs.

“Some of the extra daily routines the special education teacher put in place supported interpersonal, physical and emotional growth,” says Baldwin. “That’s now fallen back onto families and the above-and-beyond flexibility of classroom teachers.”

Conditional hitch

Many funding structures depend on a child getting some form of diagnosis, which can have a flow-on effect. One child gets diagnosed and receives a certain level of funding, but the teacher intuitively knows there are other children who also need support.

“All the kids get some kind of support rather than it going only to those who’ve gone through the technical process,” says Avery. “Our concern is that a smaller amount of funding gets apportioned among the bigger group.”

Baldwin laments the overturning of the Gonski report’s position on needs-based funding, noting that change is occurring where it has been implemented in South Australia and NSW.

Avery sees progress being made through Positive Partnerships’ work in raising awareness of disability, which is delivered by a consortium known as Partnerships between Education and the Autism Community (PEAC). The government-funded organisation has developed resources, including a behaviour template and a general adjustments checklist, specifically for teachers and schools working with

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students with autism.

Last year it launched a storytelling animation, Finding Out About Kevin, to help raise awareness of autism in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities. It was developed in conjunction with Jaki French, a Kamilaroi woman from Moree in NSW, who has a son with autism, and in partnership with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities throughout Australia. The animation, which is used at community get-togethers, has an accompanying resources pack and activity booklet.

Avery says the resources are also aimed at helping schools build an inclusive culture, which is vital to ensuring that children with disabilities have a good schooling experience.

The Positive Partnerships resources kit has a whole-of-school audit called ‘How inclusive is my school?, a storybook about difference called Djambii the Different Kookaburra and resource guide for teachers.

“They also have workshop training modules with strategies for inclusiveness in teaching practices,” says Avery. “The teachers who do the training become the champions for their school, and it has a strong community flavour to it.

“You can count the number of days kids go to school, but quality of teaching is a hard thing [to quantify]. But that’s what’s making the difference.”

Christine Long is a freelance writer.
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Targeted practice

At Camberwell South Primary School in Melbourne, the emphasis is on personal growth. Spelling is one example, says teacher Amanda Schmidt. “We’ve seen such growth from the start of this year compared with when we recently tested. “The students have grown enormously, which is something we can be really proud of. We’re teaching more effectively according to the children’s needs,” says Schmidt.

The school has been running what it calls personalised learning programs for several years. Data is collected and used to assess where students are at, and group and individual teaching is planned from there.

It’s a well-resourced program that involves professional collaboration and provides coaching in the use of assessment tools.

“We also have a few staff members who have time release allocated, either to support other teachers or to get the assessments done,” says Schmidt.

This model ticks the boxes for Dr Peter Goss, lead author of the Grattan Institute’s recent report Targeted Teaching: How Better Use of Data Can Improve Student Learning. One of his key messages is that this style of teaching demands three things: time, tools and training for teachers. However, the report found what many teachers experience – these resources are often in short supply.

The report argues that programs such as those at Camberwell South Primary, and Shalvey Public School in Sydney’s west (which is part of NSW’s $203 million Early Action for Success strategy) are needed to improve learning outcomes across the nation, which is falling behind on international benchmarks.

With proper resourcing, targeted...
teaching programs can improve performance, says Goss. The report also found that support at system level is often inadequate. “Teachers ought to have the toolkit that helps them to understand where every student is at, and that then guides what comes next. Easy said, very hard to do,” Goss told Australian Educator.

**Ability grouping**

The idea that good teaching depends on ascertaining what a student already knows, and teaching them accordingly, is not new. It goes by different names and there is some debate about different models. Individualised, personalised, targeted, visible, differentiated, clinical and evidence-based teaching are underpinned by the philosophy of education first proposed by Lev Vygotsky about 90 years ago.

Professor Geoff Masters, of the Australian Council for Educational Research, says early attempts at individualised learning included grouping students by their assumed ability levels. “So in Year 6 you’d have different classes - 6a, 6b, 6c - where students were permanently grouped,” he says. “We’ve moved right away from that and I’m certainly not advocating we go back to it. There’s not much research evidence to support it because it tends to reinforce students’ views of themselves as good or poor learners.”

The ‘mastery learning’ of the 1970s and 1980s is recalled by Dianne Siemon, a professor of mathematics education at the Royal Melbourne Institute of Technology. “It was very much individualised. They were taught at point of need and they had individual programs,” she says.

“Teachers ought to have the toolkit that helps them to understand where every student is at, and that then guides what comes next. Easy said, very hard to do.”

It was an approach that involved testing and pre-testing of particular skills and topics, in contrast to assessing skills in problem-solving, reasoning, collaborating and creating, which she and many international experts say need to be the focus of 21st-century schools. Researchers and education departments say best practice calls for mixed-ability classes that offer broad and deep learning. The emphasis is on student progression and using assessment data to establish and understand starting points for teaching and learning, and for monitoring growth or progress over time.

Siemon’s research has found a spread of up to eight years in mathematics ability in a single-year level. This will come as little surprise to teachers working with a wide range of student abilities. “We have a diverse range of kids, from really high achievers, to some with low literacy, down to those still reading at Year 1 and 2 levels,” says Liam Holcombe, acting head of department for effective learning and teaching at Harristown State High School in Toowoomba, Queensland. “Catering for that in a classroom is quite challenging, especially for new teachers learning the ropes around behaviour management and school practices, as well as delivering a curriculum.”

**Better than heroes**

The Grattan Institute report says governments and system leaders need to improve training for new teachers in assessment and the use of data. On-the-ground support and professional development is also needed for experienced teachers and school leaders.
“In every place we saw, targeted teaching requires more time, and that's going to require resources from somewhere,” says Goss. “We argue that systems should provide the resources, at least while the new approach is being bedded down.

“It's virtually impossible for teachers to do on their own. That's the 'hero teacher' model. There are a lot of heroes out there, but there's a better way. Individual schools developing their own method from scratch means lots of reinventing some of the same approaches. More effective is for education systems to say, ‘Here's some ways of doing it that work well. Can you take one of them, adapt it and make sure you work together so you own it locally?’”

The report doesn't advocate individual learning plans for every student. “I think that would be too hard and not worthwhile. It’s about finding some way that the range of material taught in the classroom is accessible to each student, and then tracking that they are learning,” says Goss.

In Queensland, the federal Gonski funding has been distributed to schools under the state's Great Results Guarantee. However, Queensland Teachers’ Union says it’s unreasonable that the department requires teachers to develop individual learning plans for every student performing below the national literacy benchmark. In the union’s view, it’s an important workload issue. “Onerous documentation identifying which classroom experience applies to which learner erodes the professional judgement of teachers and doesn’t reflect an understanding of the continually evolving learning journey of students,” says the QTU's position paper.

Sam Pidgeon
QTU Vice President

“Your mainstream teacher of a class with 25–28 students isn't resourced to the level to provide individualised learning for every student.”

“Our response,” says QTU vice-president Sam Pidgeon, “has had to be that your mainstream teacher of a class with 25-28 students isn't resourced to the level to provide individualised learning for every student. We have the view that 'differentiation' is different to the concept of personalised or individualised planning.”

A mainstream teacher with a full class doesn't have the time or the capacity, or even the specialised skills in some cases, she says. “If you haven’t got the resources, then you can’t deliver that plan for that student. It’s frustrating for teachers when they know what intervention would help, but they don’t have access to it.”

Pidgeon says individualised learning poses an even greater challenge in a high school under traditional timetabling structures. Students work with up to eight teachers who see them for a maximum of 210 minutes a week.

Goss and Masters acknowledge this as a factor. “In primary schools there’s an opportunity for teachers to get to know the children in much greater depth,” says Masters.

Big success
At Shalvey Public School in Sydney's outer northwest suburbs, the Early Action for Success strategy has been in place for three years and principal Tanya Rose says it has been a big success.

“This year our mid-year data is showing that over 80 per cent of our Year 1 students are achieving ‘at expectation’ in reading. In numeracy, over 90 per cent of our kindergarten students have already achieved the end-of-year expectations [in September].”

The program has provided a range of resources, from an instructional leader, funding for professional development in differentiated instruction, the equivalent of an additional 1.3 teachers, and a grant to assist with literacy and numeracy development.

Early Action for Success has cost NSW about $70 million a year.

“The program builds the capability of teachers and schools,” says Goss, “Our estimate is that it would cost $300 million to roll out an equivalent program for 20 per cent of schools across Australia for the first three years of schooling.

“We think it would be a great down-payment on targeted teaching for all students in all school levels across Australia.”

Lisa Waller is a freelance writer.
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Iranian Mojgan Shamsalipoor, 21, was only a few months away from completing her secondary education when she was removed, without warning, from community detention in Brisbane and transferred to a detention centre in Darwin, leaving the Yeronga State High School community in shock.

The school, where Shamsalipoor is enrolled in Year 12, has students from 55 countries. In addition to Shamsalipoor, there are 46 other students at the school who are either in community detention or on bridging visas.

Teacher Jessica Walker, who is also a member of the school’s P&C and a Queensland Teachers’ Union representative, says what happened to Shamsalipoor has left students reeling.

“There is so much uncertainty and none of us knew Mojgan would be taken in this manner. They are all very fearful,” says Walker.

“There’s been a cloud over the Year 12 cohort. They’ve had a harsh introduction to reality and how asylum seekers are treated in our country,” she adds.

The school community had already been discussing how to respond to the government’s policy on asylum seekers, but this incident galvanised it into action. The next day, 50 members took part in a rally in Brisbane against the Border Force Act. In the following weeks, the school community launched a petition and a Facebook page, and with QTU support, held three rallies to bring Shamsalipoor’s situation to public attention.

The school’s P&C vice-president Neil Davidson was one parent who saw it as imperative to speak out against a system that was deliberately indoctrinating fear of difference.

“When you are elected to represent the best interests of the school and school community, the only way to demonstrate the right thing to do, is to do the right thing,” he says. “My concern from the bigger-picture perspective is that switched-on kids have a pretty good handle on what’s right and what’s wrong, and we train it out of them.”

At the time of writing, there had been one hopeful development: a submission to the Department of Immigration and Border Protection requesting a partner visa for Shamsalipoor, who is married to an Australian resident, had been deemed worthy of the immigration minister’s attention.

Shamsalipoor’s transfer, however, was not an isolated incident. Another four Iranian students from state schools in Brisbane were transferred, without warning, from community detention to detention in Darwin. All were minors.

Extra pressure
At the end of July, Australia had 480 children in community detention and 3,764 on bridging visas, according to departmental statistics.

An Asylum Seeker Resource Centre spokesperson says Iran doesn’t accept forced repatriation — its citizens must return voluntarily. So, a return to detention in Australia can be a way to put extra pressure on those who have had their asylum seeker claim rejected to leave Australia of their own accord.

For school communities, the situation highlights the need to be aware of the stresses that impact on asylum-seeker students.

A resource centre fact sheet published in December 2014 says asylum seekers arriving without a valid visa, or without clearing immigration at the airport, aren’t eligible for permanent protection. Instead, they must reapply for temporary protection every three years and can’t sponsor family to come to Australia.

Walker explains what those legal changes can mean for asylum seekers’ educational and work prospects. For example, they cannot access tertiary education in the same way as a permanent resident. Instead, they would be a full-fee-payer, like an international student.

“We’ve been trying to see if some of them can perhaps enrol part-time and do one subject a semester,” she says, “but at the moment we’ve got no answer on that.”

Plus, temporary residents are ineligible for loans. Walker says one of the school’s Year 11 students hoped to buy a car and tried applying for a low-interest loan under a scheme administered by Good Shepherd Microfinance. However, because he...
had a temporary bridging visa, he was ineligible.

“We have families going through the process where their [asylum seeker] claim has been denied and we’re trying to support them. At the same time, they are experiencing immense pressure to return to the countries they fled from – Iran, Iraq, Sri Lanka and Bangladesh,” says Walker.

The transition from community detention to a bridging visa is a time of great upheaval, she says.

“In community detention, they can’t work. Adults can access only six weeks of basic English education. They don’t have access to money, so they are in a house paid for by the government, with a high level of support from case workers. Children under 18 are entitled to attend school.

“When they get their bridging visa, there can be pressure on them to move very quickly, and they don’t have good support around that.

“The parents have very limited English, so the children usually have to miss school to find a place to live and be the family’s interpreter.” Students often miss exams and assessments during this time.

Active support

Yeronga State High School has been active in offering asylum seekers additional support. Under a program specifically for refugees, Home of Expressive Arts in Learning (HEAL), the school gets an art therapist two days a week. School funds are paying for a youth welfare worker four days a week.

In September the QTU created a special-interest group called Teachers for Refugees and Asylum Seekers. This is a direct response to the impact government policy is having on every member of the school’s community. At any school with asylum seeker students, it’s important that the P&C is aware of the situation, says Walker. Yeronga State High School’s P&C agreed to buy senior jerseys and cover formal costs for students on bridging visas when, on turning 18, they were no longer given financial support for their education.

“Having the P&C on side creates a sense of community around these young people and it gets into the broader community,” she says.

She also urges schools to initiate discussions with students and their families during enrolment so they understand their circumstances, and to develop links with caseworkers and external organisations. In her case, that has included St Vincent de Paul, the Queensland Program of Assistance to Survivors of Torture and Trauma, the Multicultural Development Association, Access Community Services, the Australian Red Cross and Zonta.

●

Christine Long is a freelance writer.

There’s been a cloud over the Year 12 cohort. They’ve had a harsh introduction to how asylum seekers are treated in our country.

Jessica Walker
Teacher at Yeronga State High School

The Yeronga State High School community has rallied around asylum seeker Mojgan Shamsalipoor.
Teacher Lachlan Stewart sums up the appeal and value of technology competitions for schools, saying they allow students to “extend themselves, network with like-minded individuals, further their career prospects and have fun”.

The competitions give students opportunities to work on exciting, motivating, real-world projects, from coding to building robots. Their knowledge and skills are challenged as they grapple with more complex technical concepts than would normally be covered in typical technology, science or mathematics classes. They can also get to connect with industry experts while preparing their entries and during the competition event.

Here is a look inside some of the main competitions:

**Young ICT Explorers**
Stewart, the information technology teacher at Mansfield State High School in Brisbane, enters his students in the Young ICT Explorers competition. Projects have included creating games with artificial intelligence and fully functional web browsers.

“I work with the students to come up with an initial idea, then support them through developing their product and documentation,” says Stewart.

“The students are enthusiastic, but they face hurdles and obstacles, and that’s where teachers can help. Particularly with time management, as they are still completing a full school load.”

In the Brisbane event this year, individual Mansfield State High students won first place in the Year 7-8 category and equal third in Year 9-10.

**F1 in Schools**
F1 in Schools is one of the world’s largest secondary school technology challenges. Students design, build, test and race miniature F1 cars capable of speeds up to 80km/h. The cars are made of balsa wood and powered by compressed carbon dioxide.

The competition involves more than nine-million students from 17,000 schools in 33 countries. About 40,000 Australian students compete each year.

The project applies STEM (science, technology, engineering and maths) components to the real-world task of building a car, says Simon Voorwinde, science teacher at Ulverstone High School in Tasmania, which competed in the world finals in Singapore in September.

“It’s an integrated approach to learning and it’s student driven. They have to raise the money and liaise with industry for technical advice and expertise, they have to develop a logo and posters, and they have to have a marketing presence, which is usually in social media, but also in the community.”

Students use Autodesk’s Inventor 3D computer-aided design program and Flow Design virtual wind tunnel software (both free to schools) to simulate wind tunnel testing to see how their design changes affect the car’s aerodynamics. They also use ANSYS simulation software and a 3D printer.

The school has also taken part in the international RoboCup robotics competition. “Competitions give students a goal to work towards,” says Voorwinde.
Australian STEM Video Game Challenge
The STEM Video Game Challenge began in Australia last year for students in Years 5–12.
Participants from Mill Park Secondary College in Melbourne have been designing and creating video games with multimedia program Scratch.
“They arrive to class early and want to stay back after class, and even after the school day,” says Year 7 IT teacher, Jaclyn Curnow.
“One talented student designed a game involving a brave pug dog that needed to escape from a house where dangerous chemicals were stored. The persistent student animated the pug’s feet so they realistically moved while it explored items in the house to decide if they were dangerous or safe.”
Students’ work is showcased to a wider audience that includes their peers and families, as well as the judges from the video gaming industry, says Curnow.
“Video games are challenging, whether students are playing or creating them. Creating them fosters critical thinking, media and information literacy, and communication and collaboration skills.” It also builds resilience, she says. “Some students expect their game to work the first time. They get frustrated and have to work through it.”
A lack of knowledge about technology isn’t something to be afraid of, adds Curnow, who taught German for 15 years before teaching technology. “I’m a technology newbie, but I can facilitate the

FIRST Robotics Competition
This is a worldwide challenge that, since 1989, has grown to involve 350,000 students in 32,600 school teams from nearly 80 countries. Students participating in the FIRST Robotics Competition raise funds for, design, build, program and operate robots.
At Willetton Senior High School in Perth, students have been working with Curtin University and students from other schools to form a robot design and fabrication team, says science teacher Bruce Dopson.
“The school promoted this robotics program to Year 10 and 11 students to expose them to engineering in a supportive environment where they can learn and use engineering applications in real-life situations.”
Last year they designed and built a robot that placed an exercise ball in a high or low goal.
It’s not, however, all about robotics. “A major part is the design, multimedia management and application, public relations, and sponsorship and financial management of the project,” says Dopson.

Cynthia Karena is a freelance writer.

Perth’s Willetton Senior High School’s robotics program last year saw students building a robot that placed an exercise ball in a high or low goal.
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**Cloudart**
(iOS, $1.29)
Cloudart automatically creates a word cloud from text. Garbutt uses it to “deconstruct language” in his English classes. Before students read a poem or a speech, he types the text into Cloudart and shows students the resulting word cloud. “I ask students to figure out what the poem or speech is about, and their thoughts about the tone of the piece,” he says. “Their eyes glaze over if you show them the poem first, but they’re interested in trying to figure out the meaning through the word cloud. It’s a tool to guide them in thinking.”

**iMovie**
(iOS, $6.49)
Garbutt uses iMovie in his year 7 class to encourage students to think about creating different types of movies. “For example, how they can convey different types of emotions with silent movies, telling the story through characters and emotions rather than relying on narrative.”

**Showbie**
(iOS, free)
Showbie is a paperless way of collecting and marking assignments. Students download assignments and upload them to their individual folders when completed. “I can access their assignments from anywhere, and I can annotate with text or voice. It’s easy to use, and tailored for teachers and to the classroom environment; specifically for classroom assignments,” says Garbutt.

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**Michael’s tip**

Don’t be afraid to explore app stores to look for apps,” says Michael Garbutt. “I go to iTunesU (Apple’s education apps) and read the descriptions. Also, keep your ears open at professional learning days and conferences, people usually talk about apps they like.

**worth a look …**

**Everyday Racism**
(Android, iOS; free)
Students can challenge their understanding of what it is to be racist by walking for a week in the shoes of a Muslim woman, an Aboriginal man or an Indian student. They will face typical daily scenarios in the form of texts, tweets, images and videos that are designed to challenge their assumptions. Students can choose how to respond, either by speaking up or staying quiet. Anti-racist charity All Together Now, the University of Western Sydney, Deakin University and Melbourne University are behind this project and the content of the app is informed by their research into racism. See also alltogethernow.org.au

**Space: A Brightpips Guide**
(iOS, $5.99 from iBooks)
This Australian-designed resource is an interactive ebook rather than an app, but it includes games, videos, and beautiful images. For example, there’s a fun game to land the Apollo spacecraft on the Moon as gently as you can; a section on Living in Space has a NASA video showing how to wash your hair in space; and information about the moon includes an interactive exercise to see the phases of the moon as it revolves around the earth.
The need for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander content in early childhood education puts an onus on teachers to examine their own beliefs, assumptions and level of knowledge, says a new book.

BY MARGARET PATON

Prompting Indigenous perspectives

Teaching Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander perspectives – ways of knowing, seeing and being – is always important in early childhood education, even if no child in a group being taught identifies as Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander, says Queensland University of Technology lecturer Lyn Zollo.

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander perspectives are a necessary part of planning, she says. Teachers should include a prompt in every piece of planning and evaluation they do along the lines of: How can I make connections with Indigenous knowledge or perspectives?

“Embedding Indigenous perspectives is not something you can do as a one-off lesson or learning experience and then forget,” says Zollo.

“This means teachers must be confident and capable in acknowledging the stories and knowledge of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and passing this on to all the children they work with. They need to review their views, beliefs, assumptions and understandings through critical thinking, awareness and engaging in reflective practice. It’s helpful for teachers to build relationships with their local communities and observe the appropriate local protocols.”

This message is part of a strong Indigenous theme in the new book Being an Early Childhood Educator: Bringing theory and practice together (Allen & Unwin), which Zollo has co-authored with Felicity McArdle and Megan Gibson. McArdle teaches undergraduate and postgraduate education students at QUT and Charles Sturt University, and Gibson and Zollo are lecturers in early childhood education at QUT.

Their book is a guide for early childhood teachers on how to make the most of their practicum experience and transition from student teacher to professional.

Resources challenge

Aboriginal and Torres Strait history and culture are a cross-curriculum priority to be embedded across key learning areas in the national curriculum. This is echoed in national frameworks including the Early Childhood Australia Code of Ethics, the Early Years Learning Framework and the Australian Professional Standards for Teachers. Many support materials and resources have been designed to help teachers embed Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander perspectives.

However, in Being an Early Childhood Educator, the authors challenge educators and teachers to interrogate the resources. They draw on the work of Indigenous colleagues such as Jean Phillips and Maureen Ah San to offer prompts including: how does the author...
There are multiple ways to see the world... Be active in helping children to recognise and celebrate differences.

"We’re not about preparing teachers who will simply replicate existing systems and taken-for-granted practices," says Zollo. "They need to be critical thinkers and stay up with the most contemporary research about teaching and learning. We want students to question the status quo, critically engage with multiple ideas and, particularly as pre-service or graduate teachers, build relationships and be professionally respectful as they develop their critical communities of practice."

To tackle this, the book offers a suite of tools, tips and strategies including a multifaceted practitioner’s portfolio.

"Students do have the scope to change their own thoughts and practices as they graduate and beyond. The portfolio can act as a progressive bookmark, a reminder for stimulating and expanding their ideas," says Zollo.

The authors encourage students to keep work samples and a journal to continuously record practice and build on the suggested toolkit of strategies and teaching tips for behaviour management and learner engagement. They say these will help teachers revisit and ethically analyse their teaching standpoint, theories and practices. A portfolio framed around the Australian Professional Standards for Teachers is a valuable tool for teacher registration/accreditation.

Students are also encouraged to have a positive attitude towards the number of practicums they will complete during their studies, and to take responsibility for ensuring they are a success.

McArdle, Gibson and Zollo note that the teaching profession demands good health, both physical and mental. Pre-service and graduate teachers should create, and integrate into their professional practice, their own personal health plan covering exercise, nutrition, stress management and the need to maintain connections outside their teaching sphere.

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There are multiple ways to see the world... Be active in helping children to recognise and celebrate differences.

Lyn Zollo
Author
In a world dominated by technology, one teacher is using her passion for the environment to help kids unplug and reconnect with the beauty of nature.

BY CYNDI TEBBEL

The great outdoors

WE ASK ...

KAMILA KRAUZE

Applying for grants is a rigorous, often thankless process that is becoming increasingly important for schools needing to fund extracurricular activities. It’s an art that Kamila Krauze, a classroom teacher and the sustainability coordinator at Glen Huntly Primary School in Melbourne, has mastered in order to improve the school grounds by turning asphalt into gardens and creating native habitats.

During her seven years at the school, Krauze has raised more than $18,000 in government and community grants for the projects. She says, at first, she wasn’t sure about her coordinator role but it has become a passion, with all-important buy-in from students and the local community.

“Winning grants year after year has allowed us to initiate wonderful projects for the kids to be part of and learn from,” she says.

At this year’s Green Schools conference, which promotes sustainability in the curriculum, Krauze received the Excellence Award for Environmental Education in recognition of her work.

Signing up parents to the school’s Green Club is a vital part of Krauze’s plan to raise sustainability awareness in the classroom and beyond to help children develop ‘green behaviour’.

Students and their parents have helped create and maintain vegetable and bush tucker gardens, improve rain filtration, house the school’s chickens, and attract native birds and other wildlife.

Working bees

A core group of parents is dedicated to working bees once a term, says Krauze.

“We’re trying to increase that so we can also look at boosting our use of recycled materials, ways to reduce spending, and auditing the biodiversity of our gardens.”

She has been keen to recognise and celebrate student contributions to the school’s sustainability platform. Last year she launched an annual Green Evening to showcase achievements in the classroom and gardens and has raised money for charities supporting endangered animals.

“It’s about helping children understand that they can’t change everyone, but they can change their own actions. With every project we do, they learn about responsibility, care, organisation and teamwork, and it affects their interaction with each other and their parents.”

Krauze does much of her sustainability work outside classroom teaching hours, but always has ideas for new projects - composting is on the agenda – and never feels anything is unachievable. “I just take it step by step.”

When the students get home, they are excited to share the practices and behaviours they learn at school, she says. Now she’s engaging them in creating a book of sustainability stories for wider distribution, including to the local library and children’s hospital.

Another group is working on a water and hydroelectricity poster for a competition.

“I’m very interested in leading sustainability in education, and I love it when children say they want careers in environmental studies or looking after animals.”

Krauze took part in a survey of Victorian state schools that showed that children were evenly split in their preferences for spending time indoors or outdoors. It was evidence of the struggle to put aside computer games and the like and get involved with more imaginative play, she says.

“We know there’s a need to promote technology, but I hope the [indoors] kids don’t disconnect from the beauty of nature.”

Cyndi Tebbel is a freelance writer.
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