

# Education Times

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## Victorian schooling on world stage

TWENTY-ONE Victorian educators heading to the first international school based extensively on the Victorian education system were officially farewelled last week after completing induction training at Coburg Senior High School.

The Victoria International School of Sharjah, which opens in September, is being established through a joint partnership between the governments of Victoria and the United Arab Emirates of Sharjah.

Education Services Minister Jacinta Allan said the school was an endorsement on an international level of Victorian schools, and acknowledged Victoria as a world leader in education.

"The Ruler of Sharjah is building the school for 2600 students, with Victoria providing the curriculum, the model of assessment and reporting, school accountability and professional leadership," she said.

The initial intake of staff at the Victorian International School of Sharjah includes principal Rob Blachford, who has already taken up his role, along with three assistant principals and 18 teachers.

They have been chosen from a very strong field of candidates from across the state, with eight coming from government primary schools, nine from government secondary schools, two from independent schools, one from a Catholic school and one from the Department's Central Office.

Final decisions on staff appointments were made by the Sharjah Government as the employer.

"With experience across a broad spectrum of subject areas, these teachers confirm the depth of quality we have in our schools," Ms Allan said.

"This provides great opportunities for professional and personal development for our teachers, who will then return to Victoria to share their expertise."

His Highness Sheik Dr Sultan Bin Mohammed Al-Qasimi, Ruler of



Sharjah, said Sharjah admired Victoria's curriculum, the methods our teachers use to encourage children to learn, and the way Victoria designs new schools.

Ms Allan said the school was in line with the Victorian

Government's Opening Doors to Export strategy of promoting Victorian industry capabilities to international target markets.

The teachers left for Sharjah last week to prepare for the opening of the school on September 2.

**On their way: Dinjerra PS teacher Sally Curwood, the principal of Kurnai College's Morwell Campus, Craig Lamshed, and Norlane West PS teacher Carmen Britnell completed their induction at Coburg Senior HS before they left for Sharjah.**

Picture: JANINE EASTGATE

## Bracks proud of education record

IN HIS emotional farewell speech last week, former Premier Steve Bracks listed education as among his government's strongest achievements.

"In education, literacy and numeracy rates have improved," he said.

"Retention rates to Year 12 are now 81 per cent; eight years ago they were 77 per cent and falling."

Mr Bracks was involved in state politics for 22 years. From campaigning for the seat of Ballarat North in 1985 – waving his "sword at the windmill" – to 13 years in the Victorian Parliament, he left political life after almost eight years as Premier.

The former teacher upheld education as a key factor in securing Victoria's future and now in its third term, education remains the State Labor Government's top priority.

Citing his time at Victoria's helm as "the best time of my life", Mr Bracks said he had given "body and soul" to the job and had no regrets.

Family considerations had hastened the timing of his decision, he said.

The Premier said he would like to be remembered as the person who "put heart back into Victoria" while running a strong economy.

Former Treasurer John Brumby replaced Mr Bracks as Premier after he was elected unopposed by the Victorian Labor Party caucus on Monday, while Rob Hulls was appointed Deputy Premier, replacing John Thwaites, who also resigned last week.

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# Comedy just the shot for readers

By Eamon Evans

WHAT'S more challenging – reading a book that's closed, or reading a book that's open while getting shot out of a cannon?

Students at Canadian Lead Primary School were left to ponder this and many other interesting questions, after a visit from Victorian Premier's Reading Challenge ambassador and stand up comedian Damian Callinan.

"The children thought it was great," said principal James Robertson, whose Ballarat school has "really embraced" the Challenge.

"They laughed all the way through, but also got the message about the fun and enjoyment of reading."

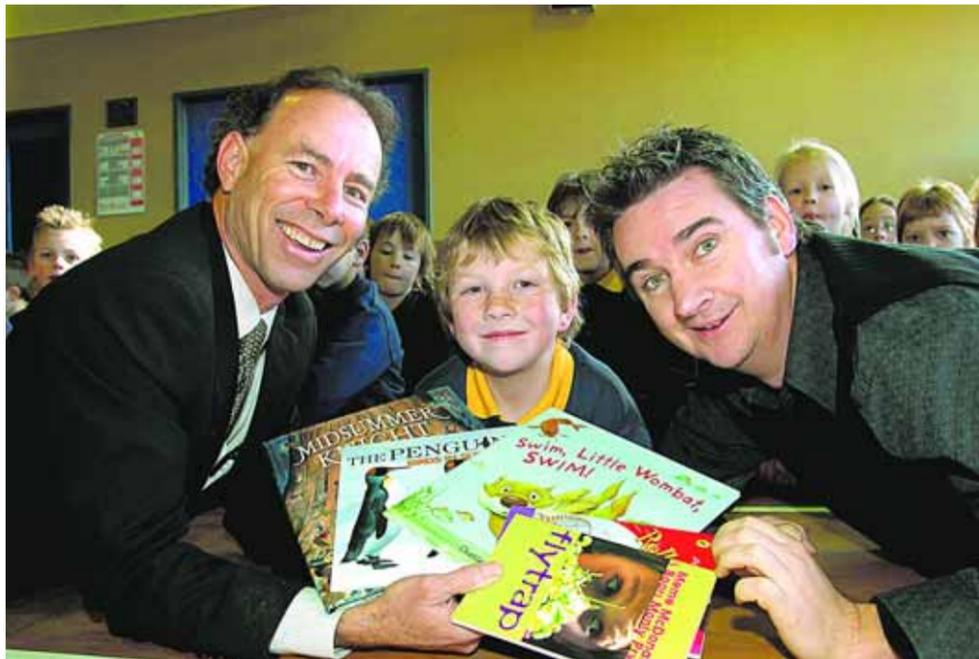
Best known for his appearances on *The Wedge*, *Rove Live* and *Before the Game*, the former drama teacher "orchestrated a grand entrance, complete with children as trumpeters, security agents, an announcer and a fainting member of the crowd," recalled Mr Robertson.

"With a most unusual voice and manner, he interviewed a couple of children about their reading and book choices and worked with the children to create a most bizarre story.

"Then, disguised as a young student trying to complete his reading challenge, he read a made up choose-your-own-adventure story, inviting the children to make the choices."

Mr Callinan admits, "I do tend to go a little left-field and look at the more amusing side of reading." But the comedian, who has been a roving Challenge ambassador for two years, is very serious about engendering in students how important reading is to him.

"My dad was a teacher and also an amateur thespian, and he used to read to me as a child," Mr Callinan said. "Because of his theatrical nature, it became a real event; he used to do accents and so



Lively literature: The Member for Ballarat East, Geoff Howard, checks out some books with Canadian Lead PS student Nathan and Premier's Reading Challenge ambassador Damien Callinan.

on. So to me, reading became more than just an individual pursuit, it became a shared pursuit.

"I suppose that that's my agenda when I go out and do school visits – to bring the books to life."

Challenge ambassadors – among them Kirsty Marshall, Sally Rippon and Wendy Orr – have been bringing books to life all over the state this year, addressing classrooms and assemblies in their own imaginative ways.

The Department's Julie Gray said students "absolutely love them".

"The presentations range from author Leigh

Hobbs teaching kids to draw his Old Tom character, to Felice Arena leading 200 students in a Specky Magee-style chant in a sea of football scarves and beanies," Ms Gray said.

"The impact of the reading challenge on individual students really becomes apparent when you see their reactions to meeting the ambassadors and receiving their praise for taking on the challenge."

To enquire about having a Challenge ambassador visit your school, email readingchallenge@edumail.vic.gov.au

## State Schools Relief

VICTORIAN students are being encouraged to let their imaginations run free and think of innovative ways to raise money for fellow students in need through the seventh annual State Schools' Relief Appeal.

Launching the 2007 appeal at Pascoe Vale Secondary College, which raised over \$5000 last year, Education Services Minister Jacinta Allan said the fundraiser was an excellent opportunity for students to develop new skills and have fun while supporting their peers.

"There are families in Victoria who are under enormous financial pressure right now, including those suffering the damaging effects of drought, bushfire and flood, as well as illness and unemployment," Ms Allan said.

"It's vital that young people are not held back by financial disadvantage and are able to wear school clothes and footwear of similar quality and style to their friends," she said.

Friday, August 24 has been earmarked as the fundraising day, with each school deciding on the activities they will organise.

■ For more information, visit [www.ssrc.net.au](http://www.ssrc.net.au)

# Curriculum builds links with newest neighbour

WITH a new legislative assembly in its formative days in East Timor, Victoria has launched an initiative to promote cultural understanding between schools in the two regions.

Curriculum units that introduce Australian students to the history, geography, way of life and challenges facing the Democratic Republic of Timor-Leste as a new nation have been created and trialled by Victorian teachers and are now available to educators nationally online.

"Timor-Leste has a fascinating history and culture and these curriculum units will help students in both primary and secondary schools gain a better understanding of one of

our closest neighbours," Education Services Minister Jacinta Allan said.

The units are designed to fit in with the Victorian Essential Learning Standards.

In Humanities, students can explore the history of Timor-Leste, its geography, distances between the capital and Australian capital cities and Australia's role in the region.

Students will also be given a basic introduction to the language of Timor-Leste, Tetum, learning greetings, the numbers from one to 10 and the words for 'mum' and 'dad'.

The curriculum units will complement the work of the Australia East Timor Friendship School Project (FSP), which has

linked Australian schools with those in the fledgling nation since 2003.

In 1999, Timor-Leste voted for independence from Indonesia, which had occupied the country since 1975, but did not achieve full self-determination until May 2002.

Embroiled in violence, thousands fled to West Timor where a UNICEF survey found some 25 per cent of refugee children under five were suffering from moderate to severe malnutrition.

Many of those children who were able to return with families to a more stable Timor-Leste are now in the school system that Australia is helping to rebuild.

The FSP was established in 2003 to

work through the Aloia Foundation, founded by the then First Lady of Timor-Leste, Kirsty Sword Gusmao, with schools to enhance the awareness and appreciation of students in both Timor-Leste and Australia of each others cultures, and to work with organisations that support the rebuilding of education opportunities for students in Timor-Leste.

It links primary and secondary schools to provide mutual learning opportunities and resources.

Since 2004, the FSP has linked 69 schools in Australia with partner schools in Timor-Leste, 41 of which are Victorian government schools.

Over the past four years, Victoria

has provided financial assistance and teacher support to the FSP, supported planning and development at the Dili Institute of Technology and provided scholarships through the Xanana Vocational Education Trust.

The new curriculum units (1 and 2 for upper primary students and 3 and 4 for lower secondary students) can be downloaded from [www.asiaeducation.edu.au](http://www.asiaeducation.edu.au) and [www.alolafoundation.org](http://www.alolafoundation.org)

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## WOODWORK WORKSHOPS

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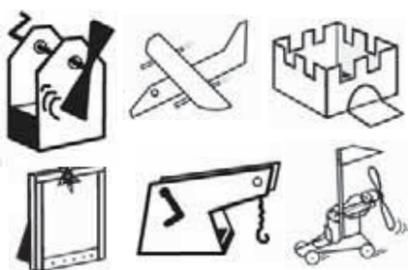
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## Get involved in Energy Safety Week

Monday 6 – Friday 10 August 2007

Energy Safety Week helps students keep safe while using gas and electricity in the home.

Switch for safety with your free toolkit containing activities for all primary levels and pre-primary with strong links to the Victorian curriculum.



Mark this week in your calendar and order the free toolkit by calling 1800 659 511 or visiting [www.originenergy.com.au/education](http://www.originenergy.com.au/education)

