

Let pupils choose their path of faith

EDITORIAL

By EMMI DE MESTRE

MOST public schools have an opt-out process in regard to religious teachings in school time. This means that the option of not participating in these seminars requires a parental signature, which is often not supplied.

High school students are expected to take on responsibility for themselves, rather than rely on the safety net of their parents, however they are not allowed to choose one of the most personal things for themselves.

If religion is to be taught on public school time, the option of participation should be left up to the students subjected to it.

Legally parents or caregivers have ultimate say and responsibility over their children, guiding them into adulthood, however during teenage years children begin to fully develop their own opinions and want to make decisions about their own life, one of which is religion.

In Australia we have religious freedom, the option to follow, or not follow, the religion of our choice, though this right is not extended to our next generation and is often forced upon them.

In most school environments

Christianity is the predominant religion taught during these lessons. Many students identify as agnostic or atheist but their parents force their religious beliefs upon them, enabled by the school.

While parents are entitled to teach their children according to what they believe, within public schools these children should have the right to choose whether they are preached to or attend a secular class during the time.

One student, when asked if he wanted to attend a religious seminar replied, "not really, but my parents won't let me go to the non-religion classroom".

If the situation were a little different and bosses demanded all workers attend religious teachings, there would be public outcry, reminding the person in power that they were unable to force their own beliefs upon others.

Why then is this right not extended to children at schooling age?

This is not to say that all students should be able to pick and choose what class they attend on the basis that they don't like that class, but they should be afforded the same freedoms as adults in this particular case.

All Australians have a right to schooling in a secular environment. Parents should not be able to deny this right to their children inside a public school, nor conversely should they be able to deny their child religious instruction.



Cartoon: Louise Luo



RISK: Asbestos has been located in the area. Picture: Mohammad Vorha

Fibres found at work sites

By ALEESHA CALDWELL

ASBESTOS is a naturally occurring silicate mineral fibre that was greatly used during house production in the '60s and '70s.

Though natural, if it is inhaled the fibres pose a massive risk to personal safety.

Some of the health risks include asbestosis, lung cancer and mesothelioma.

While these illnesses are serious, symptoms don't usually show for about 20-30 years, which means early treatment or a cure is hard.

Many building developments have been in progress lately on the Central Coast, including a McDonald's in Umina as well as the

demolition of houses in East Gosford. One of the most worrying projects however is the Zone 3 building in Gosford that recently burnt down, which was previously used for indoor laser tag.

While the debris was cleared from the site, an exclusion zone was put in place after asbestos was discovered in the roof.

This exclusion zone posed problems for people travelling along the main road, but with three schools and Gosford Hospital nearby the site needed containing.

Because of the fire the asbestos fibres could have escaped without proper treatment, meaning the fibres could have travelled anywhere and been inhaled by anyone.

The sand of time raises old worries

By BRAELIE JONES-HOPE

SAND quarrying around Calga was examined closely in the 1960s after causing environmental damage, and now it is once again causing concerns.

The area has been actively quarried for the last 50 years, however, earlier practices resulted in the degradation of Cabbage Tree Creek, closing down some operations until they were improved in 1990.

Now residents are again worried about the consequences of a proposed quarry extension.

The quarry plans to supply a sixth of the demand for Sydney's construction needs, but it could also release a particle called silica dust, known to cause asthma, with long-term exposure leading to asbestosis-like diseases such as silicosis.

The Calga quarry will need to use hundreds of tonnes of water and drill into the sandstone shelf, harming the regeneration process and leaving the area without an abundance of water.

There could be ramifications on the Australian Walkabout Wildlife Park's supply of fresh water and in the long term cause a drain on the Central Coast's main supply.

A local resident said: "The continued sandmining in the area is a concern and the local council should do more to alert the general public of this potential danger."

Frontier of learning starts in homegroups

By MADI QUINN and LUCIE GREEN

GOSFORD High School has found new ways to educate and bring students together with the help of a collaboration with the University of Newcastle.

Principal Lynne Searle initiated the program - Homegroups - involving 20 people from one school house from different years, who meet three times a week for 20 minutes under the supervision of a teacher.

During this time they discuss global issues, participate in tutoring groups, and celebrate each other's birthdays under a year 11 lead learner.

"Homegroups are a great opportunity to interact with different year groups," said student Harry York.

Students and teachers also worked closely with the university to rework the year nine and 10 history/geography course. Students work on major projects that incorporate dance, film-making and design.



GROOVY: Year 10 Gosford High School students enjoying the fruits of their decade project.

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