



Cartoon: Blake Archer

## Letting chaplaincy stay in our schools

### EDITORIAL

By **BLAKE ARCHER** and **TYGA MUIR**

THE idea of removing the chaplaincy program from Australian schools could pose a problem to the many students who use this service. Recently, the Australian government was forced to stop federal funding to the chaplaincy program. Late last year, the High Court decided that funding of the program would be passed down to the states and territories.

There are many hard-working chaplains in Australian schools. They are very important as they provide support to children with various issues, often in a fun and engaging way. Children who indicate they require the assistance of a school chaplain are encouraged to work through issues in a supportive and caring environment.

Robert Branham has been the chaplain at Wallsend Public School for three years. Many students agree that Mr Branham is a very significant part of the school community. Over the four days a week Mr Branham is onsite, he sees on average 25 students who need his help.

The children at Wallsend Public School believe that there

should be more kind people like Mr Branham in schools. It would seem his popularity does not stop just at the students. The staff at the school also enjoy having Mr Branham around, particularly when he brings in chocolate.

It has been estimated that approximately 2900 schools throughout Australia engage the services of the school chaplaincy program. Chaplains not only provide pastoral care but are required to respect other's views, values and beliefs. They are there to support all students, regardless of the students' world views.

Two university studies conducted in 2009 and 2012 indicated that schools overwhelmingly value the role their school chaplains perform.

Despite the enthusiasm many schools have shown for this program, there is little government support, and funding the scheme does not seem to be a priority. The High Court's implemented state funding via the National School Chaplaincy and Student Welfare Program is set to expire in December.

For the time being, the students and staff at Wallsend Public School choose to remain optimistic about the future of keeping their chaplain. They will continue to benefit from the excellent student support he provides and the daily chocolate that he brings.

# School chaplains to face unknown future

By **OLIVIA KAKOULIDIS** and **DARCY NEWLIN**

THE school chaplaincy program has been running since 2006, providing pastoral care to students Australian schools. Recently the High Court decided that this program will no longer be funded by the federal government and it now relies on the backing from state and territory governments.

Wallsend Public School's chaplain, Rob Branham, is pleased that the NSW Government has decided to back the chaplaincy program for now. "I love it," he said. "It means that I still have a job. It's great when you can still continue to do what you love to do."

In between the stopping of federal funding and the state government stepping in to cover the cost of the program, Mr Branham worked at the school on a volunteer basis for two months without pay.

"We were given the option as chaplains to work or not to work, because the funding wasn't there; there was a time when I wasn't paid at the beginning of the year," he said, adding "It wasn't a big decision if it meant I could still come in and see the students every day".

Although the future of the school chaplaincy program remains unclear due to some opposition and the uncertainty of state funding, some argue there is still a need in the community for this service. At Wallsend Public School alone, Mr



Jacob enjoys the support of school chaplain Mr Branham.

Branham sees more than 20 students a week that require his assistance.

"There is a huge need for support workers in schools. I'm not sure about the future though," he said.

"Chaplaincy kind of has a religious connotation to it, some people are a little scared by that even though religion doesn't come into what I do."

The current state funding for school chaplains is due to end this

December. If the program is not financially supported to continue, Mr Branham stresses that it is still important to provide assistance to the many students who need it.

"I do know this. If the funding runs out and the program doesn't continue, we still will have people who are willing to volunteer and continue to support students, so that's a good thing".

## Former student enjoying dance success

By **COURTNEY HODGES** and **JASMINE GRAY**

AN ex-Wallsend Public School student is thrilled to be the only dancer from Newcastle to perform at a prestigious international event in Sydney in August.

Makayla Auld has come a long way since her days at Wallsend Public School. She started dancing when she was three, following in the footsteps of her mum, nan and aunties.

"I love to dance," she said, "It expresses who I

am". "It is good exercise and keeps you on your toes. It also helps with memory, especially with all the dances I have to remember".

Makayla, in year 7, credits her old primary school with being a big influence on her dance success, having won the school's performing arts trophy. She explained that participating in Star Struck and being a school minister had a big impact on her.

"The teachers all gave me the confidence to be who I am today," she said.

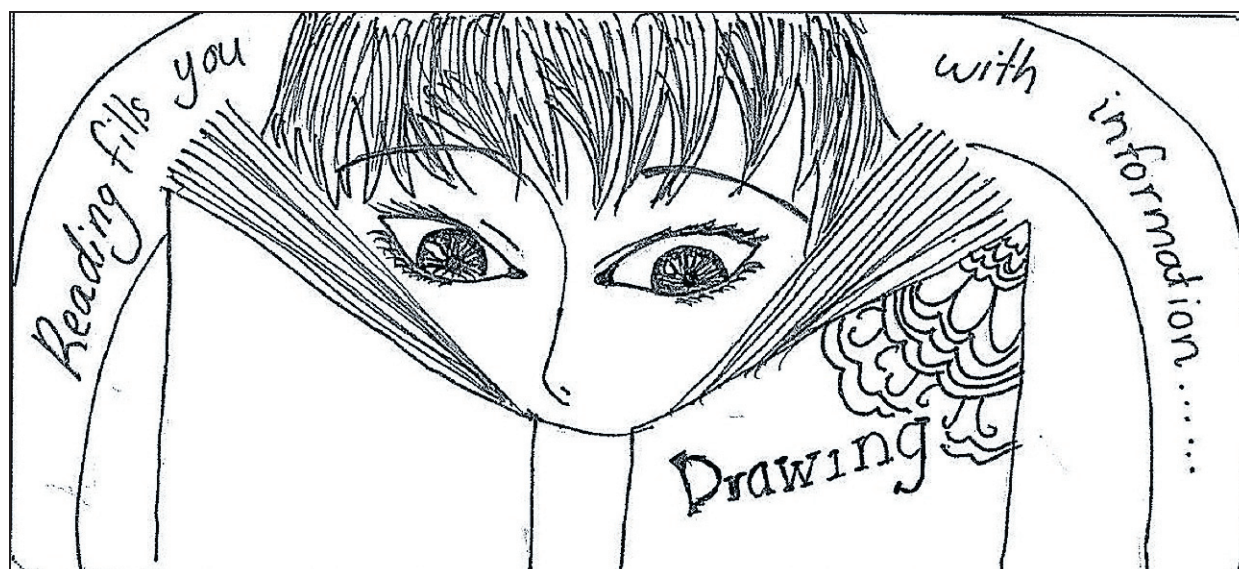


Courtney and Jasmine help Makayla celebrate her success in performing arts.

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