

School gets top marks

Federal education minister visits Ridge



□ Federal education minister Julie Bishop listens attentively as Carlo Forner, who won his book after finding a mistake in an encyclopaedia, outlines the benefits of the Books in Homes Program.

Lightning Ridge Central School was given the thumbs up by Federal Minister for Education Julie Bishop when she visited last week.

Mrs Bishop was in town in response to a letter from school librarian Penny Fahey, who wrote telling her about the Books in Homes Program.

"She wrote to me and told me about the success of the program and I said I'd have to come out and have a look, so here I am," Mrs Bishop said.

At a special assembly the minister gave books to children who had been "caught being good".

Before handing out the awards Mrs Bishop, who said she has kept every book she ever owned, spoke to the children about the joys of reading: "I've always loved reading and

always treasured my books. New books are especially exciting. Every time you get a new book and open the first page it's an entirely new story."

Before the assembly the minister was taken on a tour of the school and seemed genuinely impressed by everything she saw, particularly the Positive Thinking Room, which has dramatically decreased suspension rates, and the Fireball Trader.

"I've never come across a school that's had a trading post before," Mrs Bishop said when she saw the latter.

At the end of the tour she gave a glowing appraisal.

"This is obviously a well-run school and it ought to be congratulated. There's great emphasis on reading and literacy and that's vital."

Mrs Bishop sees Lightning Ridge

Central as a pin-up for the Schools in Partnership Program, a federal initiative that is pumping hundreds of thousands of dollars into 10 specially selected schools.

"This is a very good example of everything we are trying to achieve. It's most certainly living up to the ideals and I'm looking forward to the chance to meet with some of the community representatives. Nothing replaces the chance to talk to the people in a school to gauge the on-the-ground success of a program."

When asked about the possibility of extending the funding for Schools in Partnership beyond its three-year deadline Mrs Bishop was coy.

"Obviously these are all matters that are still being evaluated," she said.



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